Voluntourism Discourse: A Case Study of ME to WE

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ABSTRACT

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Youth's perceptions of international development and its related themes are being shaped through the messages relayed in the marketing of volunteer sending organizations. This research explores how one voluntourism sending organization, ME to WE, packages and portrays themes of international development and contributes to Heron's "helping imperative" (2007), which is a desire to go abroad and make change by asserting one's own values of development. It uses qualitative content analysis from ME to WE's online youth trip pages and explores how the organization uses a discourse that focuses on the notion of "doing" development, selling adventure, the allure of the proximity to poverty, and leadership and social justice training. The research situates the findings in the scholarly debates on international volunteering and voluntourism and draws heavily on postcolonial analysis. It examines how ME to WE uses a rhetoric that promotes sustainable development, partnerships, building leaders, and global citizenship, however upon deeper analysis this promotion is superficial in that the themes in the discourse point to a lack of critical reflexivity in meaningful, thick conceptions of global citizenship education, an overwhelming support for egoistic motivations over altruism in youth going abroad, a consumer-first, consumption-based mentality, and a reinforcing of unequal power structures between the Global North and Global South, reverting back towards charity as opposed to solidarity.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualizing the Voluntourism Industry

Voluntourism (also referred to as "volunteer tourism") is increasing in popularity particularly among youth (Sin, 2009, 2010; Wearing & McGehee, 2013a, 2013b; Lyons et al., 2012; Tiessen, 2014; Butcher & Smith, 2010; Mostafanezhad, 2013a). This type of tourism involves the travel of volunteers (most often from countries in the Global North) to countries in the Global South to partake in volunteer activities framed as development initiatives in combination with adventure and travel. While volunteering is one component of voluntourism projects, there is an assumption that there is a demand for these charitable contributions. There are many volunteering programs that promote participatory development, solidarity, regional volunteer opportunities, South-South volunteering and local volunteering; however, the growth market of voluntourism (which I define here as "short-term volunteer abroad programs," meaning trips of under one month, that combine adventure and tourism and are geared primarily to semi-skilled or unskilled youth, ages 15-30) promotes a top-down, unidirectional and paternalistic development approach. The voluntourism sending organizations[1] (hereinafter referred to as "VTSOs") appear to promote "development" work but utilize a particular discourse to "sell" their product, being the trips on which youth participate, through their online discourse. "The proliferation of voluntourism company websites can be seen as part of increased media

[1] While the term "volunteer sending organization" can refer to any organization that sends volunteers abroad, "voluntourism sending organization" (or VTSO) is more selective to "short-term volunteer abroad programs." While voluntourism sending organizations are also volunteer sending organizations, as defined in this thesis, not all volunteer sending organizations are voluntourism sending organizations.

exposure in the Global North to poverty in the Global South" (Barnett & Weiss, 2008, p. 101 as cited by Zeddies & Millei, 2015). These websites shape what youth and interested consumers believe the reality is in the Global South and some scholars have pointed out that such programs risk perpetuating the idea that the Global North has solutions to the problems of the Global South (or that the Global South has problems in need of solutions from the Global North).

The focus of this research is to examine the representations of development being made by a particular VTSO, ME to WE, a Canadian for-profit social enterprise that is largely known for its youth-based voluntourism trips, and to situate these representations of development within the broader context of development studies and international volunteering scholarly research. I have prioritized self-representation for my study because youth's perceptions of international development and its related themes are being shaped through the messages relayed in the marketing of VTSOs. The business-oriented nature of the VTSO brings into question the conflict between the branding of an organization's image for the purposes of attracting and selling a product to consumers, and its role as a vehicle for development.

A growing body of literature in this field focuses on identifying trends in volunteering abroad generally and voluntourism specifically (Tiessen, 2014; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Simpson, 2004; Sin, 2009; Lyons et al., 2012), the perceived developmental benefits to the host communities (Wearing, 2001; MGehee & Andereck, 2009; Lewis, 2006; Singh, 2002; Broad, 2003), the motivations of and benefits to the volunteers (including cross-cultural encounters) (Lepp, 2008; Wearing, Deville, & Lyons, 2008; Tiessen & Heron, 2012; Tiessen, 2012, 2014; Heron, 2011; Bakker & Lamoureux, 2008; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Sin, 2010; Heron, 2011; McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007) and the unequal power relationships

inherent in these partnerships and interactions (Mostafanezhad, 2013; Simpson, 2004; Sin, 2010; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Heron, 2007).

Voluntourism, though often only appreciated as a concept of development or charity, can and should also be viewed in terms of its economic impact as an industry (Butcher & Smith, 2010). Positioning the practice in the commercial realm, McGloin and Georgeou (2016) explain:

> Voluntourism is an economic activity driven by profit occurring within an unregulated industry and operating without any accreditation process. Monies are paid to a tour operator whose business is based in the Global North and who profits from sending others to developing countries and communities. (p. 405)

The experience and all of its components have been commoditized and branded for purchase as a type of development intervention: "Voluntourism approaches the activity of development practice as a commodity to be bought and sold" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 406). Foreign destinations, their cultures and their people are advertised as and therefore perceived as merely products or commodities (Bolen, 2001; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). Though there are volunteer sending organizations that consider themselves non-profit and focus on solidarity rather than charity (such as CUSO, WUSC, among others), these organizations still need to market and promote themselves to earn grants and attract participants. There are numerous voluntourism and volunteer sending organizations that are for-profit with similar approaches to these non-profit organizations promoting programs and projects abroad within the international development context. To narrow down my research, I focus on one VTSO to illustrate the discourse used in its marketing strategies. Understanding the marketing strategies and rhetoric employed is important for appreciating other factors such as motivations for participation and impacts on host countries.

This research engages in a careful examination of marketing rhetoric and situates the analysis of ME to WE publications discourse in these broader debates and scholarly research.

1.2 Research Rationale

The volunteer abroad literature shows an increasing number of youth from the Global North participating in voluntourism trips to the Global South framed as charity/development trips (Sin, 2009, 2010; Wearing & McGehee, 2013a, 2013b; Lyons et al., 2012; Butcher & Smith, 2010; Tiessen, 2014; Mostafanezhad, 2013a). Because of the prolific number of VTSOs and the frequency with which youth participate in such trips, voluntourism has become normalized, a sort of rite-of-passage for any young person. The internet is undoubtedly a dominant means for youth to learn about anything meaningful, and whether or not a youth or parent enrolls themselves/their child in a voluntourism trip, the website content made available to them by an organization paints a particular image, evoking particular emotions and feelings, and therefore serves as a mechanism for conveying particular concepts of development and power relations. While advertisements for such experiential learning programs are of incredible importance to youth in choosing particular destinations and explaining narratives to family and friends for reasons in choosing to go abroad, mostly, students have subconsciously been learning from these and other types of advertisements and media sources long before international educators were able to frame these experiences in more critical terms (Zemach-Bersin, 2009). Building on these notions that there is a subconscious intake of a particular marketing language used in the voluntourism industry, this research explores in greater depth the nature and content of that marketing material to lend further insight into the kinds of messages conveyed to youth as they continue to indiscriminately consume ME to WE rhetoric.

I personally took part in a voluntourism trip in my final year of high school under the belief that I was helping and making change that would otherwise not be available to the community I was working in. It was the language on websites that taught me about the status of relationships between the Global North and Global South and that the latter needed the help of the former. Pursuing International Development Studies in my undergraduate degree helped me unpack and unlearn these notions in order to critically examine the effects of the industry of voluntourism. This entire process of being sold a utopian idea of development and then having to unlearn it stimulated not just the passion for this topic but gave me a particular sensitivity to the language used to present an organization and its experiences.

The ability to research and learn about a VTSO and the work it does in the Global South so easily through the internet brings about a particular accessibility and intimacy (Anderson, 1991) that makes the reader feel borderless and more mobile (Zeddies & Millei, 2015), closer and more able to take part in the action. The discourse used in this mass media is therefore crucial to analyze because it has the ability to reach and inform such a large number of individuals who will come to learn about development and the relationship between the Global North and the Global South from these VTSOs. Using ME to WE as a case study to understand how one VTSO portrays themes of development to its potential "consumers," this research aims to uncover and deconstruct this discourse to assist with analyzing and understanding the nature and extent to which a particular set of words or ideas are conveyed. Unpacking this discourse has the added advantage of leading to a deeper analysis of the implications this rhetoric may have in the context of international development debates, specifically postcolonialism and the Othering of the Global South.

1.3 Focus of the Study and Research Questions

Organizations promoting voluntourism use a particular set of images and discourse in order to market their product: the experience of travelling abroad and volunteering for development. One implication of this rapidly growing industry with its far-reaching marketing strategies is the shaping of a particular image of development. The current academic literature has addressed the reasons why today's youth have a growing interest in volunteering abroad and experiencing other cultures/the unknown (see Sin, 2010; Simpson, 2004, Lepp, 2008; Wearing et al., 2008; Tiessen & Heron, 2012; Heron, 2007, 2011, Tiessen, 2012; McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007; Sin, 2009), how the Other is portrayed both in tourism and development studies (see Tiessen, 2012; Simpson, 2004; Weaing & McGehee, 2013; Heron, 2007; McGloin & Georgeou, 2016), and how imagery and representation are used in a particular way in global citizenship (see Zemach-Bersin, 2009; Clost, 2014).

As mentioned above, by studying the text of its webpages promoting its voluntourism programs, this research examines how ME to WE packages and portrays international development. This research into discourse is relevant and important because it helps us understand how inequality in partnerships is addressed and helps make sense of it within the context and dynamic of Canadian youth participating in voluntourism programs abroad. Building on postcolonialism, this research offers concrete examples of Otherness as seen from the perspective of the (predominantly) white, middle-class Canadian youth relative to the foreign, exotic person from the Global South. It is also a play on the combination of selfish vs. altruistic motives leading one to pursue this "helping" experience abroad, and the packaging of a charity/development experience for purchase. These themes build on Heron's "helping

imperative" analysis (2007), which is a desire to go abroad and make change by asserting one's own values of development. Heron's primary critiques in analyzing 1-2 year placements of skilled, prepared and educated late 20-30 year olds relate to Otherness, a complicated combination of egoistic and altruistic motivations and an ultimate desire for development impact, even in charitable form. Heron's analysis of helping rationales for participation in international volunteering can be extended to voluntourism, and her critiques are magnified considering ME to WE's context of 2-3 week trips involving unskilled, unprepared teens. Heron analyzes the "helping imperative," focused on acts of charity, arguing that this notion of "helping" is constructed in an "us" vs. "them" frame whereby the identities of people in the Global South are constructed in relation to problems requiring solutions from those in the Global North. Such "helping imperatives" then reinforce rather than reduce inequalities by creating this artificial and power-laden binary. Important questions arise from the "helping imperative" analysis: 1) Who is being helped? 2) Who asked for such help? 3) What is the nature of the help offered in relation to the skills on offer by the volunteers? and 4) How are identities shaped and maintained by virtue of this particular constructed relationship of helping? While Heron's work involves analysing long-term contributions of international volunteers who were often university educated, older and more highly skilled, the questions noted above are even more important in the context of young Canadians, particularly the age cohort of ME to WE participants (13-17) who have few skills to offer, do so in a very short (2-3 week) period of time, and in large groups of other Canadians without making deep cross-cultural connections while abroad.

In this research I examine voluntourism with a particular focus on the discourse that is used. I use ME to WE as a case study to analyze a variety of themes in the context of existing literature, specifically focusing on underlying issues of power relations and the "helping

imperative," ultimately situating the findings in the debate on charity vs. development as solidarity. The research questions are as follows:

- How does the voluntourism program of the ME to WE social enterprise describe its overseas programs and in doing so, how does it perpetuate and/or challenge the "helping imperative" in its marketing material?
- Based on this research of ME to WE discourse, what are the analytical frames that help us analyze and understand the implications of this language for international development?

1.4 Overview of the Study

This research uses qualitative research methods, specifically a qualitative content analysis, to collect data and detect trends, patterns and regularities in order to understand how the industry of voluntourism markets its product through the language it chooses to display on websites, in particular a case study approach examining the website of ME to WE. The webpages from which the data has been collected have been transcribed to include their text only and attached as Appendices to this thesis.

ME to WE is a Canadian for-profit social enterprise that promotes itself by focusing on selling an ethical style-line, volunteer abroad trips, and leadership opportunities such as training and motivational speakers. Recently, ME to WE has been part of the rebranding of a larger enterprise model, the "WE movement." The WE Movement, self-categorized as an NGO, encompasses a family of organizations, including:

- ME to WE – the for-profit social enterprise, from which 50% of profits are given to the WE Charity;
- WE Charity – the charitable portion of the movement that domestically, empowers change through the WE Schools program and internationally, through the WE Villages program; and
- WE Day – the rallies/events that are filled with students and lead by celebrities and politicians to inspire change in youth by speaking words of "change," "make a difference," and "have an impact."

The WE Movement has over 3.4 million "likes" on Facebook and 1 million followers on Twitter.

ME to WE is the branch of the movement responsible for selling the voluntourism trips. As formally stated on ME to WE's Facebook page, "ME to WE provides authentic products and experiences that make an impact" (ME to WE, n.d.). This impact, according to a promotional video on the business' YouTube page (MeToWe, 2016), is measured by 1) the number of lives they change at home and abroad, 2) positive social and environmental impact, and 3) in-kind and cash donations they give to their partner charity, now called WE Charity, but formerly called Free the Children[2]. Listed officially in the information section of the enterprise's Facebook page are the products the company offers: "ME to WE sells socially conscious and environmentally friendly clothes, books and accessories– as well as immersive volunteer trips. We also provide inspiring speakers, leadership training and transformative travel experiences." The speakers and

[2] Nearing the final stages of writing this thesis, the name of ME to WE's partner charity "Free the Children" was changed to "WE Charity." For the purposes of consistency between the existing literature and data, and this thesis, I will use the new name, "WE Charity" throughout this thesis. I have changed the name in all of the quotes/data throughout this thesis to reflect the new name, placed inside brackets to note the change. (Note the Appendices have maintained their original wording.)

leadership experiences to which they allude may or may not be in addition to the similar opportunities offered by the WE Day experience, which is a performance or rally of sorts with presenters and storytellers such as celebrities, politicians, cultural icons such as African Maasai Warriors and motivational speakers, coupled with popular music concerts and corporate sponsorships marketed to youth that fill up stadiums not only across Canada, but extend to the US and UK. These events attract tens of thousands of youth to celebrate (in 2016, ME to WE claims that over 200,000 students will have participated in WE Day events in over 14 cities), cheer for and inspire a rhetoric of "change" through leadership. These young people are encouraged to go out and "make a difference" in the world and "be the change." In doing so, ME to WE creates a market for potential voluntourism participants who come to the volunteer abroad programs with a particular mindset (that they, as young people as young as 13 have something important to offer – a helping mindset – that can be applied to working in developing communities in *x* number countries in the Global South). The voluntourism programs consist of 2-3 weeks in the host country working on pre-determined development projects such as building part of a school, digging trenches, or planting crops, engaging with the local people and culture, and exploring the geography in adventure activities. The impact of these "development" projects are not well understood. Critiques arising from these programs have become widespread (see Biddle, 2014; Jefferess, 2012; Moore, 2014; Atkinson, 2013), nonetheless, ME to WE continues to run a highly successful marketing campaign with world-known personalities and even our highest profile leaders in Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Governor General David Johnston, extolling the virtues of this under-analyzed organization. While the youth, through dialogue, are sold promises changing the world, the specifics of how this change will happen fall short. ME to WE's voluntourism program is advertised as helping communities, "having an

impact" and "making a difference." I will return to this language, but it is important to point out that the modus operandi of the charitable organization for which ME to WE's volunteer development work is done is "to save poor children from poverty": "Free The Children believes that for children to break free from poverty, we must meet the basic needs of all members of a community and eliminate the obstacles preventing children from accessing education" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016).

1.5 Overview of Key Findings

The findings draw on postcolonial analysis to understand the framework and historical context within which this voluntourism experience exists. It helps to better understand the use and position of power, race, status and privilege in the relationship between the Global North and Global South as seen through the format of voluntourism programs as development interventions. It contextualizes the relationships in voluntourism as a form of giving and receiving (donors and receivers), as in postcolonialism (Baaz, 2005). These notions underpin the phenomenon of voluntourism through the inherent paternalistic nature of the participants' relationships and frame the practice as problematic and detrimental to development goals – a step backwards towards a charity model. The term charity has strong ties to colonialism and missionary work. In its definition, it means to provide relief to the poor or those in need and it evokes a sentiment of helping by giving hand-outs rather than working in solidarity with. It also makes the following assumptions: 1) that all of the sites where charitable action occurs are in such a state because of that community or their government's failure to develop or fix themselves, 2) that help (resources, capacity, etc.) is needed from a community that has already advanced, like the Global North, because they will have solutions to their problems, and 3) that

the Global North as an economic and political centre has no relation or effect on the community in the Global South's well-being and is external to the problem.

The findings of this case study highlight four core themes that arise in the discourse: the notion of "doing" development, the focus on marketing the adventure aspect of the experience, the allure of the proximity to poverty, and leadership and social justice training. These are examined within a critical theory framework, drawing heavily on postcolonial analysis and building on four thematic issues: 1) global citizenship (thick vs. thin), 2) altruism vs. egoism, 3) neoliberalism (consumer vs. citizen), and 4) charity vs. development. Situating the findings of this research within this framework allows for a deeper understanding of the implications of presenting voluntourism as development.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. This first chapter and introduction contextualizes the voluntourism industry. It explores key concepts prevalent in the literature and expands on how the media exposure of the voluntourism websites function as learning locations for development themes to youth. It then explains the rationale for the research arguing that this phenomenon merits study due to the proliferation and rapid expanse of these VTSOs and their online discourse and how this accessibility and convenience has made youth feel particularly borderless and mobile, translating to a readiness for action, which are all themes congruent to those in the findings. The increased number of youth going abroad begs greater research into how VTSOs are marketing themselves to attract such youth and to see whether the themes in the marketing language used are consistent with the themes in the volunteer abroad literature. The

focus of this research is to understand how VTSOs use a particular discourse in order to sell their product, being the experience of travelling abroad to do some of the shortest of short-term volunteer work.

This thesis then moves to the literature review in Chapter 2, which will be used as a basis from which the findings will be analyzed using a qualitative content analysis methodology. The definitions and origins of voluntourism section explores the range of volunteering abroad categories and organizations. The review then moves to contextualizing the growth industry of the phenomenon, showing how it has expanded so much that it has come to be normalized and considered a rite-of-passage for today's youth, as well as earning its own place in both the tourism and development industries. The critical theory framework which draws on four thematic issues (that will be used as the basis for analysis in Chapter 5) is also explored in the literature review. Global citizenship compares "thick" vs. "thin" conceptions of global citizenship education (Cameron, 2014), which looks at the student or individual's relation and place in the global system in terms of the acts they perform and their ethical obligations. The "altruism" vs. "egoism" debate explores the root of young people's motivations in wanting to go abroad, suggesting pure altruism is likely nonexistent. The neoliberalism analytical lens frames voluntourism as an experience that is purchased and consumed by youth from the Global North, situating the voluntourist as a consumer rather than understanding their role as a citizen. The final thematic issue, "charity" vs. "development" concerns the paternalistic underpinnings regarding privilege and power and is used in this research to help understand whether the representation of voluntourism in ME to WE's discourse reinforces or dismantles those negative stereotypes.

Chapter 3 presents the case study and methodology, explains the parameters, and provides background on the chosen VTSO, ME to WE. It then outlines the qualitative content analysis chosen as a method and the data collection performed for this research. Qualitative content analysis is a unique form of research in that its data not only already exists, but it exists for the purposes of having meaning for someone else – meaning, it was written for an intended audience by someone, and the content analyst must use this context in order to understand and interpret the data. I collected my data by continually revisiting the themes in my literature and examining them against a chosen set of webpages to see what was written and to consider what material was not included (i.e. what was missing).

The findings, Chapter 4, compile four prevalent themes found in the data: 1) "Doing" Development, 2) Adventure, Travel and Authentic Experiences, 3) The Allure of the Proximity to Poverty, and 4) Youth Leadership and Social Justice Training. The first theme of "doing" development explores ME to WE's widely-used language of sustainable development, then expands on the themes of partnership and power and the solution-oriented rhetoric to uncover whether this language of development truly encapsulates any level of development standards. The second theme explores adventure, travel and authentic experiences to better understand how the voluntourism commodity is marketed and made appealing to youth and how this ties into the larger development themes. The third theme, the allure of the proximity to poverty measures how a consumer, the youth participant purchasing a ME to WE voluntourism trip, justifies their experience through comparison of their known reality to that of the local community in the Global South. This section is based primarily on the testimonials hand-picked by ME to WE which convey deeper messages than they read on the surface. The fourth and final theme, youth leadership and social justice training, has a large focus in the relevant literature and equally in

the discourse of the VTSO. The problem with the language here, however, is that the VTSO does not delve much further than indicating that there are leadership opportunities and the experience serves as a leadership practice. While this is problematic on a paternalistic level, it also neglects to examine the deeper practices of leadership and skills training that youth could be exposed to on such a trip.

From here, Chapter 5's analysis uses a critical theory framework to understand and contextualize these findings in a postcolonial framework, drawing on the thematic issues of: 1) Global Citizenship (thick vs. thin), 2) Altruism vs. Egoism, 3) Neoliberalism (consumer vs. citizen), and 4) Charity vs. Development, in an attempt to answer the research questions being posed, which are to understand how ME to WE as a VTSO packages and portrays themes of development in its online marketing discourse and what the implications of this are. By analyzing this research within a global citizenship spectrum, from thin to thick (Cameron, 2014), I will be able to determine to what extent ME to WE has represented its youth participants as global citizens appreciating their ethical obligations within a complex, global system (thick concepts of global citizenship), or if they instead focused more on a call for immediate action, having participants remain external to the problem and not critically engage (thin concepts of global citizenship). The altruism vs. egoism analysis is used to understand where the youth's motivations fit on a continuum, appreciating that there are both "do good" altruistic motives entangled with the more egoistic, consumer-benefitting incentives. The neoliberalism analysis contextualizes the voluntourism phenomenon as a practice that is consumed by youth, which will allow me to determine what story this tells for the Global North-Global South relationships and to what extent this framing reinforces negative neocolonial stereotypes. The charity vs. development theoretical framework explores how the development rhetoric matches up against

actual development as opposed to charity, considering the paternalistic, neoliberal subtext in the findings.

Lastly, Chapter 6 offers final conclusions, summarizing the findings and analysis. It also explores the limitations of this research and makes recommendations for future research and changes to program delivery for voluntourism.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review outlines the definitions and origins of voluntourism to explore the range of volunteering abroad categories and organizations. It then moves to contextualize the growth industry of the phenomenon, showing how it has expanded so much that it is considered a normalized, rite-of-passage for many of today's Canadian youth. Next, it provides an overview of the key themes in the literature.

This research employs a critical theory framework and draws on the thematic issues of: 1) global citizenship, comparing thick vs. thin conceptions of global citizenship education, which looks at the student or individual's relation and place in the global system in terms of the acts they perform and their ethical obligations, 2) altruism vs. egoism, which explores the root of some of these participants' motivations in wanting to go abroad and attempts to place their selflessness/selfishness on a spectrum, 3) neoliberalism, which contextualizes voluntourism as a product that people consume, and frames the voluntourist as a consumer as opposed to a citizen, that the experience is designed for their benefit without regard of external consequences, and 4) charity vs. development, which concerns the paternalistic underpinnings regarding privilege and power, used in this research to help understand whether the representation of voluntourism in ME to WE's discourse reinforces or dismantles those negative stereotypes. Lastly, this review explains where the gap in this literature exists and how this research aims to fill it.

Throughout this thesis but specifically throughout this literature review, in order to not conflate the existing scholarship, I will differentiate between voluntourism as I define within the parameters of my research as volunteering abroad for under one month, and volunteering abroad, which is longer than one month. I will note whether it is short-term (1-6 months) or long-term

(six months or more) and often specify the type of research conducted (volunteer, learn, or study abroad) to avoid ambiguity.

2.1 Definitions and Origins of Voluntourism

One of the initial definitions of voluntourists describes "those 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, restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). The phenomenon has, however, over time, boasted numerous definitions and is recognized through a variety of categories such as alternate tourism, ecotourism, "new tourism," "niche tourism," "new moral tourism," and "charity," "pro-poor" (Wearing & McGehee, 2013), "justice" and "goodwill" tourism (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Sin, 2009), "altruistic tourism" (Singh, 2002), "fair trade tourism" (Mostafanezhad, 2013a), and sustainable tourism. Some of the critical scholarship on volunteering abroad includes definitions within broader categories such as international experiential learning (Tiessen & Huish, 2014), learning/volunteer abroad (Tiessen & Heron, 2012; Tiessen, 2012; Heron, 2007, 2011; Simpson, 2004; Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012); international service learning (Lewis, 2006; Lough, 2011; Palacios, 2010; McMillan & Stanton, 2014; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999; Kiely & Hartman, 2010; Hartman, 2008), development work (Devereux, 2008), study abroad, cultural exchange, etc. With the increasing number and types of volunteer opportunities and experiences arising globally by a range of organizations, the voluntourism industry has itself become "increasingly ambiguous in definition and context" (Taplin et al., 2014, p. 876, as cited in Callanan & Thomas, 2005, p. 195) in order to account for

such diversity. Regardless of how it is framed, travel and charity work are the emphases of voluntourism programs (Tiessen, 2014).

2.2 Contextualizing the Growth Industry of Voluntourism

As of 2013, tourism generally was considered the world's largest industry (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Mass tourism grew into the 19th century and as the novelty wore off and the global phenomenon became accessible and normalized, people began to seek newer, more unconventional forms of tourism. The late 19th and early 20th century bore a breed of tourists seeking "alternative tourism," such as backpacking, adventure tourism and ecotourism (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). The marketing of such forms of tourism in the internet-age created niche markets with a particular discourse that is "fundamentally aligned to social and environmental sustainability" (Wearing & McGehee, 2013) and is continually evolving, bringing us into the 21st century.

The industry and phenomenon of voluntourism as alternative tourism has over time, become increasingly popular and is expanding rapidly (Sin, 2009, 2010; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Lyons et al., 2012; Tiessen, 2014; Mostafanezhad, 2013a), thus constituting a growth industry (defined by Investopedia as: "A sector of the economy experiencing a higher-than-average growth rate"). Though the industry is relatively new and the global landscape in which it is being marketed and sold is continually evolving, data points to the rising number of youth travelling abroad, the increasingly younger age of volunteers, an increasingly shorter amount of time spent abroad by volunteers, and a growing emphasis on adventure and tourism in the marketing of these programs (Tiessen, 2014).

With these increased numbers of youth seeking volunteer abroad experiences, VTSOs of all sorts are proliferating to meet the consumer demands. This abundance of VTSOs has played a role in the increased media exposure in depicting the Global South's poverty to the Global North (Barnett & Weiss, 2008 as cited by Zeddies & Millei, 2015). Furthermore, the generation of youth participating in or reading about these programs has been exposed to these organizations' depiction of poverty: "they have both unconsciously and consciously been absorbing the images and rhetoric of international education advertisements for years" (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 303) (speaking specifically to study abroad marketing, the conclusions to which draw great parallels to volunteer abroad and voluntourism implications). Moreover, students who go abroad have been subconsciously influenced by these advertisements (which are highly instrumental in creating the narratives and judgments for their future experience) long before it is likely that international educators will have been able to teach them critical thinking skills to make sense of these images and discourse (Zemach-Bersin, 2009).

In addition to a differentiation based on time spent, there is an important distinction to be made between voluntourism and international volunteering for development. The latter, development volunteering, "has as its central concern 'development'; making a contribution to a process of social change that is of value to the local community/host organisation" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 405). This process normally involves volunteers whose skills, training and education closely align with the volunteer placement and requirements, travelling to countries in the Global South and working toward long-term development objectives, meaningfully engaging with the local population, and staying anywhere from 3-6 months to upwards of three years or more (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). This arrangement is facilitated by a mutually agreed-upon programme between the volunteer-sending organization and volunteer-hosting agency.

Voluntourism, on the other hand, is painted and advertised as development volunteering, where "voluntourism companies have appropriated the language of humanitarian development in order to trade on the idea that they send people to 'help' others in dire need of assistance" (p. 405), but ultimately, it is the money paid to the business sending the volunteers in the Global North that is of chief concern (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). The authors succinctly summarize the starting point for my research in the following quote, in the problem with (for-profit) voluntourism companies branding themselves as agents of "development": "Voluntourism approaches the activity of development practice as a commodity to be bought and sold" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 406). Despite claiming it is "vastly different from most 'voluntourism' experiences" (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016), ME to WE is nonetheless voluntourism, and therefore, the development it sells can be understood as part of its branding strategy. Analyzing the language ME to WE uses to sell the activity of development practice is the primary focus of this research.

2.3 Voluntourism in the Context of Duty, Responsibility, and Global Citizenship Identities

This section on global citizenship will look at the individual's relationship with and place in the global system in terms of the acts they perform and their ethical obligations. The first part will provide an overview of what it means to be a caring citizen, or a citizen with responsibilities, specifically in relation to volunteering abroad, and the second part will critique approaches to the education of global citizenship.

2.3.1 Living in "Geographies of Responsibility and Care"

One motivation that drives youth to volunteer abroad is a feeling that they should help others. Sin (2010) introduces the idea of living in "geographies of responsibility and care" (p. 984), which is based on the understanding that the privileged recognize that their state of living is at the expense of decreased living conditions amongst the world's less-privileged. Volunteering abroad is a seemingly selfless act in which one attempts to fulfill this guilt-turned-duty to care for the less-privileged populations of the world (Sin, 2010). The tourist experiences the Other through the mere act of travelling to lands other than their own. An underlying principle of this geography of responsibility is the division between privileged and underprivileged. Recognizing that we live in "geographies of responsibilities," like living in a cosmopolitan world, allows us to reflect on how we perceive our duty to others. Furthermore, those who self-identify as privileged consider it their responsibility to act in order to address those they deem to be "underprivileged" whether they are invited to do so or not.

The discourse used in VTSO programs' marketing material plays on the charitable sympathies of the consumer, suggesting that an individual *can* in fact (and *should*) make a difference. This implies that social change is an individual process that requires a "hero" and that "doing something is better than doing nothing" (Simpson, 2004, p. 685). A counter critique to this is the concept that global citizens have both positive and negative duties and that by fulfilling one's negative duties (that is, *not* participating in these charitable processes), one can prevent the doing of harm and be part of a movement leading to the reforming of these complex global systems that perpetuate charity models and do not lead to improving the lives of those in impoverished situations (Cameron, 2014).

A large motivation for youth volunteering abroad is participating in cross-cultural encounters and becoming a more (globally) engaged citizen. Global citizenship has its roots in cosmopolitanism, which is "underpinned by the central goal of harmonious relations between the people of the world" and "celebrates cultural diversity and human rights," actively being concerned about the needs of others (Lyons et al., 2012 citing Carter, 2004). Cosmopolitanism is premised on the conviction that "by virtue of simply being human all human beings have certain moral obligations towards all other human beings" (Cameron, 2014 citing Brown & Held, 2010, p.1 and Lu, 2000). Global citizenship is an updated, contemporary term to cosmopolitanism that has an outward manifestation whereby individuals and groups "negotiate, claim and practice rights, responsibilities and duties" within their various communities (Tiessen, forthcoming, citing Isin & Wood, 1999; Sassen, 2002).

2.3.2 Critiquing Global Citizenship Education

However, while the *promotion* of global citizenship and "global citizenship" as a term itself have come to be used generously and liberally in university programs and volunteer abroad discourse (Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012), its true definition in terms of its ethical obligations (over its buzz-word appeal) has been carelessly lost (Cameron, 2014; Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012; Lewin, 2009; Shultz, 2007; Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012). A rhetoric of "do good" has replaced important political and cultural debates concerning ethics of positive and negative action and duties. In her research, Zemach-Bersin (2009) explains the reckless use she discovered of global citizenship rhetoric in study abroad promotional material, often used as "an empty signifier, symbolic of a broad yet vague sentiment and lacking in concrete information from which students can learn" (p. 315). Due to the lack of "strong framework for progressive learning," "the

concept of global citizenship [was opened] to speculation and assumptions that do not necessarily match the intentions of [international] educators" (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 315). Many scholars have begun questioning and critiquing global citizenship education (Spivak, 2003, 2004; Dobson, 2005, 2006; Andreotti, 2006; Cameron, 2014) because of its failure to address the ethical questions of duty and responsibility and therefore, uncritically defining global citizenship only insofar as it identifies as an activity of travel.

In critiquing the global education approach to global citizenship, Andreotti (2006) builds on Spivak's (2003, 2004) and Dobson's (2005, 2006) analyses to create a framework in which she compares "soft" vs. "critical" citizenship education. "Soft" education is focused on the problems of poverty and helplessness whereas "critical" education is rooted in inequality and injustices and is highly reflective (Andreotti, 2006). Andreotti (2006) argues that the purpose of critical global citizenship is not to "unveil" the truth but to provide a space for learners to self-reflect on their cultures and to "take responsibility for decisions and actions" (p. 48).

Also adding to the global citizenship education critique, Cameron (2014) reframes the vague "doing good" that many students note as a motivation for international experiential learning (into which voluntourism fits) by shifting the focus from solely "fixing", "helping" and "doing good" in communities in the Global South to also concentrating on "centres of political and economic power in the Global North" where students can look toward contributing to the "prevention of harm" (p. 24). This "prevention of harm," he argues, extends beyond "the negative duty to not benefit from the harm done to others" through systems and constructs largely created in the Global North such as global trade rules and climate change (p. 31). Cameron presents "thick" forms of global citizenship in contrast to "thin" forms which, like Andreotti's critical vs. soft global citizenship education, puts a greater onus on the student and

education system in critically understanding and reflecting on their actions and their ethical motives and consequences. Cameron dives deeper in his contrast by paying particular attention to the "often neglected negative obligations" in thick cosmopolitanism, whereby every daily action in the Global North is part of a complex global system that has a larger impact on other individuals and communities around the world and may in fact have a negative effect without one knowing. Cameron argues that thick forms of global citizenship require a greater critical reflexivity of all actions and obligations, both positive and negative and how they impact the larger global system. He also claims that it is important for students to not necessarily be focused on skills-preparation prior to participating in international experiential learning programs, but be prepared intellectually in order for "students to understand their own learning process as part of a broader struggle for global social and environmental justice" (Cameron, 2014, p. 36).

Both Andreotti (2006) and Cameron (2014) say that not all soft/thin forms of global citizenship education are negative, specifically if they can lead toward critical/thick forms of global citizenship. While Cameron and Andreotti apply these frameworks to international experiential learning or service learning, in this research, I will examine these frames in the context of voluntourism.

2.4 Selfless or Selfish? – Altruism vs. Egoism

The altruism vs. egoism debate is rooted in the participants' motivations for volunteering abroad. There are many reasons that draw youth to volunteer abroad. The major motivations include seeking travel and adventure opportunities, often framed as seeking an experience or personal growth, which encompasses self-fulfilling and self-interested motivations, and global

responsibility, a motivation that has participants understand their privilege and use this form of guilt or global imbalance as a motivation. This section first explores the motivations for youth volunteering abroad from an altruistic and egoistic perspective, then moves into more closely defining altruism and egoism to situate voluntourism more appropriately on the spectrum.

2.4.1 Altruistic and Egoistic Motivations for Volunteering Abroad

In addition to the general motive of "helping" as discussed above (and further discussed below), a major focus of voluntourism is the promotion of personal growth. A large motivation specific to the younger generation (ages 15-30) who volunteer abroad relates to the volunteers' perceived benefits. Self-interest has been identified as a primary motivator for youth volunteering abroad (Lepp, 2008; Wearing et al., 2008; Tiessen & Heron, 2012), which includes "a desire for personal growth, cross-cultural understanding, skills development, testing academic knowledge in practice, and trying out a career choice" (Heron, 2011). Returning volunteers reportedly highlighted personal growth as a core motivation for their volunteer abroad experience: a motivation that the authors problematize as a potentially positive, but highly insufficient outcome of learning/volunteer abroad programs (Tiessen & Heron, 2012; Tiessen, 2012).

The perceived benefits attributed to the volunteer include self-discovery, pursuit of altruism and change, and a gaining of valuable experience (Heron, 2011; McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). The tourist's experience has been described as cathartic, a practice that offers intrinsic rewards (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). A term that is commonly referred to in this field of literature is Wearing's (2001) "value-change," a

concept that suggests that voluntourism causes "value-change and changed consciousness in the individual that will subsequently influence their lifestyle" (p. x).

Sin (2009) argues that the voluntourists' desire to travel seems to overpower their desire to contribute, and that they see aid-recipients as inferior to them through the process of Othering. The participants noted self-improvement as a primary motivation of the voluntourism experience extending to reasons such as upgrading their image and ability to small talk, and improving their CV to include that "he or she was a conscious and worldly tourist or individual" (p. 497). Based on Canadian volunteer participant feedback, "the positive benefits experienced by the Canadians are rewarding for the Canadians" (Tiessen, 2012).

Many researchers have studied the reasons why people volunteer at all (not just under the umbrella of voluntourism) when such an act requires extra time, energy and often valuable resources such as money for no obvious gain, but actually at a cost and personal sacrifice (Winerman, 2006). This inquiry can be traced back to philosophical debates that look at whether the act of volunteering is altruistic or whether egoistic, self-serving motivations inevitably overpower those good intentions.

2.4.2 Defining Altruism and Egoism

Though there are varying definitions for altruism, altruistic behaviour is defined as an act that benefits other people and is performed voluntarily and intentionally without the expectation of any external reward (Piliavin & Charn, 1990 as cited by Mustonen, 2007; Bierhoff, 1987 as cited by Phillips & Phillips, 2011). Some definitions go further to describe altruism as an act that requires "self-sacrifice" and for the individual to "put themselves in danger" or have the helper

risk harm for the increased benefit of others, having the act be "at a personal expense" (Becker, 1976 as cited by Mustonen, 2007; Piliavin et al., 1981 as cited by Phillips & Phillips, 2011; Sigmund & Hauert, 2002 and Monroe, 1996 as cited by Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Butler & Tomazos, 2011; Wispe, 1978 as cited by Butler & Tomazos, 2011; Hartenian & Lilly, 2009 as cited by Novoa & Johnson, 2013). This necessity of self-sacrifice, however, has been debated, as this concerns consequences as opposed to motivations. Furthermore, despite the sacrifice, there are often benefits that the helper receives that are greater than the costs from the act, such as praise, reward, happiness/satisfaction with the result, and recognition, for example.

Egoism is the opposite of altruism and is defined as "behavio[u]r intended to benefit oneself" (Phillips & Phillips, 2011). How the terms are linked, however, is that much of the research points to the egocentric basis of all altruism – that there is an underlying benefit to all seemingly altruistic actions (Haski-Leventhal, 2009). Even in the case of empathy, when one wishes to help another who is suffering, they are doing so arguably to decrease their own distress, improve their social image, and "relieve their sense of obligation" caused by the uneasiness of the unfortunate situation of another's suffering (Batson, 1991 as cited by Haski-Leventhal, 2009). These are all benefits to the act of helping that show, in this case, that it is difficult for a pure altruistic act to occur. The more obvious egoistic motivations in a volunteer abroad experience are those that are clearly self-oriented, and include, among others, travelling, gaining experience, learning a new language, public recognition/praise back home, CV building, and testing a career path.

Some volunteers believe the practice of voluntourism to be mutually beneficial: while the self develops, volunteers genuinely hope that their actions contribute "positively and directly to the social, natural and/or economic environments in which they participate" (Wearing &

McGehee, 2013, p. 6), portraying the altruistic, good-will aspect of the phenomenon. Many volunteers report a "desire for reciprocity" in some capacity, without any guidelines on how this help would be delivered (Tiessen, 2012).

Georgeou (2012) raises an interesting point of Vellekoop-Baldock's (1990) suggesting that altruism is accepted in the vocabulary of motives for volunteering, "partly because the ideology of volunteerism assumes the need for altruism, partly because no other motives can be admitted to" (p. 10), supporting that the act is selfless and therefore "good." The problem with continuing to use this language of defining volunteering as an altruistic behaviour that automatically results in social "good" is that it undermines that there is always some benefit for the giver, "even if it is only through a sense of self-satisfaction" (Georgeou, 2012, p. 11).

As noted above, many motivations for youth partaking in voluntourism trips combine altruistic and egoistic motives, whether knowingly or not. A youth participant is often led by the desire to "help or give back to communities" (Tiessen, 2012), which has altruistic notions, however these motivations are usually accompanied by other motivations that are self-oriented and produce benefits primarily to the helper. Though volunteering conceptualized as an expression of civil service has been associated with the "altruistic spirit of 'doing good' for the sake of it, not for material reward, recognition or praise" (Georgeou, 2012, p. 10), as per the definitions above the act of voluntourism cannot be purely altruistic. Understanding how participants' motivations fit within the spectrum of the altruism vs. egoism debate and how VTSOs play on both sides of this continuum in terms of their marketing will be a point of analysis in this research.

2.5 Consuming an Experience – Neoliberalism

Volunteering abroad has become a commodity "like the development celebrity," that packages and sells development as "a seemingly more 'real' experience that goes beyond 'sightseeing' and highlights affective and empathetic encounters with local people that mobilise perceptively authentic emotional and affective exchanges" (Mostafanezhad, 2013a, p. 495). As has become a recurring theme in this research, the experience of going abroad to volunteer as a young Canadian has become normalized (Tiessen & Huish, 2014), mainstreamed (Lockhart, 2012 as cited in Tiessen, 2014), and is often considered a rite-of-passage for today's youth. This section explores development volunteering and voluntourism within a neoliberal framework, then moves into the focus on travel and gaining cultural capital as primary motivations for volunteering abroad, framing the development experience as a commodity to be consumed, and lastly looks at the pre-departure advertisements and rhetoric that youth are exposed to that may have an impact on their preconceived notions not necessarily in deciding to go abroad, but of what their experience abroad will be like, as well as what the people, culture and geography of their chosen destination in the Global South will be like.

2.5.1 Neoliberal Logic

McGloin and Georgeou (2016) explore in their research the neoliberal logic of consumption which includes how the experience of voluntourism is promoted and the colonial underpinnings associated with this language, such as reinforcing a "hegemonic discourse of need" (p. 403). Their research builds on Georgeou's (2012) research on long-term development volunteering from a neoliberal perspective, in which she situates this phenomenon within the

civil society paradigm as an extension of government and private/corporate efforts to satisfy international directives and initiatives aiming at solving world poverty, hunger, inequality, health, etc. The authors differentiate between this international development volunteering and short-term voluntourism: the former existing within the civil society paradigm, involving a longer time commitment abroad (18 months or more [Georgeou, 2012, p. 2]), taking "programmatic form" (Georgeou, 2012, p. 2), undertaken by more skilled and educated individuals who have training more relevant to the placement, having "development" as the central concern to the placement (though this form of volunteering is not without its own criticisms [see Georgeou, 2012 and Simpson, 2004]), and "engagement" with the local community coming in the form of meaningful partnership; the latter, voluntourism, cannot be examined within the same paradigm, rather it exists within the market and "is an economic activity driven by profit occurring within an unregulated industry … [where] monies are paid to a tour operator whose business is based in the Global North and who profits from sending others to developing countries and communities" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 405), involves less individual time commitment, accommodates unskilled participants, and "engagement" with the local community comes in the form of children in classrooms or playing with children in orphanages.

McGloin and Georgeou's framing of voluntourism as neoliberalism first comes from the understanding that voluntourism commoditizes the development practice as a product to be bought and sold (p. 406). Their findings discuss how in voluntourism (and unlike or less so in development volunteering), indigenous communities form a part of the "photogenic landscape" to add value to the voluntourist's "authentic" adventure (p. 406). The commercial operators in the Global North have capitalized on and sold the idea of "helping the poor" in developing

countries, "highlighting opportunities of intimate contact with the exotic poor, promising both authenticity and engagement with communities in developing countries" (p. 407). These companies appeal to the participants' desire to "make a difference" while adding value to the experience by providing them with the opportunity to have an "'up close and personal' engagement with poverty – 'getting your hands dirty' is a selling point" (p. 407). Their practice and business is premised on the marketization of the activity of "doing development." Though these experiences could be acquired for considerably less through local operators in the host countries, the voluntourism companies from the Global North package the "development" activities amongst other sight-seeing tourism trips and charge a large fee to interested individuals, playing on their desires to "help the poor" (p. 408).

The authors continue, arguing that "voluntourism is part of a system of neoliberal development that requires inequality so that some may reap the beneficial effects of the market" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 414), suggesting that "while globalised neoliberal capitalism continues to produce growing inequality, there will be increased 'opportunities' for voluntourism" (p. 408). They elaborate on this by saying that sending better educated voluntourists on these trips will not contribute to "effect[ing] structural change as voluntourism, as an activity, reinforces the paradigm of need without enabling agency by local communities" (p. 414). The cultural capital acquired by voluntourists working in the Global South is converted to economic capital in terms of employment markets (CV-building) in the Global North (p. 414, as cited in Jones, 2011). Simply put, voluntourism fits with the neoliberal ideology in that it is run by private organizations and is premised on individual promotion by appealing to the individual desire to "help," using a discourse of seduction in its "promises of a feel-good experience that will benefit both the voluntourist and the recipient of her altruism" (p. 409). This

logic reinforces colonial relations of power by giving no space for critical thought "to consider the reasons for, or the effects of, 'helping' those whose poverty is the value-added attraction" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 415).

Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011) contribute to this debate on a larger scale, illustrating how contemporary international volunteering has become more complex when viewed through neoliberalism as an analytical lens, considering how it is "producing and being produced through new dynamics and relationships between the state, the corporate sector and civil society" (p. 546). Furthermore, as Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011) argue, "Particular ideas of political community, notions of responsibility and conceptions of obligations to distant others, and the increasing formalisation of the non-governmental and voluntary sectors are shaping how contemporary volunteering is constructed" (p. 546). The shaping of the field in these terms is of great significance to the research conducted for this thesis as it speaks to the importance of rhetoric and discourse in affecting the practice.

2.5.2 Travel and Cultural Capital

The phenomenon of voluntourism has its roots in part in travel, which is considered to play a large role in shaping a young person's identity. Today's youth are part of a generation "that through the use of new technology and global media has been afforded unprecedented knowledge of the world, its diverse peoples and cultures and the problems that the citizens of different countries face" (Lyons et al., 2012, p. 365 as cited in McMillin, 2007). Due to the growth of tourism and opening of new markets, "this generation has also been granted unprecedented access to the world" (Lyons et al., 2012, p. 365). This generation seeks

challenges, is open-minded, and has "a hunger for overseas travel" (Lyons et al., 2012, p. 365). The tourism and specifically the "gap year"[3] industry market has capitalized on this generation of "avid consumers" (Lyons et al., 2012, p. 367).

Travelling enables one to "collect places," something that provides youth with a way of framing the Third World (Desforges, 1998) and therefore contributes to the establishment of a particular conceptualization of the Other. Desforges (1998) argues that youth gain "cultural capital" (a gaining of non-numeric assets) when travelling abroad, which entitles them, giving them a sense of authority on the lands and cultures to which they travel. Sin (2009) echoes this, seeing voluntourists as having great interest in "gain[ing] cultural capital through the collection of knowledge and experience" (p. 489), leading to the shaping of one's identity (Lyons et al., 2012). Travel and adventure were noted as very important motivators for Canadian youth volunteering abroad (Tiessen, 2012), whether it was to "experience culture" or wanting "an experience" (Tiessen, 2012).

As a part of travel, immersing oneself in a foreign, local culture can be seen as an invaluable experience. This cultural immersion is a likely motivator for volunteering abroad, (Bakker & Lamoureux, 2008) whereby seeking camaraderie with local individuals (which can sometimes only be done through an organized effort like a voluntourism trip), as well as sharing the experience with family, a tourist can immerse her or himself in cross-cultural encounters. However, cultural immersion as a motivator has been observed to be more dominant across older populations (Bakker & Lamoureux, 2008) as compared to youth. Additionally, a search for

[3] The term "gap year" has been defined as "a nominal period during which a person delays further education or employment in order to travel" (Millington, 2005 cited by Lyons et al., 2011, p. 365). While it can occur at any point over a person's lifespan, it most commonly "involves a year off after completing secondary school or tertiary studies" (Lyons et al., 2011, p. 365).

authenticity in a cynical post-modern world is a strong component of understanding one's identity (Butcher & Smith, 2010), seen in partaking in voluntourism programs in order to find "the real Africa," for example (Phelan, 2015). What this shows is an overwhelming trend toward self-serving and self-fulfilling motivations in voluntourists deciding to travel abroad, linking egoism to a consumer-driven, neoliberal consumption mentality.

2.5.3 Pre-Departure Experience and Expectations

Zemach-Bersin's research (2009) echoes the above-mentioned tendencies. In looking specifically at the effect of advertising at one school in the U.S. on experiential learning opportunities (semester abroad) pre-departure reflections, she argues that these programs are advertised in such a way that put the student from the Global North first, appealing to their desires, without much thought to the land, culture, people or destination to which they are travelling. She argues that these programs' advertisements "endorse attitudes of consumerism, entitlement, privilege, narcissism, and global and cultural ignorance," despite using text that encourages tenets of global citizenship and cross-cultural engagement (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 303). This consumer-first mentality (specifically over the people being "helped") emphasizes international education as a commodity – but it goes further. The advertisements capitalize on standard U.S. cultural values and include these as commodities for sale (i.e. "personal advancement, achievement, adventure, and individual success"), irrespective of the broader consequences of these actions (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 306). Positioned around fulfilling and satisfying the needs of the consumer, study abroad advertising uses anticipatory statements such as "life-changing experience," "It's the experience of a Lifetime!" and "transform your life." Furthermore, the overseas experience is articulated with a language of "social currency" by using

words with strong monetary connotations such as “enrich,” “rich,” “wealth,” and “invaluable.” These notions convince students that their lives would be incomplete without partaking in the experience, incorporating a degree of shaming and guilt (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 306).

Tiessen’s analysis (2014) of 3-6 month learning/volunteer abroad programs point to a rhetoric of excitement and adventure with messages such as “experience of a lifetime” as well. Similar themes are evident in the voluntourism materials. Youth sometimes take this level of adventure to the extreme and purposefully depart on such trips with as little knowledge and understanding of the destination, its peoples, its culture and almost certainly its development needs as possible in order to have the most “shocking” and unique experience (Tiessen, 2014). Zemach-Bersin (2009) found the role of advertisements in study abroad was not to teach students about the destinations and their respective cultures and histories, rather to entice the consumer enough to go on a trip (with many students even choosing destinations at random). Despite being encouraged to research their destination and partake in pre-departure training, many students interviewed post-trip did not feel they needed to be prepared as the experience was sold as a personal adventure, and therefore they did not need to learn about and prepare for the country as long as they personally felt ready (Zemach-Bersin, 2009). People are fascinated with the unknown and romanticize the poverty and danger associated with a particular place or region of the world, so long as they are onlookers and can remove themselves from the experience at their will (Williams, 2008). There is major privilege associated with these notions.

Wearing and McGehee (2013) allude to voluntourism as a form of “contemporary cannibalism.” They go on to say that voluntourism can be understood in relation to strategies whereby “the tourist consumes and destroys the culture of the host peoples in developing

countries" (p. 8). Volunteer abroad and voluntourism are largely analyzed by their "cultural/social consumption" nature in this light (Wymer et al., 2007; Wearing, 2001; Wearing et al., 2008; Pieterse, 2010; Butcher & Smith, 2010; Calkin, 2014; Zeddies & Millei, 2015; Mostafanezhad, 2013a, 2013b; Sin, 2010; Simpson, 2004; Mustonen, 2007; Desforges, 1998). The countries and peoples of the South have been positioned as "serving [the volunteers'] learning and personal growth" (Heron, 2007, p. 47). There is a need to regulate or seek social justice in this form of development (Simpson, 2004) in order to remove the overarching paternalistic associations from the realm of volunteer abroad programs and voluntourism, where able.

2.6 Reverting to Paternalistic Mentalities – Charity vs. Development

One of the major themes discussed throughout the literature is the paternalistic nature of the practice of voluntourism. Voluntourism is "underscored by colonial power relations" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 409). Despite cultural exchange on trips and attempts at reciprocity and culture-sharing, there is distinct separation between the privileged and underprivileged, or developed and developing, which lays the groundwork for an "us" vs. "them" mentality. This concept has also been framed as the "privileged helper"/"first world giver" vs. the "Third World receiver," lending itself to questions of power, race, gender, privilege and responsibility (Mostafanezhad, 2013a, p. 495; Wilson, 2011; Munt, 1994). This paternalism rhetoric within a development context lends itself to be explored within a "charity" vs. "development" framework. To do this, this section will examine Heron's (2007) "helping imperative" to understand the motives and impacts of Canadian development workers abroad, how the Other is conceptualized through reinforcing privilege, the language of change, the

developmental benefits per the stakeholders, and lastly, the alternative benefits to the phenomenon considering the framework.

2.6.1 The "Helping Imperative"

Charity in its most basic form is providing relief to the poor or those in need, "a chance for those who have more than enough to help those who don't have enough" (Blackledge, 2013). This evokes a language of "helping," which implies that we, as the ones in the Global North, are the ones in the position to help and therefore in a position of power and privilege. This reinforces postcolonialism in volunteering abroad.

Heron's (2007) research critically evaluates white middle-class Canadian women who undertake long-term, volunteer development work in Africa. Her findings are framed by what she coins the "helping imperative," which is a desire to go abroad and make change by asserting one's own values of development, and ultimately show self-serving motives based on a "profound desire for self" on the part of the development workers abroad (p. 156). Heron analyzes long-term placements (1-2 years) of trained and educated late 20-30-year-old women and how they have come to understand their relationship with the Other based on their experiences and motivations. She concludes that the decision to go overseas at all as a development worker "actualizes the colonial continuities of entitlement and obligation to intervene globally" (p. 88). Development workers lead with the "desire for development" through the "helping imperative" and in terms of what they believe to be right, conceptions that are based in colonial ideas constituted by "relations of comparison" (p. 55). The "ongoing identification of cultural differences" between Canadian development workers and African

people implies a "comparative racialized superiority" (p. 89). There is often a yearning for "authentic" experiences in the development worker experience, like looking for "something different," something that will help you make a personal change in your own life, a move toward self-growth. An important part of the volunteer's experience abroad is fostering relationships with the Other, however this concept implies a desire for the Other in order to fulfill part of one's motive in going abroad (p. 51). "Helping imperatives" reinforce rather than reduce inequalities.

As previously mentioned, there is a difference between charitable "doing good" without critical reflection of one's actions within a global system and a "do no harm" policy (Pogge, 2008) that incorporates a critical understanding of social justice and the workings of a complex international system. Ideal development is typically sustainable and effective, something that is not at the forefront of all voluntourism programs and perhaps lacking entirely in many (Mohamud, 2013). Though voluntourism programs are often sought by participants to assuage the guilt of their privilege, this "do good" motivation fails to "address the root institutional and structural causes of [global injustices]" (Mohamud, 2013).

In partaking in voluntourism, the differential in power between the voluntourist and the indigenous communities to whom aid is offered is normalised. The emphasis on the voluntourist "providing" to those in "need" suggests by the very act of voluntourism that there are those who "lack" and therefore require help. These power relations "mimic and reinforce those responsible for global inequality and poverty in the first place" by imposing in the voluntourism discourse "haves" and "have-nots" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 409). In a hope of "giving back," a core belief of voluntourism that brings with it complexities, the reality is that the supposed "giving" is also "taking" when viewed as an experience of neoliberal consumption where the

voluntourist experiences the "authentic Other" and "does development" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 410).

Various scholars have quantified and questioned the operational result of "geographies of care" (Mostafanezhad, 2013a, 2013b; Sin 2010; Macmillan & Townsend, 2006; Milligan & Conradson, 2006; Lawson, 2007). Care ethics in a broad sense can look at how the social has come to be constructed through unequal power relationships (Lawson, 2007). Heron (2007) critiques the overwhelming push for women volunteering abroad, who are looking to make a difference and promote change by analyzing the assertion of their own values relative to the oppressed Other in their "helping" actions. This desire to help is a major motivation that plays on many young women's sympathies in deciding to go abroad. Mostafanezhad (2013a) uses celebrity humanitarianism to contrast gendered voluntourism in what she calls the "Angelina effect," referring to Angelina Jolie and other women celebrities like Madonna who have "made international volunteering sexy" (p. 485) in their humanitarian work including the adoption of children from the "Third World," further analyzing the trends and effects of gendered agendas of VTSOs, i.e. utilizing the role of the sentimental woman working in a daycare in the Global South. The problem with these practices in voluntourism in how they relate to geographies of care or care ethics is that while they seemingly support a development model or an ethic of care, they are superficial and fail to observe the more deeply-rooted underlying power dynamics entrenched in the very experience that is voluntourism.

2.6.2 Othering by Reinforcing Privilege

In Tiessen's (2012) study analysing Canadian volunteers' motivations, she reports about the problematized "luck" that participants speak of when they indicate that they felt the volunteer abroad experience had allowed them to gain a broader perspective – that if something were to go wrong in that participant's future, they could put their life's situation into perspective and realize how "lucky" they are. Tiessen problematizes this by showing that the flip side to this "Canadian luck" is the "unlucky Global South" devoid of critical analyses of the structural conditions that determine who experiences "luck" and why. In this example, while seeming to create a broader sense of perspective and awareness, the experience in reality perpetuates neocolonial attitudes and oppressive stereotypes (Tiessen, 2012). This is further explored by Simpson (2004) who explores this luck, as she calls "lotto logic" (Quinby, 2002) and its consequences. "Lotto logic" explains the status quo of the disparities between the Global North and Global South through a "fatalistic faith in the 'luck of the draw'" as opposed to attributing such inequalities and oppression to the "structures and systems in which we all participate" (Simpson, 2004, p. 689).

In studying the nature and effects of advertisements on study abroad participants in a U.S. university, Zemach-Bersin (2009) concluded the experiential learning product is positioned in such a way that serves the American consumer's interest and values. While the American student is depicted as "active and adventurous," the world outside of the U.S. is described as "passive, submissive, and open … literally waiting to fulfill the needs and desires of American students" (p. 306). This passivity characterization implies a "justification for exploitation and domination" and portrays the destinations as commodities "just 'waiting' to be purchased and consumed" (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 307). This builds on the language of colonialism, perpetuating notions of "us" vs. "them" and "developed" vs. "undeveloped." Specifically, when commoditizing

development in the form of voluntourism, there is a green-light given to the consumer to fulfill the desires they feel they are entitled to, having purchased the voluntourism experience. This entitlement and ownership over foreign lands and cultures is also discussed by Zemach-Bersin (2009), when students are marketed statements and claims such as "make the world give up its secrets" and "make the world your laboratory," giving an unjustified authority and power to students, as well as the sentiment that as an American, there is no border they cannot cross (p. 307). This privilege is further provoked with the use of language such as "discovery" and "expanding frontiers," without paying tribute to the historical and often violent and destructive roots those words carry and the histories of those who currently inhabit those lands (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 307).

Clost (2014) argues that this entitlement of authority gives the tourist a sense of ownership over the experience in the distribution and narrative concluded from the photographs taken while volunteering, undermining any such ownership of the individuals' identity in the photographs. Zemach-Bersin (2009) speaks to the paternalism in photography and images in advertisements, explaining how the viewer is always drawn to the White American in the photo, regardless of the topic of the scene. The cross-cultural friendships are depicted as happy, while the White American is in a symbolically paternalistic position. The "exotic non-White locals" are "depicted as an undifferentiated group apparently nameless and often unworthy of being shown in focus" (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 308). A theme of past participants from study abroad experiences who had their photographs featured in catalogues shows them situated in the photo in such a way that they are using the "study abroad location as a backdrop for [their] personal enjoyment, against which [they occupy] a position of superiority" (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p.

309). This contributes to a visual, symbolic display of self-fulfillment and privilege with a disregard for the local environment.

2.6.3 Language of Change

Allowing for voluntourism to continue undisputed assumes that "help" is wanted and that "help" cannot be a bad thing (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 410). The use of a development aid language in the volunteer abroad discourse associates negative attributes when the experience can instead foster some positive experiences. For example, the discourse "make a difference" and "be the change" reinforces a solution-oriented rhetoric as opposed to fostering cross-cultural encounters which have been shown to be quite positive outcomes for both volunteers and host community participants in voluntourism experiences. Looking specifically at the language of "making a difference," this suggests that there needs to be change, defined in terms of socio-economic improvement. This very "difference" does not necessarily mean the same thing to the poor community as it does to those "active agents of change" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 411). Moreover, it implies that only those individuals coming from the Global North in order to "make a difference" can be the active agents in the process of positive social change (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). This discourse therefore "implies a power relation based on a binary of agency whereby change can only occur through the intervention of the voluntourist" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 411). Moreover, this type of language associates unrealistic expectations for the volunteer abroad experience (Palacios, 2010; Simpson, 2004).

2.6.4 Developmental Benefits Per the Stakeholders

The organization plays a major role in whether the experience for the other two parties (host community and volunteer) is positive or negative. Firstly, VTSOs have begun defining development, which is problematic, as it implies notions of need or change that are often one-sided, unrealistic and inappropriately placed with little context (Simpson, 2004). As Simpson (2004) explains, there exists an overarching ideology that "doing something is better than doing nothing" (p. 685), which in many ways, authorizes anyone who *can* (afford to, not necessarily that they have the required skill level) volunteer, should (Mostafanezhad, 2013a). This further evokes unequal power relations and concepts such as the saviour complex.

Secondly, there is a problem in the intersection of the business aspects of the organizations, specifically concerning economic profit, and achieving good development, characterized by the minimal public criticism (and general civic praise) the practice has evoked (Lyons et al., 2012). For example, while the literature may suggest there are greater benefits to long-term voluntourism vs. short-term voluntourism, VTSOs may see short-term voluntourism as more likely to attract participants (and money), and therefore may choose to market it despite its shortcomings as a good development initiative (Heron, 2011).

Organizations are also the facilitators of the projects, meaning they have the responsibility for seeking communities and projects for volunteers to work in. The organizations ultimately focus their efforts on providing the ultimate *experience* for the paying volunteers, rather than focusing on the individuals in the host communities or their development desires. This dilemma is not unique to voluntourism, however, but extends throughout the international development field as a development NGO, like a donor country, is ultimately accountable to its donors rather than host communities. The enhanced experience of voluntourism sold to Canadian

youth capitalizes on the discourse of adventure, journey, fun, personal growth and CV-building for the very same reasons.

Many authors highlight the concept of dependency and need within voluntourism (see Simpson, 2004; Sin, 2010; Palacios, 2010, etc.). Rather than communities relying on themselves to develop, the relationship between the volunteer and the host community, intertwined with the VTSO, creates a complex, inescapable dependency. VTSOs can claim that there is a need for help, and volunteers can respond to this call with an understanding that the poor "need" them, which does not necessarily take into consideration the actual needs of local communities. This, among other things, contributes to the industry's common oversimplification of development (Simpson, 2004). Simpson (2004) refers to this as the creation of a "geography of need." Moreover, VTSOs scout out potential communities for their projects where volunteers will be sent. Communities need to be considered poor enough, and in great enough need in order to be considered a contending site. Once a community has been selected as an area of opportunity and a site for voluntourism activities to take place, the projects that ensue greatly alter the functioning and infrastructure within a community (Sin, 2010). For example, if a community consistently has volunteers running a daycare program, the community no longer has the need to provide this service itself and becomes dependent on the continuous influx of volunteers and the organization for facilitating this. The community has therefore become dependent on such infrastructure provided by organizations. Other forms of dependency come from children expecting gifts from voluntourists (every two weeks when a new set of volunteers arrive) or schools receiving school supplies (whether needed or not) from the organization due to their participation as a site for its program. This perpetuates a mentality of greed and begging (Sin, 2010), rather than encouraging a community to learn how to help itself.

2.6.5 Alternative Benefits

An inevitable consequence of the voluntourism experience is the cross-cultural encounters and local connections between host community members and volunteers. Little research has been done to conclude whether this experience is seen as beneficial for the host community as a solidarity development measure, however it has been studied from the perspective of youth participants reporting it as a key motivation in wanting to volunteer abroad. The value of creating a sense of connection from the perspective of the host community is often assumed as positive (Boyle et al. 2001 as cited by Tiessen, forthcoming). As Tiessen's (forthcoming) research examines, there are positive and negative attributes that present challenges and opportunities in the cross-cultural relationship between the host-country (organization staff in this case) and youth participants. Knowledge-sharing and "a general interest in getting to know people and have rich intercultural exchanges" between volunteers and host community members were noted as positive outcomes, whereas persistent perceived cultural biases (more differences between cultures than shared commonalities), foreigner isolationism (where international volunteers would stick to themselves while abroad) and host-country participants feeling undermined by a "perceived superiority of international volunteers" were noted as challenges in the shared learning process (Tiessen, forthcoming, p. 72-73). Tiessen explains how some challenges from the volunteer perspective are likely entrenched in previous learning abroad experiences and like other examples explored in this section of this review of charity vs. development, rationalizes certain neocolonial attitudes rather than dismantling them. These challenges are also framed as opportunities in order to encourage increased intercultural understanding to promote solidarity and global citizenship (Tiessen, forthcoming).

The literature so far has indicated that voluntourism *could be* an alternate form of development insofar as describing the benefits received by host communities, (Wearing, 2001; McGehee & Andereck, 2009) as it steps outside of traditional forms of development assistance; however, the evidence remains inconclusive. A direct relationship has, nonetheless, been observed between the benefits of the host community and the volunteer: when the volunteer has a positive experience, members of the host community are more likely to report a similar experience (McGehee & Andereck, 2009).

Lewis (2006) analyzes international volunteering in reference to international development, suggesting that it is a more humanizing approach to other development initiatives or practices and in participating in the act, one has the power to prompt shifts in the relationships between the North and South on the local level. These conclusions, though not a complete acceptance of the status quo, but not a rejection of the volunteer abroad paternalistic model, contribute to the "poor but happy" narrative, in which it is appropriate to accept the poverty or dire living situations of the poor because the voluntourism approach at least is a humanizing situation. This humanizing approach has little substance as an effective development solution.

One way in which it is suggested that voluntourism can promote developmental benefits for the host community or inadvertently within the larger, more complex system, is by having everyday citizens travel to and experience life in the Global South. They would thereby gain an appreciation and understanding of the Global South, which "may provide a key element in the 'public face' of development, which can help to catalyse change in the North" (Devereux, 2008, citing Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004).

Overall, these charitable underpinnings show a digression away from solidarity and ethical development interventions. Despite a tourist feeling better about her or himself by partaking in voluntourism programs, the neocolonial behaviour of tourism is far from virtuous (Munt, 1994). It is necessary, however, to note that there is a wide range of and diverse set of volunteerism and voluntourism programs that exist and what is important is to analyze the dynamics and nuances of each program in order to understand the positive and negative outcomes for different people under different circumstances. Despite this wide range of programs available on offer, nonetheless, many of them reportedly fail to reach expected, deeper developmental change and their participants fail to achieve critical social justice goals.

2.7 Summary

This review has attempted to provide a framework from which voluntourism programs can be better understood. Where a gap exists in this body of literature is a study on *how* today's VSTOs market themselves to Canadian consumers, what discourse is used, and how these organizations portray development and related concepts, as well as the relationship between the Global North and Global South.

The remainder of this research will use this literature review as a basis from which it will compare and analyze the discourse used in the online promotional content of the popular Canadian VTSO, ME to WE.

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study of the website content of one VTSO, ME to WE, that analyzes and interprets the language used to market the product of voluntourism programs to youth and then contrasts it with the existing body of voluntourism and related literature. It uses a critical theory framework, drawing on four thematic issues to explore the impacts and implications of these findings.

This section first describes the rationale for using a case study as a research design, outlines the parameters, and provides background information on ME to WE. It then moves on to the methodology section which rationalizes qualitative content analysis as the tool to collect data.

3.1 Case Study

3.1.1 As a Research Design

This research uses a case study research design. This type of research design allows the researcher to explore one "case" at one point in time and ask the question "what is going on?" (Bouma et al., 2012, p. 110). A case study does not test a hypothesis and does not compare two entities, rather it "takes a very broad look at the phenomenon being investigated" (Bouma et al., 2012, p. 111). A case study freezes the data (the text, in this case) to one point in time. In this research, the data is limited to the date(s) the text was saved/printed from the website. All other research designs either compare two entities or compare the same entity at two or more points in time (Bouma et al., 2012). This type of research design is useful for my research as it sets this case as a building block from which we can understand if the discourse used in the online representation of one particular VTSO is reflective of the themes present in the volunteer abroad

literature. From here, this case study can help determine if and how future research should be conducted.

3.1.2 Parameters

The data was drawn from the website content of ME to WE, a VTSO that targets Canadian youth (ages 15-30) to partake in short-term volunteer trips (defined as trips not exceeding three months) to countries in the Global South. This organization charges a fee for participating in the volunteer abroad experience, which is integral to this research project as I have conceptualized voluntourism in terms of its branding being marketed as a commodity, and in broader terms, as a growth industry. For this particular research, it is important to focus on a for-profit organization, as this ensures that voluntourism is framed as a commodity for purchase. ME to WE is large in scale and offers a variety of trips to numerous country destinations, all at a cost. In order to understand how this product is "sold," there must be a cost for the commodity.

3.1.3 Background on ME to WE

ME to WE is a Canadian for-profit social enterprise that works alongside its charity, WE Charity. Its three primary business ventures are volunteer trips predominantly to the Global South, WE Day events (which include motivational speakers and concerts to inspire elementary and high school-aged children to "be the change") and a ME to WE style line that includes merchandise for sale from which the profits are meant to give back to the charity's communities. ME to WE exists within the WE Movement, which promotes change to youth through leadership rhetoric. ME to WE, the movement's social enterprise, has been critiqued within but mostly

outside academia for putting its brand and image concerns over the development issues it purports to uphold (Jefferess, 2012; Sarwar, 2014; Brown, 2015; Greschner, 2015; Atkinson, 2013) as well as selling this brand to youth (largely in the age range of 12-18) who are highly impressionable and often unable to discern between helpful contributions and problematic practices (Jefferess, 2012).

Though the minimum age to participate in any ME to WE trip is technically four, the ages for the trips that will be analyzed in the findings are 13-18. To provide a bit more information on how ME to WE compares to those VTSOs described in the volunteer and voluntourism literature above, I provide a chart below showing the six trip options available for solo youth participants (not school or family trips, as these sections will not be used in the data collection) and their associated lengths and costs. This data was drawn on March 17, 2016 and the destination options, length of time and prices may have changed since then.

Trip Destination	**Length of Time (Days)**	**Price (CAD)**	**What is Included**	**What is Not Included**
Amazon	15	$3895	- round-trip airfare from Toronto, - accommodations while on the ground, - three meals daily, - bottled and/or purified water, - entrance fees to activities, - language lessons, - volunteer placement activities, - leaderships training (including comprehensive action planning), and	- travel medical insurance, - passport and visa fees, - additional flights needed to get to group flight departures, and - additional baggage fees.
China	19	$5395		
Ecuador	15	$3995		
India	18	$4995		
Kenya/Tanzania	20	$5495		
Nicaragua	15	$3995		

			- access to a facilitator, who is available 24 hours a day, as well as a 24-hour emergency service.	

Based on the information in the chart above, the average number of days for the trips I will be examining is 17 days, and the average cost for a trip at the time this data was compiled was $4,628 (CAD).

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Content Analysis

In order to examine the materials, I adopted a content analysis for my methodology, which is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24). How Krippendorff (2013) makes a crucial distinction between content analysis and other types of research methods is that the starting point of the data not only already exists but "means something to someone" and "is produced by someone to have meanings for someone else" and these meanings, which constitute the context, are something that must not only not be ignored, but used in the analysis (p. 25).

Content analysis can take both the quantitative and qualitative forms (or aspects of both). For the purposes of this research, only qualitative content analysis will be explored. The qualitative scholar uses a research design that allows for continual input from known literature to "contextualize their readings of given texts, [rearticulate] the meanings of those texts in view of

the assumed contexts, and [allow] research questions and answers to arise together in the course of their involvement with the given texts" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 88).

With regards to ensuring reliability despite the qualitative nature of such content analysis, Krippendorff (2013) explains "for a content analysis to be replicable, the analysts must explicate the context that guides their inferences. Without such explicitness, anything would go" (p. 30), understanding that the meanings of certain text are relative to particular contexts, discourses or purposes.

3.2.2 Data Collection

The webpages constitute my "texts" and the phrases and sentences I extracted constitute my "data". In my initially proposed research, I intended to have various terms within each theme of my findings that I would count to have a more quantitative approach for my methodology. Creating a series of phrases or words that fell within each category, however, undermined the nuances and small details that I was noticing, such as power dynamics or notions of guilt, that were embedded within the text that did not fall within any one of my categories. Furthermore, a more quantitative approach did not account for the text's context with regards to where it was located on the website (whether the text was from the "about us" page, from a "testimonial," under "safety precautions," etc.) which was important to include.

I instead took a fully qualitative approach. I chose a set of pages that constituted my sample that I saved and printed on a particular day to be able to re-visit as I knew the website would change over time (all webpages were saved between March 17 and 29, 2016). I chose the main pages one might search when seeking an individual voluntourism opportunity, as well as

each of the main destination pages for the individual youth trips. These pages all displayed various themes found in the relevant academic literature on volunteer abroad and voluntourism. I selected the following specific webpages for my data collection, and their text format can be found as Appendices at the end of this thesis:

- "Volunteer Travel" (see ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016);
- "Youth Trips" (see ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016);
- "Why ME to WE Trips are Different" (see ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016);
- "Testimonials" (see ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016);
- "Frequently Asked Questions" (for volunteer trips) (see ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016);
- "Amazon" (see ME to WE: Amazon, 2016);
- "China" (see ME to WE: China, 2016);
- "Ecuador" (see ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016);
- "India" (see ME to WE: India, 2016);
- "Kenya/Tanzania" (see ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016); and
- "Nicaragua" (see ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016).

This selection includes all youth content on the ME to WE site that was accessible to an individual youth interested in participating on a ME to WE trip (and excludes pages specific to school, family and other trips).

I coded the chosen pages, looking for specific themes that emerged that were consistent with the literature. This led me to highlight text that fit into various themes and see what trends were most common (and what was missing) from (or outside of) the literature. The qualitative

content analysis I used provided me the space to find themes in the text and understand the context within which the text was written as being relevant to those findings. Because content analysis understands that the text being analyzed has value external to the researcher, that it was written for an audience within a social framework and for a particular purpose, these contexts were integral to interpreting the findings. For example, I understood that these webpages function as a source of marketing for youth and parents interested in learning more about going on (or sending their children on) a volunteer abroad trip. This is the intended purpose of the text considering the author and audience and is important to consider when collecting the data as it informs why certain language is used in certain circumstances.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

One focus of the voluntourism literature is to analyze and evaluate the role this type of tourism and this industry plays in "good" or sustainable development by measuring it against participant expectations and experiences, host communities' perspectives as well as some external standards of practice. Overall, there is more research available from the volunteer-sending country perspective, looking for example at the motivations that draw participants to want to partake in such volunteer trips as well as their reflections upon returning home from such trips. Significant research has also focused on the inherent paternalistic nature of voluntourism.

The impact of voluntourism in terms of development outcomes is limited, nonetheless, a rhetoric and discourse of "development" is widely employed in voluntourism marketing materials. I employ the case study of ME to WE to examine how references to development are addressed. Within this first theme, I focus on how the language used positions the Global South as a people and landscape with "problems requiring solutions," solutions that a program like ME to WE can "solve." I examine development as partnership and cultural understanding, altering power dynamics, creating change and solving problems, and solution-oriented rhetoric.

A second important theme arising from the literature above is adventure. In the data collected from ME to WE's discourse presented here, I examine adventure in relation to authentic experiences, a focus on youth adventure and exploration, and the unique opportunity marketed for participants to experience an exotic culture shock.

ME to WE promotes its programs using selective participant testimonials as part of its marketing material. In these testimonials, there is a language of seeking proximity to poverty and in turn, a sense of understanding or justifying it, the situation, and the obvious divide between

the privileged and poor, or helpers and recipients. Various authors discuss the "poor but happy" mentality, that though the local population is poor, the participants see them as happy (see Simpson, 2004; Crossley, 2012, etc.). The third theme in these findings will explore this concept, how in turn, this attitude contributes to the participants' ability to leave a community feeling happy and self-fulfilled.

The fourth and final theme explored is leadership and social justice training. ME to WE relies heavily on its trips' ability to teach its participants the roots of social justice issues and from there, develop leadership qualities and action plans for youth to bring back to their home countries.

It is important to note that the following findings are not a reflection of the work that the organization ME to WE does, nor a reflection of the actual trip experiences, rather a reflection of the representation of particular themes found through the discourse ME to WE employs in certain categories of its online promotion of youth voluntourism trips. Whether the ideals promoted in the marketing material occur on the ground or are in fact disingenuous is not the focus of this study, though it would shed additional light on the implications of the language and wording used if they were to be studied. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate that the testimonials quoted below and throughout this research serve as an extension of ME to WE's promotional discourse and not as evidence of participants' experience on their trips, though there is an assumption that there is a degree of genuineness throughout the quotes and that some level of truthful participant experience reflection can be drawn.

4.1 "Doing" Development

Though not publicized as such, ME to WE is the for-profit business that runs these voluntourism trips, leadership camps, events for youth and schools such as WE Day, and a clothing company, partnered with its charitable organization WE Charity. On the voluntourism trips, WE Charity sites and models of development are used. When discussing development, there is an emphasis on sustainable development across the website; success in development is defined as follows for ME to WE: "Success for our non-profit partner, [WE Charity], is when people no longer need charity" (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016).

4.1.1 Deconstructing Partnership and Power

In defining partnership, ME to WE presents a balanced rhetoric, marketing it as a "cultural exchange" (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). In its text (both ME to WE's words and testimonials, which are also chosen by ME to WE and therefore not unbiased) there is discussion of connections between youth participants and local community members. The "learners and leaders from a different culture" are marketed as "proud, equal partners," which speaks to some positive imagery (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016; ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016).

While on its face, it is expected that an organization would promote sustainable development and equality in partnerships, a closer analysis of the inherent power relations in the discourse became necessary. Despite encouraging equality between the voluntourists and local members of the host communities regarding development decisions (as ME to WE stresses the importance of reciprocal exchange and equality in partnership), the power given to the youth

(who require no qualifications) in the discourse undermines this equality and encourages a privileged seat of paternalism for these youth of the Global North over the local community in the Global South. The voluntourism experience is presented as a "win-win" for the potential participant, suggesting that from their position of privilege, they might as well also volunteer abroad: "Travel overseas, whether it's a beach or backpacking vacation is on their bucket list. A ME to WE Trip is a chance to quench that travel bug and have an impact" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016).

This point of Global North privilege has undertones throughout most sections of the website content. For example, the quote: "If you're going to see the world, have an impact while you're at it" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016) suggests that a youth who is rich enough to travel might as well volunteer while they are doing so, while accurately showing privilege, also points to the fact that development may not be of primary focus for voluntourists. Another example of this privilege is the one-sided safety description from the perspective of the youth participants travelling abroad, where there is no mention of such pre- and post-trip preparations being done for the host community to deal with such cultural exchange and development decisions, despite repeatedly receiving and sending off foreigners (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). A further example is that there are no skills, qualifications or fitness abilities required to partake in a ME to WE volunteer abroad trip (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016), suggesting that unskilled youth are able to perform any task better than a local member of a host community despite them being unqualified, unfit and unprepared (and would not be permitted to do the same tasks in their home country). The Frequently Asked Questions section nonetheless suggests that the youth volunteers fit into the sustainable development plan and do not take away work from local labourers, from

which we can deduce that they likely serve no legitimate development purpose (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). The marketing material is therefore contradictory. On the one hand there is the appropriation of careful and politically-correct language in official statements but then the other marketing tools employed are rather problematic.

There is a consistent discourse in the discussion of participants connecting with local communities. One of the main taglines on the main Volunteer Travel page is "Connect with learners and leaders from a different culture," which goes on to read:

> Meet and work with community members from another culture and understand their joys and challenges. Talk to learners and community leaders, who are proud, equal partners in these holistic initiatives. Expand your worldview by experiencing different culture, language and customs. Through hands-on work experience, gain empathy, compassion and understanding for different cultures and environments. (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016)

Under the "Why ME to WE Trips are Different" page, the VTSO once again focuses on this connection: "ME to WE Trips connect participants with learners and leaders from different cultures," painting images of how you, as a potential participant, can connect with the local community:

> You will gain perspective and a deeper understanding of the lives of women in developing communities when you sit under the shade of a tree with mamas learning to make handcrafted beaded accessories or hauling a jerry can of water along a stony path. … Participants meet and work with community members from another culture and understand their joys and challenges. Participants talk to learners attending [WE Charity] schools and meet community leaders, who are proud, equal partners in these holistic initiatives. … ME to WE Trips promote dialogue and cultivate relationships by giving participants a unique opportunity to spend time with local community members and put real faces, names and stories to the impact of their volunteer work. … Participants experience and embrace the sights and sounds of a new culture, by tasting the unique

> flavours of local cuisines, taking part in traditional activities and learning new languages. … Each adventure puts participants side-by-side with community members who teach you skills or deepen your experience through participation. (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016)

In the overview for the various trips offered, each destination includes an emphasis on this "local" community connection: Amazon – "Learn Spanish and the native Kichwa language … and visit the home of a local family to learn about traditional culture and ways-of-life" (ME to WE: Amazon, 2016), China – "discover the contrast between China's booming cities and vast countryside as you volunteer alongside locals in a rural community" (ME to WE: China, 2016), Ecuador – "Connect with the indigenous people of the Andes Mountains … Step into an indigenous community to volunteer with local women's groups, join communities in a 'minga' to help build a school or clean water project" (ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016), India – "learn a bit of Hindi while talking to local elders and playing with kids" (ME to WE: India, 2016), Kenya/Tanzania – "Travel through the Great Rift Valley to a remote Maasai or Kipsigis community, where you'll spend your days diving into the vibrant and joyful local culture. Volunteer with locals on a project to improve access to education … Learn Swahili, bead with mamas, meet community elders and hear stories that have been passed on through generations" (ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016), and Nicaragua – "By participating in grassroots projects in rural communities, you'll not only get your hands dirty but help remove the barriers to education for young community members" (ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016).

Some examples of testimonials stressing the importance of connecting with community emphasize this importance in the ME to WE brand. For example: "In India, even the language and culture barriers can't stop people from connecting" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), "getting to build relationships with these people that we're helping … I know that there'll be that

connection forever" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016), "In East Africa I met a girl named Joyline. We really connected because we were about the same age and both at the same place in our lives – but completely different places in our lives because of where we live" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), and "I can't even begin to describe how strong of a connection we had with … the community members we met" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016).

While much of the discourse in this section has shown a paternalistic standpoint of development, the emphasis on voluntourists connecting with local communities could stand to show a bridging of that gap.

4.1.2 Terms of Change

ME to WE uses development action buzz words such as "change," "impact," "world changing" and "make a difference" in its online discourse that promote a need to change and often with this comes a prescribed method for doing so, which is where WE Charity comes in. A key ME to WE phrase is "Be part of the solution" (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). But to what problems? This rhetoric seemingly motivates the volunteer to "do good," suggesting they are needed because there is a problem and change must happen. They are consequently encouraged to travel to the destination to take part in such action. The tagline on the main youth trips page reads: "Youth Trips with impact - travel with purpose: It's more than a stamp in your passport. It's about people, connections and self-discovery – working together to change the world" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016). These terms of change are discussed from the perspective of the youth participant as well as the local

community, that they will both be, after this experience, "changed forever," as a participant's testimonial reads: "New friends, new memories and two lives changed forever" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016). In another testimonial, a youth participant reports on her perceived impact in the community: "…it was definitely eye-opening to see how much of a difference you can make" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016). Below a photo of the accommodations the participants will stay in on the Kenya/Tanzania trip reads the caption: "Drop off your bags at your accommodations and get ready to make a difference" (ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016). Each trip destination page has a section that outlines "See how you will make a difference" (ME to WE: Amazon, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2106; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016; ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016), showing before and after photos of various sites (that do not even match up, but images are outside of the scope of this study) and give a description on how, through the *help* of ME to WE and WE Charity, there has been change, impact, and difference made, though not defined further than suggested it is necessary and it has been made on previous trips, therefore justifying the trips' continued existence.

In counting the following phrases "make a difference," "make a positive difference," and "making a difference," throughout the webpages surveyed, the language of "difference" in these terms (specifically with the word "difference") appeared 27 times. "Make an impact," "make a positive impact," and similar language of "having an impact" (specifically with the word "impact") appeared 26 times. Phrases that included "help" (specifically with the word "help") that were related to the voluntourist "helping" the Other, or the people/community they were visiting, appeared 32 times, 10 of which were on the testimonial page specifically. In searching for the word "change," I limited my count to references of change in the community and not

volunteers feeling they have been changed personally (as the latter is a common occurrence, and though outside of the scope of this section, will be addressed later in this chapter). Throughout the pages, I noted 15 references to change, specifically searching for the word "change." There are many examples of all of these terms throughout the discourse, but perhaps some of the strongest examples come from the testimonials as they show both the branded marketing intentions of ME to WE and are somewhat representative of the participants' experiences. Here are a few examples showing an average display of a mix of these terms (emphasis added):

> Having that hands-on experience and getting to build relationships with *these people that we're helping* - it's one of those motivators. When you are actually with these people, you realize *how much of a change you're making*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016)

> …by taking this opportunity [a ME to WE trip], *I was making a difference* in someone's life. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016)

> I wanted to see [WE Charity's] work firsthand, and see how *[WE Charity] was helping these communities* lift themselves from the cycle of poverty. That's why I went on my first ME to WE Trip to Rural China. (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016)

> This trip will re-instate your beliefs to see first hand *what you are doing is making a difference*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016).

> …it was definitely eye-opening to see *how much of a difference you can make*. (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016)

> Being away from home for the first time for so long was so scary, but once I stepped on the plane, I knew what I was doing was for a good cause, the chance to meet new people and *make a difference* in other people's lives. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016)

> I realized that *no impact is too small*. Every single person could truly *make a difference* in someone else's life. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)
>
> I remember my initial intentions for volunteering to go. I *wanted to help*, to give people hope for a future through education, and empower generations of students to go to school! (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)
>
> Helping to build the walls for this information centre with this group of incredible *change-makers* was nothing short of awesome! (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016)
>
> All the kids that went on this trip had one goal in mind: to *make a difference* and *help* these kids get education. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)
>
> I have gained such perspective on being a global citizen and *creating positive change*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016).
>
> …the trip really ignited my passion for *helping others*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)

Though these examples are strictly from the testimonial webpage, these terms appeared on nearly all of the webpages analyzed. All of these terms are limited to the appearance of the specific words "difference," "impact," "help," and "change" meaning there were numerous other references to these ideas using other words/phrases, but this overview provides insight as a baseline into how often and regularly these themes show up in the ME to WE voluntourism discourse.

The emphasis of change in the voluntourism discourse is highly problematic, in that it is elusive while still captivating youth on the basis of good intentions. While still including development ideas, there is a focus on making a difference and making an undefinable,

ambiguous “change” that is perhaps uninvited by the very communities these youth are “helping.”

4.2 Adventure, Travel and Authentic Experiences

ME to WE’s discourse surrounding its youth trips relies heavily on travel and adventure. Doing development, in whatever way it is manifested, is not the selling point or priority of this organization with respect to how it brands itself in its online discourse:

> If you’re going to see the world, have an impact while you’re at it … We live in the world where most westerners, especially young westerners, are more connected than ever before. Travel overseas, whether it’s a beach or backpacking vacation is on their bucket list. A ME to WE Trip is a chance to quench that travel bug and have an impact. (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016)

In a list of reasons why ME to WE trips are different, some top adventure opportunities are highlighted: “You will also find adventure on a ME to WE Trip, whether you’re searching the Big Five on safari in Kenya; being trained by a Maasai warrior to throw a traditional rungu; or participating in a traditional Hindu prayer ceremony in northern India” (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016).

In every trip destination page, the majority (and certainly the beginning) of the paragraph describing the program uses descriptive language to outline the environment and the adventures that will take place before mentioning that there will even be volunteering-type (development) activities. For example, the Amazon trip paragraph follows, with emphasis added where the only mention of volunteering (and reference to potential development benefits) is:

> Amazon | Immerse yourself in an indigenous culture on a rainforest adventure
>
> As you travel from Ecuador's capital, Quito, toward the Amazon basin, the environment starts to change and the temperature steadily rises. Moving into the lush forest, everything grows more exotic and tropical. The plants are larger, with broad palm leaves as big as people. Waterfalls burst out of cliff-sides. Make your way via motorized canoe to the Minga Lodge, your home-away-from home situated on the banks of the Los Rios, a waterway that feeds into the world's second longest river. Nestled in the heart of the jungle, visit an indigenous community and *join locals in building a school or clean water project*. Learn Spanish and the native Kichwa language, try your hand at weaving crafts from materials found in the jungle, and visit the home of a local family to learn about traditional culture and ways-of-life. Hike the rainforest and discover the amazing array of plant, insect and animal species that call the rainforest home, led by your trusty jungle guide. Uncover the secrets of the rainforest on this unforgettable adventure. (ME to WE: Amazon, 2016)

Out of 182 words introducing the Amazon trip, 10 focused on any sort of volunteering or development efforts (5%). Similarly, the Kenya/Tanzania trip uses descriptive language appealing to the potential participants as a journey packed with adventure and authentic experiences:

> Kenya/Tanzania | *Work alongside rural communities* in the heart of the vast savannah
>
> Hop into a lorry for an unforgettable journey through the ever-changing landscape of Kenya/Tanzania, from vast plains dotted with acacia trees, to rolling hills, lush forests and endless horizons. Travel through the Great Rift Valley to a remote Maasai or Kipsigis community, where you'll spend your days diving into the vibrant and joyful local culture. *Volunteer with locals on a project to improve access to education—whether you're laying bricks that will become a school or digging trenches for a well that will provide clean water*. Learn Swahili, bead with mamas, meet community elders and hear stories that have been passed on through generations. Embark on a safari in the Maasai Mara or Ngorongoro Crater and get up close and personal with the "Big Five"—lions elephants, buffalos, leopards and rhinos as they roam the wild land of the Serengeti, named after the Maasai word for "endless plains." Get ready to journey off the beaten path for an adventure like no other. (ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016)

In this example, of 175 words, 35 (20%) were related to the volunteering, development aspect (italicized). In the Ecuador excerpt below, 19 of 148 (12%) are related to development and volunteering:

> Ecuador | Connect with the indigenous people of the Andes Mountains
>
> The longest continental mountain range in the world—also known as the Andes—is where your adventure takes place. Journey to the sky on long, winding roads, past green quilts of rolling hills and with the spectacular background of snow-capped mountains and volcanoes. Step into an indigenous community to *volunteer with local women's groups, join communities in a "minga" to help build a school or clean water project*, and explore Ecuador's history of economic disparities and human rights struggles. Then, your retreat to the Amazon will take you from these mountains among the clouds to the lush jungle miles below, giving you a better understanding of these different climates and how they're each affected by environmental degradation. From the peaks of the Andes to the basin of the Amazon, this is an adventure packed to the brim. (ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016)

The China excerpt below tells the same story, with only 32/165 (19%) of the words focusing on development/volunteering, and instead a major focus in selling the destination based on the experience and journey the participant will have. Like all of the destination introduction paragraphs, the language uses words of adventure and appeals to the senses of the potential participant, situating them in this exotic, foreign land, as opposed to the development initiatives ME to WE's voluntourism is purportedly based on:

> China | Connect with students, *make a difference* and explore an ancient civilization

> An adventure to China offers breathtaking views of the old and new—from city to countryside. Start in Beijing, a bustling city that is one of the most populous in the world. Explore the city's fascinating ancient history with visits to Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. As you head out of the capital, stop to explore one of the world's most famous monuments—the Great Wall of China—which spans more than 8,000 kilometres. Then, discover the contrast between China's booming cities and vast countryside as you *volunteer alongside locals in a rural community*. Practice your Mandarin, *teach English at a primary school and help build a school or clean water project*. End your trip with a visit to the city of Shaolin to learn about meditation and martial arts with a monk, and to *spend a day volunteering at an orphanage*. Get ready for an incredible journey like no other! (ME to WE: China, 2016)

Thus, the focus on adventure and exploring through travel and the immersion into a different culture take center stage. This does not resonate with the stated commitments of making a difference and having an impact that the organization so heavily relies on in its official vision, slogans and statements. This centrality of adventure is problematic because it is mismatched with the organization's mission of sustainable development and apparent commitment to social justice, making it overall disingenuous to the consumer.

Building on the focus of adventure, ME to WE claims that participants will have an authentic experience: "Expand your worldview by experiencing different culture, language and customs," which promotes ideas of "us" vs. "them," or Othering, and plays on the exoticness and foreignness of other cultures as an appealing form of marketing (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). This adventurous trip is therefore played up not merely as an exciting travel journey, but an opportunity for youth to experience the unknown and learn/appreciate the differences between their group and the local population they will visit during their short, planned trip abroad. Another way that the authenticity of the voluntourism experience is confirmed is by using poverty in the discourse. This can be seen in various testimonials, for example (emphasis added): in Nicaragua, "By participating in

grassroots projects in rural communities, you'll not only *get your hands dirty* but help remove the barriers to education for young community members" (ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016), "*Get your hands dirty* digging a water project like a borehole or well" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), and in India, "On roads snaking through the countryside, discover one of [WE Charity's] rural partner communities where you'll *get your hands dirty* working on a volunteer project like a school, clean water project or health centre" (ME to WE: India, 2016).

The voluntourism trip ME to WE promotes evokes a quest for shocking experiences and is also described as a dramatic and life-changing experience. This can be observed in the following testimonials: "Travelling to China dramatically changed my life. Not only do I now have lifelong friends all over the world, I have gained such perspective on being a global citizen and creating positive change" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016), "East Africa taught me more than I can express and changed the way I view everything" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016), "it turns out [this trip] was a life-changing experience and … I have a different perspective on the world" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016), and "The contrast between who I was before the trip and who I am now is completely black and white" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016). These testimonials illustrate a youth who goes abroad being shocked and feeling transformed by this experience, potentially due to having been unprepared.

Throughout the webpages examined, action words and phrases that play up the emphasis of adventure and exploration are predominantly used over passive words, particularly in a section of the main page for youth trips that asks (and answers) the following of potential participants: "Why do you want to travel?" and "Where do you want to go?" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016). For example, "You're a fearless explorer with the thirst for raw, authentic adventure" (ME to

WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Take Bollywood dance lessons in India" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Eat slugs with a jungle guide in Ecuador" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Embark on a sunset safari in East Africa" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "India: Dive into a colourful culture" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016), "Get your hands dirty digging a water project like a borehole or well" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Go on a water-walk with women and girls in India" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), and "Take part in local sporting events in the Dominican Republic" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016). These words and phrases arouse the same excitement and sense of adventure and paint the imagery defined above.

Though these adventure-oriented words are used prolifically, there is still great diversity in the discourse of more passive words such as "explore" and "learn" which promotes a positive learning experience for participants and markets a lesson to students that they will not simply be "making an impact" and "doing" the entire time, every moment they are abroad, but they will also be gaining valuable knowledge and exposure. This tourism side of voluntourism is being set up to complement the "development" parts, where one can "learn" and "experience" the culture so that they can appreciate and truly understand their hand in development. Some examples of these more passive phrases include: "Learn about sustainable development from our in-country teams" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "explore social issues in a dynamic landscape" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016), "Spend time with local community members and put real faces, names and stories to the impact of [your] volunteer work" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), and "Ecuador: Connect with the indigenous people of the Andes mountains" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016). Though these excerpts may be more passive in nature than action-oriented, they still have some

excitement and a marketable aspect to them, and perhaps play into the tourism part of the voluntourism experience.

4.3 The Allure of the Proximity to Poverty

This next theme will look at the testimonials as an indicator of participant satisfaction which is fuelled by these voluntourists' comparative realities to the communities to which they travelled. It will also seek to illustrate the allure that participants, coming from a position of privilege, have in getting close to poverty. It is through this closeness to poverty that the voluntourist is found comparing her or himself to the Other in order to recognize and appreciate her or his place in her or his relationship as between voluntourist and impoverished local in the Global South. For example, one participant's testimonial from the Kenya/Tanzania trip reflects on how close this poverty felt to her in a testimonial:

> Being in East Africa made me realize how huge the world really is. But what touched me the most while I was there were the local people I met … You can read about poverty or watch documentaries on it, but seeing it firsthand is very different. Suddenly poverty has a face and a hand to shake, and world poverty becomes much more real to you. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016)

Though this may read as an appreciation for learning about poverty in a "real-world" context, on a deeper analysis, it shows that poverty is something she has never personally encountered in her privileged life and that by taking this ME to WE trip, she has been afforded the opportunity to "experience" it, but only dropping by so quickly before leaving again.

Another form of comparison that takes place involves the voluntourist comparing her or his daily reality with that of a person in the Global South (where they are visiting), but reducing the status quo of the inequality to fate, expressed as "lotto logic" (Quinby, 2002), rather than acknowledging the deeper structural and systematic contributing factors in which the tourist plays a role. "Lotto logic" is a major theme present in the youth testimonials. This theme in this context suggests that the youth voluntourist feel they are lucky to have been dealt the hand they have been (being born into a country of wealth). For example: "The journey really made me realize how lucky we are to have such easy access to clean, cold and hot water" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016) and "Taking a water walk in India and spending a day in the life with a woman made me realize how fortunate I am. What amazed me was how content these people were. Living in a world of materialism, it's a true eye-opener" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016).

This is situated within a deeper context, which is the acceptance of the international status quo (the poor are poor and the rich are rich) because of the "poor but happy" mentality – the idea that: although they are poor, at least they are happy, so it is OK. As long as a poor community is happy, the system of poverty can continue and the rich do not need to feel guilty. Some examples of these testimonials include: "The people I met who lived in poverty but continued to smile and appreciate their lives taught me so much" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), "We met so many incredible people that were always smiling and cheerful, despite the conditions they were living in" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016), "I made some amazing friends [local people] who were always smiling no matter what" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016), "You'd get off the boat and see all

the kids lined up at the shore waiting for you, with massive smiles on their faces" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Amazon, 2016), and:

> We started out as excited tourists who roamed the crowded streets full of life on foot and by bus. We saw poverty, but we also saw raw happiness. We saw people happy simply because they were alive. We saw girls, boys, women, and men excited to see us, and we returned the ear-to-ear grins with grins of our own. We were often welcomed with laughter and cheerful, sincere, 'Namaste's. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016)

The interpretation of what the voluntourists see is limited by what they are able to understand and the limited context in which they see these people. Adding to this, there is also a tendency of the voluntourists to generalize entire populations or communities despite only having observed them for a mere couple of weeks (if that). These lands, culture and people are summarized into simple pairs of descriptors, creating a simple geography (Simpson, 2004); for example: "There's something about the beautiful sunsets, exotic wildlife and the incredibly kind-hearted people" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016), "What amazed me was how content these people were" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016), "In India, even the language and culture barriers can't stop people from connecting" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), and "The people were phenomenal, the culture was brilliant and the landscape in the country was breath taking" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016). Simplifying geographies evokes an unauthorized sense of knowledge over lands, people and culture from the youth participants.

4.4 Youth Leadership and Social Justice Training

A great deal of the relevant critical literature focuses on the motivations and benefits to the voluntourist in partaking in programs. Much of the underlying text throughout the website including in the testimonials speak to the programs' leadership opportunities, about using the experience to gain perspective on broader social justice issues in order to achieve a "deeper understanding of sustainability and development issues," and to become a better leader that can give back to one's community upon returning home (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). The website promotes the following: "We believe that the world is the best classroom, and ME to WE Trips offer the opportunity for participants to gain a first-hand understanding of social justice issues, discover a new perspective to understand the world and find the inspiration to lead change" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016).

Leadership is a quality not only promoted largely by the VTSO but something that the organization uses to set itself apart from other voluntourism programs (in addition to being an organization focused on "making an impact" using a "sustainable development model" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016):

> ME to WE Trips are guided by highly trained and experienced facilitators. They provide participants with leadership training, skill-building workshops and help them develop action plans. When participants return home, they then have the tools to take action on social causes as well as a deeper understanding of sustainability and development issues. … [WE Charity] is there to support your continued volunteer efforts with campaigns that impact the global and local causes you care about. (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016; ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016)

As seen in the quote above, ME to WE emphasizes a focus on leadership training that they hope translates from the experience abroad to the youth's local community. In particular, this last statement from the above quote is not backed up anywhere on the site and though it may be true, there is no apparent link to get information on success stories for youth who have come home and "[made] a difference" using the tools learned or motivation cultured on a ME to WE trip. Furthermore, in the voluntourism literature, gaining the skills to effect change in one's local community, or "making a difference" back home, is not one of the primary motivations, even of those motivators that appeal to the youth's desire to gain personal growth skills and values. It is therefore somewhat surprising that ME to WE uses this discourse so freely in its material when most of its other discourse has appealed to the various popular desires of youth.

Something else that ME to WE promotes in its voluntourism discourse is a rhetoric of personal growth in the form of transformation and change. Some examples can be observed in the following select testimonials (emphasis added):

> Travelling to China *dramatically changed my life*. Not only do I now have lifelong friends all over the world, I have gained such perspective on being a global citizen and creating positive change. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016)

> After going on this trip, I have a new appreciation for school. Especially on those days where I don't want to go to school or I don't want to make an effort. *It's changed a lot of things for me at home*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016)

> When I returned from the volunteer trip, *I got more than what I asked for*. Not only did *I appreciate the life I had a lot more*, but the trip really ignited my passion for helping others and let me see the world in a broader view. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Amazon, 2016)

> The contrast between *who I was before the trip and who I am now is completely black and white*. I appreciate so many things like water, my family, the accessibility of food and the life I live so much more than I ever did before. The people I met who lived in poverty but continued to smile and appreciate their lives taught me so much. It really *changed my outlook* on a lot of things. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)

> When I went on this trip, I met people that helped me find my voice. They helped me show my true colours. They made me feel good and happy and they *inspired me to change*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)

> *East Africa taught me more than I can express* and *changed the way I view everything*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016)

> New friends, new memories and *two lives changed forever*. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)

> *Ecuador gave me a purpose*. Life is made up of millions of souls touching one another, giving or taking something every time their paths cross. I was touched by so many souls on this trip. (ME to WE: Youth Trips; ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016)

> I never could have anticipated the renewed hope that this community would instill in me. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016)

> …it turns out [this trip] was a life-changing experience and something I would do over and over again … I have a different perspective on the world. (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016)

These testimonials speak to the motives of change and experience of personal growth in terms of motivations and outcomes in participating in the ME to WE voluntourism experience.

The VTSO goes as far as to claim that "ME to WE Trips have a proven impact on all travellers" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). Throughout the website, the only mention of external research on "development impact" is the

following: “The impact of Free The Children’s development model has been externally validated by the U.S.-based social-impact consulting firm Mission Measurement” (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), despite development purportedly being the organization’s and trips’ primary focus. Four other times throughout the analyzed webpages, ME to WE repeats that it hired this above-mentioned consulting firm, Mission Measurement in 2014, to conduct “independent third-party research” to “prove” such impact: “that trip participants were even more motivated to make change when they returned home” (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). In this vein, in some testimonials, youth speak to the lessons they will bring back home: “After this experience, I will try my best to never waste anything. I know that I will never take anything for granted” (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016) and “I was touched by so many souls on this trip – it is now my turn to do the same” (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016). Another participant remarks in a testimonial: “I met people that helped me find my voice” (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), likely reflective of other participants and not of the local population, though overall, there does appear to be a great deal of testimonial indication that suggests that connecting to local communities is an important part of the ME to WE voluntourism experience. Overall, leadership skills training is a major selling point utilized by ME to WE.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

This analysis section will use a critical theory framework informed by postcolonialism that draws on four thematic issues, as outlined in Chapter 2, the literature review, to analyze the findings: global citizenship (thick vs. thin), altruism vs. egoism, neoliberalism (consumer vs. citizen), and charity vs. development. In this chapter, I elaborate on the findings from Chapter 4 to examine how the ME to WE discourse reinforces and perpetuates inequalities identified in these thematic categories. The global citizenship lens analyzes the depth to which the discourse involves ethical obligations of the youth in the voluntourism practice. The altruism vs. egoism debate situates the motivations of ME to WE trip participants on a spectrum to understand the complex nature of the practice and the entrenched unequal power relations that egoistic motivations bring to the experience. The neoliberalism lens situates the voluntourism experience as a commodity that exists on the market and therefore frames all of the marketing aspects as designed to appeal to the self-centered desires of the voluntourist as a consumer, rather than understanding their role in the experience as a citizen. The charity vs. development debate underscores how ME to WE's work is more about "helping" and providing solutions as opposed to meaningful development initiatives, thereby reinforcing paternalistic stereotypes by creating a desire for the Other and framing the Global South as a land for colonial exploration by the Global North.

My analysis in general supports the critical debates in the scholarly research as opposed to the popular view that ME to WE authenticates through its branding, which is the notion that "help" is inherently "good." I argue that the voluntourism trips it sells to youth under the premise of leadership, adventure, "making a difference," "having an impact," and being a "change-

maker" reinforce neocolonial, paternalistic concepts of unequal power relations between the Global North and Global South.

5.1 Global Citizenship – Thick vs. Thin

Global citizenship is a contemporary view on cosmopolitanism, which concerns a human's relation to other humans in the world in terms of moral duties. While global citizenship has become a term used liberally in international development education and volunteer abroad discourse, its ethical obligations as related to political and global systems are often neglected (Cameron, 2014). ME to WE, as seen in its very name, attempts as a social enterprise to move the moral responsibilities from the individual "me" to the collective "we" (Jefferess, 2012). Jefferess (2012) argues that ME to WE focuses on global education as a lifestyle brand whose activities often reinforce a colonial rhetoric while outwardly articulating moral obligation, but as an organization, it fails to do no harm and have students critically reflect or engage with their moral duties and responsibilities or indeed to make any sacrifices of their own privilege (p. 23-24).

With respect to my research, very few findings point to ME to WE supporting proponents of thick concepts of global citizenship, reinforcing Jefferess' (2012) conclusions. I argue that there are many components of thin notions of global citizenship in my findings, but ME to WE seldom presents a more critical engagement toward thick concepts.

In terms of "doing" development, the term "connecting" was emphasized throughout the discourse, specifically with local leaders from a different culture, local communities, etc. ME to WE highlighted the concept of cross-cultural connections, noting they can lead to many learning

opportunities between cultures, and avidly marketing this cultural exchange in terms of "learners and community leaders [being] proud, equal partners" in the initiatives and similar language (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). While this could lead to thick concepts of global citizenship, the underlying neocolonial power that accompanies youth on voluntourism trips does not make this a reciprocal exchange and it is here where part of the problem lies. Youth that partake in the ME to WE voluntourism experience are in positions of power and privilege and are literally and figuratively flying in for a short period of time and then flying away, making the opportunity for equal, reciprocal cross-cultural understanding for all individuals involved nearly impossible. Furthermore, this reciprocal exchange is only marketed from a unidirectional perspective, from the side of the voluntourist, implying that the individual in the community in the Global South is not relevant enough to be considered in a position to contribute to or benefit from that relationship. As such it is only the global citizenship identity of the voluntourist that is important in this equation. Furthermore, the centrality of travel to the definition of global citizenship identity is clear in this case. Global citizenship is then generally associated with one's ability to travel to places around the world (Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012).

In fact, youth subconsciously disassociate themselves from the local community through appreciating their state of privilege in contrast to the state of poverty in which they are visiting, a notion that fits into the "lotto logic" theme (Quinby, 2002). The "lotto logic" rhetoric in which youth participants, particularly through testimonials, express how seeing such poverty makes them feel lucky for being born into their current place (a country of wealth), is problematic from a global citizenship education lens because it emphasizes an acceptance of the systematic status quo between the Global North and Global South as a function of fate rather than critically

evaluating the structures and systems in which they play a role (Simpson, 2004). Despite ME to WE trips providing its participants the opportunity to engage in leadership opportunities and use the experience to become more active and engaged citizens upon returning home (a theme explored below), the testimonials being post-trip somehow override those avenues to show the lack of thick concepts of global citizenship education on these trips.

As seen in the findings, ME to WE has placed a large emphasis on marketing its youth leadership and social justice training on its voluntourism trips. The organization uses the experience for the youth to observe, participate in and ultimately gain insight and knowledge from which they will learn and return home to give back to their community in some way. From a global citizenship perspective, this is beneficial because it allows for the continued development of leaders and learners. It provides them the opportunity to engage in critical reflection and conversations (assuming these are available to them in their leadership and social justice training) that better informs action in a more sincere and thoughtful way. It is, however, problematic for numerous reasons. From a global citizenship perspective specifically, the training is based on the premise that volunteer, development-type action is required (as it is presumably ongoing while in-country), which does not allow for unbiased critical reflection. Furthermore, it is not specified whether this training is done with or without the local community, but it is likely done amongst other trip participants with educators from the Global North, which means the training is unidirectional, has neocolonial underpinnings, and does not take into account the complex global systems within which those from the Global North are situated, placing a certain blame for poverty on those in the Global South rather than those of the Global North.

The inclusion of pre-departure training on this type of trip would see participants being prepared so that they are trained and educated in such a way that they are able to understand, appreciate and be more critical of the experience upon which they would embark as well as understand their place and their impact on the community with which they are working, but also within a larger system. It would provide them with the resources and tools to reflect critically prior to embarking on this experience. A post-trip reflection training would provide the opportunity to reflect and be guided on the experience and understand one's actions and more broadly, place in the larger global system. While ME to WE does not mention pre-departure training, hidden under the umbrella of how to "deal with culture shock" in the "Frequently Asked Questions," trip participants are reportedly provided with:

> …a detailed overview of the community they will visit, as well as a list of books, resources, films, etc. that they may use to get a better sense of their destination. These materials discuss issues that affect the community, development needs, provide details about current projects, as well as information on cultural and traditional practices. (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016)

While the information in these materials was not available for analysis, provided they include discourse of the same tone as the webpages examined, they would seemingly promote an idealized view of development with solution-oriented rhetoric and vague notions of "change" underlying the "helping imperative." Nonetheless, having materials to disseminate is a positive start to foster prepared and engaged minds before travelling to a foreign destination. This information, however, being listed under the heading of "How do ME to WE staff help participants deal with culture shock?" (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016) (and also discussing how to cope with "reverse culture shock"), reaffirms a power relationship that posits

the voluntourists above the citizens of the Global South. The very idea that another's culture can be "shocking" in and of itself is derogatory and degrading. ME to WE makes no mention of post-trip reflection, other than to say that the voluntourists' experiences will be turned into "long-term activism." As mentioned in Chapter 6 as a limitation, this research analyzes what ME to WE says and not what it does, though it is telling that this information is listed under a section that deals with serving the participants' mental well-being ("culture shock") as a safety concern and not the organization's ability to foster critical thinking skills in its participants through pre-departure training or post-trip reflection.

Moving now to the pre-trip experience, the influence of advertisements of websites and promotional material of VTSOs play a large role in formulating preconceived ideas of poverty along with what "needs" and "should" be done in the Global South. It consequently instills a kind of saviour-complex or denotes the voluntourist as the "hero" in the narrative. This builds on Simpson's (2004) research wherein she found that participants felt an associated guilt, that if they could do something, they should, and that "doing something is better than doing nothing" (p. 685). In particular, ME to WE uses many development buzz words, or terms of change, that are positioned as solution-oriented rhetoric. For example, terms such as "make a difference," "change," "impact," and "do good," suggest that help from the Global North can be sent in to provide solutions in the form of help or volunteering to the problems of the Global South. A key ME to WE phrase is "Be part of the solution" (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016), which reinforces neocolonial attitudes that we have solutions to their problems. It assumes that there is a problem that needs fixing, and gives unskilled, underqualified youth the false pretense that they are more able to fix it than the people that live within the community wherein lies the "problem." This not only suggests that those

from the Global South cannot help themselves, but ignores that there is a more complex global system at play in the problems that ME to WE is alleging it can solve. This presents a thin concept of global citizenship because it shows a lack of recognition of a complex global system at play or that the community within which the youth are working is part of the supposed solution and are global citizens as well. The discourse is unidirectional and suggests that the youth travelling abroad from the Global North are the only global citizens. Furthermore, this also does not contribute to a "do no harm" philosophy (Pogge, 2008) that the global citizenship and cosmopolitanism literature reinforces when concerning moral obligations.

The findings illustrated that adventure-oriented and action words were used abundantly throughout the webpages observed in contrast to more passive words, the latter of which promoting a learning environment for participants and not just acting and doing (for example "explore" and "learn"). These phrases are descriptive, positioning the voluntourist as explorer and adventurer: "You're a fearless explorer with the thirst for raw, authentic adventure" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Get your hands dirty digging a water project like a borehole or well" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Eat slugs with a jungle guide in Ecuador" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), and "India: Dive into a colourful culture" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016). This action-oriented discourse contributes to this solution-oriented rhetoric as opposed to engaging in the critical reflexivity that Andreotti (2006) and Cameron (2014) suggest is required for students in global citizenship education.

What the global citizenship lens provides is a greater understanding of the depth to which ME to WE's voluntourism discourse explores or as I have argued, largely fails to uncover and in fact misses an opportunity to appreciate, the ethical obligations these youth have as human beings within a political, complex global system.

5.2 Altruism vs. Egoism

The altruism vs. egoism debate concerns the motivations causing one to perform or undertake an act. The former is often defined as involving self-sacrifice or the individual putting themselves in danger for the well-being of another (often less-fortunate), whereas the latter involves one acting with an expectation of a particular outcome or benefit. Using the example of donating money to an international charity: doing so because it will help you on your tax return, because it was your co-worker who solicited the donation and so you feel the need to keep up a good image, or because you get the chance to win a vacation by doing so, are all examples of motivations on the more egoistic side of the spectrum. One could perform the same act out of a completely different, more altruistic motivation, such as giving anonymously and thinking this charity will improve the lives of those less-fortunate.

The findings of this research show an overwhelming support for an egoistic perspective, though appreciate that much of the literature on altruism does suggest that altruism as pure selflessness is unlikely to exist as a practical matter because most acts have some type of benefit (known or unknown) toward the doer (Haski-Leventhal, 2009). Therefore, the binary of altruism vs. egoism is not terribly helpful since altruism is unachievable – we all have personal motivations (see Haski-Leventhal, 2009). Despite the language of "helping" and the desire to "give back," this rhetoric of "do good," while seemingly purely altruistic, provides benefits for the giver, even if it is merely through a sense of self-satisfaction (Georgeou, 2012, p. 11). In terms of the continuum, participants' comments suggest they fall more in line with egoistic motivations. For example, this is seen in phrases such as participants feeling "changed forever" and the experience being "eye-opening," as well as quotes such as: "Travelling to China

dramatically changed my life. Not only do I now have lifelong friends all over the world, I have gained such perspective on being a global citizen and creating positive change" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016), "It's changed a lot of things for me at home" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Amazon, 2016), "The journey really made me realize how lucky we are to have such easy access to clean, cold and hot water" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016), "Taking a water walk in India and spending a day in the life with a woman made me realize how fortunate I am" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016), "The people I met who lived in poverty but continued to smile and appreciate their lives taught me so much" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), and "I was touched by so many souls on this trip – it is now my turn to do the same" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016). This egoism is supported and fostered by the marketing material used by ME to WE, drawing on the participants' interests and values. For example: "A ME to WE Trip kick-starts a life-long journey" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), "ME to WE Trips are impactful, life changing" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016), "When you take a ME to WE Trip, you not only work in partnership with local community members, you also take a journey that has enriched the lives of more than 15,000 participants from around the world" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), "Students, teachers, leading business figures, celebrities, world leaders and members of the Royal Family have taken a ME to WE Trip" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016), "You will come away from a ME to WE Trip with a deeper understanding of social justice and development issues" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), "Participants experience and embrace the sights and sounds of a new culture, by tasting the unique flavours of local cuisines, taking part in traditional activities and learning new

languages" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), "You will also find adventure on a ME to WE Trip, whether you're searching the Big Five on safari in Kenya; being trained by a Maasai warrior to throw a traditional rungu; or participating in a traditional Hindu prayer ceremony in northern India" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), and "Each adventure puts participants side-by-side with community members who teach you skills or deepen your experience through participation" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016). This egoism finds itself in a paradoxical position; while the marketing material needs to sell the experience to the consumer in a way so that it appeals to her or his ego (as the findings show it largely does, adopting a consumer-first mentality and playing to the ideas of volunteer self-discovery, pursuit of altruism and change, and a gaining of valuable experience [Heron, 2011; McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007]), it simultaneously must uphold and market the values of a sustainable development trip, which it also purports to be.

These paradoxes are rampant in the material, showcasing the volunteer-local community as equals, then using paternalistic discourse to undermine this relationship and position the youth in a seat of privilege. Empathy has a particular place in the altruism vs. egoism literature. Where empathy would appear on its face to be situated on the altruism side of the spectrum, it is argued that empathy, like compassion, works in an unexpected way that actually causes an individual to perform seemingly philanthropic actions, but they are actually doing so by way of ridding their own distress and improving their social image (Batson, 1991 as cited by Haski-Leventhal, 2009). ME to WE points to the participants' privilege in being able to (afford to) travel and how they should thereby also feel compelled to "have an impact" while doing so: "Travel overseas, whether it's a beach or backpacking vacation is on their bucket list. A ME to WE Trip is a chance to quench that travel bug and have an impact" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016). The

following quote illustrates much of the same associated guilt: “If you’re going to see the world, have an impact while you’re at it” (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016). Undertones of privilege and power in the discourse override do-good initiatives when it comes to development. ME to WE, under the banner of sustainable development and volunteering to make a difference, plays on this concept of empathy as egoism, whereby one acts to assuage her or his guilt and improve her or his social image, deliberately pointing out that the participant is so privileged that she or he might as well volunteer. Ultimately, the VTSO plays on the youth’s position of privilege – they volunteer abroad because they can (afford to). Embarking on a voluntourism trip under this premise is contradictory to the selfless, altruistic concepts of development that ME to WE purports so strongly to support and encourage throughout its discourse.

The ME to WE discourse is rampant with references to adventure, travel and youth having an “authentic” experience. The altruism literature surrounding volunteerism suggests that for an act to be altruistic, it must have no ulterior motives or produce offshoot benefits. The focus on adventure and travel as a dominant motivation for youth to participate in volunteering abroad contributes to egoistic motivations as opposed to pure, selfless intentions. The impact of this, therefore, contributes to negative perceptions of development. While ME to WE no doubt reinforces its strong support for developmental initiatives in its voluntourism trips and indicates that it hopes that some developmental good will come from the experience towards the local population (what they refer to as “impact”), the ultimate benefit is towards the consumer, being always the youth participant.

The findings also illustrated an emphasis on the “local” and on “connections”: connecting with local communities, learning the local language, “participat[ing] in grassroots projects in rural communities” (ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016), etc. The local community does not have the

same opportunity to visit the youth's local community in, say, Canada, so these "connections" and the relation to "local" are defined by the organization, ME to WE, and the youth participants themselves. It is therefore not a purely reciprocal cross-cultural exchange between the participants and the local communities, which means that these very themes are for the benefit of the participants, pointing yet further to egoistic motivations.

A rhetoric focused on solutions, though embedded in neocolonial notions, does lend itself to a more altruistic as opposed to egoistic philosophy. Furthermore, in the altruism literature, many researchers explain that there must be a self-sacrifice in the act for it to be purely altruistic in nature; from the ME to WE discourse, it is hard to see the voluntourism experience as having even a degree of self-sacrifice and danger (for example, if a participant is concerned at all about their personal safety, the organization has a thoroughly-outlined safety section to ensure each trip participant's safety from pre-trip to the journey home). Moreover, this is supported by Moore's (2014) argument which examines status and argues that a group or individuals of higher status will only seek to improve a minority group's status in society as long as it does not compromise or lessen their own power, thereby maintaining inequality (p. 50, quoting McIntosh, 1989).

As stated in my findings section, participants seek and purchase an experience as consumers, and therefore have certain expectations, whether it be feeling happy, learning about the Global South, having had a fulfilling vacation, feeling like they had an impact and made a difference, etc. Expectations are more about the consequences or outcomes that result from an act, whereas motivations deal with reasons one decides to perform an act. These expectations are not necessarily the same as the motivations for going abroad. After a trip, the consumer, or trip participant, will determine their level of satisfaction with the product. Expecting anything in

return for the act of volunteering, as mentioned numerous times above, eliminates the possibility of it being considered anything near being a purely altruistic effort.

There is also a rhetoric of the pursuit of the voluntourist themselves being changed through seeking personal transformation (often framed positively as growth), which is found throughout the discourse but particularly through the participant testimonials. Some examples of this include: “Travelling to China dramatically changed my life. Not only do I now have lifelong friends all over the world, I have gained such perspective on being a global citizen and creating positive change” (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016); “After going on this trip, I have a new appreciation for school. Especially on those days where I don’t want to go to school or I don’t want to make an effort. It’s changed a lot of things for me at home” (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Amazon, 2016); “When I returned from the volunteer trip, I got more than what I asked for. Not only did I appreciate the life I had a lot more, but the trip really ignited my passion for helping others and let me see the world in a broader view” (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016); “The contrast between who I was before the trip and who I am now is completely black and white … It really changed my outlook on a lot of things” (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016); and “it turns out [this trip] was a life-changing experience” (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: India, 2016). This is supported by the literature by being framed as a cathartic orientation, one that offers the tourist an intrinsic reward (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). Wearing (2001) furthermore suggests voluntourism causes “value-change and changed consciousness in the individual that will subsequently influence their lifestyle” (p. x). This focus on desire for personal growth in terms of transformation is egoistic in nature and problematic in that self-oriented motivations overpower the desire to contribute to a (meaningful) development impact.

Building on this egoistic desire for personal growth, the youth leadership and social justice training is heavily promoted throughout the ME to WE trips website content, which further supports the egoistic motivations that overpower the altruistic do-good development rhetoric that accompanies most volunteer abroad trips. This is further enhanced by the fact that these are merely themes of thin concepts of global citizenship education as opposed to thick, which could have led to deeper, critical and more meaningful education.

Related to the capitalist accumulation of experience through the neoliberal acquisition of experience abroad is a general failure to understand the structural dynamics that facilitate this consumption. Consequently, without a deconstruction of the structural inequality, youth participants return home with simplistic and problematic understandings of their place and impact in the world. Reflections on "lucky to be Canadian" are key illustrations of this failure to fully comprehend global inequality and one's complicity in that process as something other than "luck." The "lotto logic" theme can further be explored in the context of altruism vs. egoism. The participants note in testimonials that the experience of seeing such poverty made them appreciate their lives back home in Canada, essentially that they are lucky to be born where they were and not into a country of poverty like the people to whom they were just exposed. This relief and personal realization can be interpreted from both perspectives: perhaps from the altruism side, being in the position of helper from the Global North, this youth believes that she or he is able to "help" as a "saviour," sacrificing her or his time and money to come volunteer. From the egoism perspective, "lotto logic" as a learned theme is actually considered a benefit to the participant, something that the youth will come home with as a new take on life, that they have been changed by this and it has been "a true eye-opener," to quote a youth testimonial (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016).

While the altruism vs. egoism debate may provide a deeper analysis of the true selfless vs. selfish nature of the motivations of youth participants as seen in the representation of online discourse, it fails to consider how these selfish, egoistic motivations, though perhaps unconscious on the part of the youth, carry deeper implications on the relationships between the youth from the Global North and the people in the communities in the Global South. Programs that are premised on international development outcomes and addressing inequality have an imperative of giving more than receiving, yet ME to WE appears to portray its brand and trip experiences as benefiting the consumer, almost in a "taking" fashion (a notion explored next in the neoliberalism analytical theme).

In order to offer a more balanced approach, programs need to provide more emphasis on shared benefits and mutuality/reciprocity. While it is clear that young Canadians benefit from these experiences more than the host partners, this remains a problematic and insufficient conclusion.

5.3 Neoliberalism – Consumer vs. Citizen

Voluntourism has been defined and understood as an industry where one consumes through purchasing an experience. McGloin and Georgeou's framing of voluntourism as neoliberalism is premised on the understanding that voluntourism commoditizes the development practice as a product to be bought and sold, existing in the market and not in the civil society paradigm (2016, p. 406). Study abroad experiences are similarly packaged and portrayed as a product and use advertisements that position the student from the Global North above the people from the destinations in the Global South, appealing to the consumeristic nature and privilege of

those students (Zemach-Bersin, 2009). This consumption is not only economic, but voluntourism has been alluded to as "contemporary cannibalism" (Wearing & McGehee, 2013), amongst other critical "consumption" terms (framing the tourist as "consuming" the cultural sites, which includes peoples). This consumption mentality is problematic because it positions the youth over the people, culture and lands to which they do not belong (and likely know little about), giving them an unwarranted sense of entitlement and authority. ME to WE positions the participants as "consumers" and not as "citizens" (Moore, 2014, p. 58) and the components of the voluntourism package as selling-features for the product.

ME to WE puts a large emphasis on its youth leadership and social justice training, suggesting that the participants use the voluntourism experience as a learning experience so that upon returning home, they can give back to their home community:

> Under the guidance of highly trained and experienced facilitators, participants engage in leadership training, skill-building workshops and action planning so when you return home, you have the tools to give back to your community. (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016)

And:

> You will come away from a ME to WE Trip with a deeper understanding of social justice and development issues that will change the way you understand the needs of marginalized communities throughout the world. You will take home these lessons, along with an action plan to make a difference. [WE Charity] is there to support your continued volunteer efforts with campaigns that impact the global and local causes you care about. (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016)

What is problematic with the language in these examples is that it reinforces colonial ideals of visiting a foreign place to observe, make notes, have an "authentic experience," and then return

home to do something – this would be akin to visiting a zoo on a school field trip and returning to class the next day and writing a report. It not only neglects that the "experience" concerns people's livelihoods and struggles but once again, reiterates the neocolonial power dynamics at play that afford this situation to occur and these youth to have such an opportunity (that those being visited and studied do not). This supports McGloin and Georgeou's (2016) research which argues how the commoditization of voluntourism programs have framed indigenous communities as part of the "photogenic landscape" to add value to the voluntourist's "authentic" adventure (p. 406). VTSOs have capitalized on people's desire to "help the poor" in the Global South but have not stopped at that, rather they have gone further to capitalize on the full consumer experience, "highlighting opportunities of intimate contact with the exotic poor, promising both authenticity and engagement with communities in developing countries" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 407). This authentic experience extends not only to an engagement with the local communities, but an engagement with poverty. ME to WE has shown this same marketing tactic, appealing to people's desire to "help" those who are less privileged in appealing to their sympathies and compassion, and then going further to additionally advertise a closeness to poverty as an authentic experience and an attractive aspect of the voluntourism trip. My research shows how ME to WE uses this very language, for example: in Nicaragua, "By participating in grassroots projects in rural communities, you'll not only get your hands dirty but help remove the barriers to education for young community members" (ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016), "Get your hands dirty digging a water project like a borehole or well" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), and in India, "On roads snaking through the countryside, discover one of [WE Charity's] rural partner communities where you'll get your hands dirty working on a volunteer project like a school, clean water project or health centre" (ME to WE: India, 2016). This

rhetoric is used by VTSOs such as ME to WE as a selling point, further illustrating the advertising of "doing development." This creates a greater divide between privileged and poor, despite the supposed aim of the program being development and helping bring communities out of poverty.

Through its rhetoric of exploring unknown lands, ME to WE fully makes the distinction between the privileged youth from the Global North and the oppressed they visit: "We believe that the world is the best classroom, and ME to WE Trips offer the opportunity for participants to gain a first-hand understanding of social justice issues, discover a new perspective to understand the world and find the inspiration to lead change" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016). This is highly problematic as it instills a sense of ownership and entitlement to these foreign, distant destinations (and their people and culture), which seem to be used and disposed of when and where necessary without much thought (which can be seen by choosing dates for a trip that best suits one's busy schedule, dropping in for 2-3 weeks of "development help," and then returning home).

Another way in which the programs are advertised to youth is in the portrayal of becoming better leaders. Leadership skills training is a major selling point used by ME to WE, for example: "participants engage in leadership training, skill-building workshops and action planning" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016) and "With interactive modules based on proven best practices, our trips empower youth with the skills, confidence and understanding to take action in their local and global communities" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016). The way this is framed is problematic because ME to WE is using the context of a particular community in a poor country as a snapshot example to paint for onlookers, the youth participants, who are not likely to have any analytical training or education to process what they are observing, being a

particular reality. This sets the youth apart from the reality and allows them to disassociate themselves with such reality, treating the local community, unknowingly, as the Other, which perpetuates paternalistic undertones.

This discourse also alludes to notions of recognizing the Other (Sin, 2010) and a general disassociation between "us" vs. "them" in mentality in creating the Other (Heron, 2007), further emphasizing this uneven power dynamic despite there being an overall discourse suggesting themes of connecting and helping. This is shown, for example, in the "poor but happy" narrative explored in testimonials, such as "You'd get off the boat and see all the kids lined up at the shore waiting for you, with massive smiles on their faces" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Amazon, 2016), the utilizing of the destination as the classroom with "We believe that the world is the best classroom, and ME to WE Trips offer the opportunity for participants to gain a first-hand understanding of social justice issues, discover a new perspective to understand the world and find the inspiration to lead change" (ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016), and notions of "experiencing" the Other such as "Expand your worldview by experiencing different culture, language and customs" (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). Instead, the power dynamic reinforced between the youth of the Global North and the local populations as sites of colonial aid in the Global South framed as the Other has become a "consumable experience" (Simpson, 2004) for the former.

Conceptualizing voluntourism in a neoliberal lens allows us to understand how the product is packaged and sold to the consumer and what the implications of this are. Instead of fostering equal and reciprocal relationships built on mutual understanding and goals of benefiting the local community, this neoliberal ideology pins an undeserved upper hand to the youth travelling from the Global North in fulfilling an agenda they were sold by the marketing material

of the VTSO. The experience has been sold to them in a particular light, and highlighting their values over the needs of the local community in the marketing discourse contributes to this larger, unequal power dynamic between the Global North and Global South.

5.4 Charity vs. Development

ME to WE's brand of voluntourism positions ways of "saving" and "helping" people at the expense of more sophisticated development approaches that foster partnership, sustainability, long-term support, and capacity building. The charity model is premised on the idea of giving and here it is used to show how even young people (with no money but lots of privilege and access to their parents' money) can also "give" just by merely going to destinations in the Global South. Specific gifts are created through these efforts: the gift of a constructed school house so the solutions to development problems are reduced to physical infrastructure. However, the limitations of this approach in development terms are clear: without strong governmental policies on education, community mobilization on the importance of educating children, economic means for people to afford not to keep girls home from school, addressing sexual and gender-based violence faced by girls in schools, etc., physical infrastructure is useless. Thus, the very nature of the "development work" completed by ME to WE is problematic and unlinked to development outcomes. ME to WE explicitly uses a language of gift-giving in describing its volunteers' work: "It's important that trip participants know [that their volunteer efforts to advance the time in which WE Charity and community members can implement programs] is how their volunteer work is a gift to the community they visit" (ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions, 2016).

Despite modern methods of development having been created with humanistic motivation, the relationship of the countries involved has reduced the binary to the underlying assumptions of those countries who "have" and those who "lack"/"need" (Georgeou, 2012, p. 29). With "helping" being an assumed, positive key role for volunteers of development working abroad, the following assumptions are made, which are all problematic in the charity vs. development paradigm: 1) it assumes that there is a need for change, 2) it assumes that the volunteers have solutions to the problems and can "fix" said problems in the Global South, and 3) it posits a relationship of "need" in the host community, which is interpreted as a "lack" (skill, service, resource) in the developing country – that they cannot do it (whatever "it" is) themselves (Georgeou, 2012, p. 117).

The notion of "saviours" from the Global North flying in to "save" those in the Global South reinforces negative stereotypes. The imagery and discourse used by ME to WE as a voluntourism organization to market its product invokes a certain colonial expression. Despite purporting WE Charity's sustainable development model for the voluntourism projects in order for youth to engage and "give back" in an ethical manner, the discourse is wrought with language of privilege that undermines the power dynamics that exist by virtue of the nature of the very phenomenon of voluntourism. The discourse emphasizes connecting with local populations and cross-cultural encounters (for example: "You will gain perspective and a deeper understanding of the lives of women in developing communities when you sit under the shade of a tree with mamas learning to make handcrafted beaded accessories or hauling a jerry can of water along a stony path" [ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016], "Participants meet and work with community members from another culture and understand their joys and challenges" [ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked

Questions, 2016], "ME to WE Trips promote dialogue and cultivate relationships by giving participants a unique opportunity to spend time with local community members and put real faces, names and stories to the impact of their volunteer work" [ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016], "Participants experience and embrace the sights and sounds of a new culture, by tasting the unique flavours of local cuisines, taking part in traditional activities and learning new languages" [ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016], and "Each adventure puts participants side-by-side with community members who teach you skills or deepen your experience through participation" [ME to WE: Why ME to WE, 2016]), but upon closer analysis, this language is not that of development but merely a superficial meet-and-greet, feel-good Band-Aid type of aid work that is really just charity labelled development. The cross-cultural encounters experienced by youth and the local populations may be seen by both parties as a benefit, but they do not necessarily contribute to local capacity building when the WE Charity development model is used and methods determined prior to the conversations between aid recipients and the voluntourists (or donors) occurring; they are therefore, external, or superficial and supplementary to any development or charity work within the community. The solution-oriented rhetoric, terms of change, focus on adventure and travel, and "lotto logic," all consistent themes found throughout the text, further contribute to these neocolonial, paternalistic concepts of undertaking a "saviour" role to "save" the less fortunate without understanding the global systems and one's implications therein, nor her or his power relationship toward the group "needing saving" in the Global South or the associated historical and colonial legacy of that location and people.

In one of its key phrases, "Be part of the solution" (ME to WE: Volunteer Travel, 2016; ME to WE: Frequently Asked Questions), ME to WE reinforces neocolonial attitudes that "we" as people of the Global North have solutions to "their" problems. It assumes that there is a

problem that needs fixing, and gives unskilled, underqualified youth the false pretense that they are more able to fix whatever is wrong (if in fact, something is wrong) than the people that live within the community wherein lies the "problem," which in turn, reinforces these attitudes. This is reflective of Heron's "helping imperative" (2007), which is a desire to go abroad and make a change by asserting one's own values of development. The findings illustrated an abundant use of "helping" words, such as in the following testimonials: "Having that hands-on experience and getting to build relationships with these people that we're helping - it's one of those motivators" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016), "I remember my initial intentions for volunteering to go. I wanted to help, to give people hope for a future through education, and empower generations of students to go to school!" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), and "the trip really ignited my passion for helping others" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016). The "helping imperative" necessitates the Other, requiring them to fulfill part of one's motive in going abroad (Heron, 2007, p. 51), thereby reinforcing rather than reducing or challenging inequalities by positioning oneself as a voluntourist above the Other, the people in the local community and those framed as requiring help, as in "need" and "lacking." The allure of the proximity to poverty discussed within the neoliberalism framework also adds to a separation between the privileged and the Other, as well as the very idea of framing the experience as a product of consumption, where for a travel abroad experience, the people and cultures are seen as valuable attractions (Zemach-Bersin, 2009) in a carnivalesque-type manner (Georgeou, 2012), undermining their reality and history.

ME to WE uses language of change, playing on the notion that social change is an individual process that requires a "hero," and that "doing something is better than doing nothing" (Simpson, 2004, p. 685). These terms of change are premised on the fact that "help" cannot be a

bad thing, and further, that it is welcome. Phrases in the findings used to signify these terms of change include "make a difference," "have an impact," "change," and "help." The findings showed ample use of this development aid language throughout the discourse. For example, the tagline on the main youth trips page reads: "Youth Trips with impact - travel with purpose: It's more than a stamp in your passport. It's about people, connections and self-discovery – working together to change the world" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), below a photo of the accommodations the participants will stay in on the Kenya/Tanzania trip reads the caption: "Drop off your bags at your accommodations and get ready to make a difference" (ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016), and a selection of testimonials read, "by taking this opportunity [a ME to WE trip] I was making a difference in someone's life" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: China, 2016), "it was definitely eye-opening to see how much of a difference you can make" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016; ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Nicaragua, 2016), and "Helping to build the walls for this information centre with this group of incredible change-makers was nothing short of awesome!" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016). This language is problematic, firstly because the "difference" and "change" rhetoric used is vague and undefinable, sending unskilled, unprepared, untrained and uneducated youth on development trips to vulnerable populations without definable levels of impact outcomes. Secondly, using a language of change suggests that change is in fact required from the onset, but "change" does not necessarily mean the same for the community to whom it is being delivered and the people delivering the aid (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Lastly, the people delivering the aid are positioned as those who will "make a difference" and are therefore considered the "active agents of change," suggesting it is only through them that change, difference, impact or improvement can be delivered or made, which "implies a power relation

based on a binary of agency whereby change can only occur through the intervention of the voluntourist" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 411).

Even when the voluntourist is not focused on making a difference and performing actions, the power binary persists between the volunteer and the recipient as seen in the "poor but happy" rhetoric available in the participant testimonials. This discourse echoes the same notions found in "lotto logic," which is a non-critical acceptance of the way things are. Some examples of these testimonials include: "The people I met who lived in poverty but continued to smile and appreciate their lives taught me so much" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), "We met so many incredible people that were always smiling and cheerful, despite the conditions they were living in" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Ecuador, 2016), "I made some amazing friends [local people] who were always smiling no matter what" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016), and "You'd get off the boat and see all the kids lined up at the shore waiting for you, with massive smiles on their faces" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Amazon, 2016). This interpretation is limited to what the voluntourists are able to comprehend within the limited context of understanding they have come to know of these people. Other than this ignorance, this discourse is problematic because it emphasizes an acceptance of a systematic status quo between countries. Furthermore, the act of voluntourists coming from the Global North to the Global South for very short-term voluntourism trips further accentuates and provokes the problem.

Action and adventure words drive much of the language used on the ME to WE website, and while this may be an attractive marketing decision, it provokes colonial notions, giving unjustified authority and power to youth in the sense that they are presented the world as their playground, that it exists for their use and pleasure. Examples of this include: "Take Bollywood

dance lessons in India" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Eat slugs with a jungle guide in Ecuador" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), "Go on a water-walk with women and girls in India" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016), and "Take part in local sporting events in the Dominican Republic" (ME to WE: Youth Trips, 2016). The overwhelming use of action and exploration words and phrases paint the participant as active and seeking adventure, a theme that Zemach-Bersin (2009) critiques as a juxtaposition to the "passive," "sleeping," and "oblivious" destination to which they are travelling, as if the world outside of the Global North is "passively waiting" for them (p. 307). This discourse further suggests that the world outside their home bubble is a world that can be purchased and consumed at their leisure. Furthermore, it mirrors colonial language of "discovery" and "expanding frontiers" as Zemach-Bersin found in her research (2009, p. 307) that shows a limitless world for those in the Global North (in her research, it is youth in the United States specifically) that is ready and available for the fulfillment of the desires of young, privileged youth from the Global North. This entitlement and authority over the experience and in the distribution of the narrative contributing to self-fulfillment and privilege with a disregard for the local environment is something echoed in Clost's research (2014).

Another example showing this dichotomy of active North vs. passive South in the findings is in the participants' testimonials, when they use language to create a "simple geography" (Simpson, 2004), in which entire populations and cultures are summarized into a few words, for example, "There's something about the beautiful sunsets, exotic wildlife and the incredibly kind-hearted people" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016; ME to WE: Kenya/Tanzania, 2016), "What amazed me was how content these people were" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016), "In India, even the language and culture barriers can't stop people from connecting" (ME to WE:

Testimonials, 2016), and "The people were phenomenal, the culture was brilliant and the landscape in the country was breath taking" (ME to WE: Testimonials, 2016). Not only do testimonials like this give the authority to a youth after 2-3 weeks abroad in a small location with limited access to the people, culture and geography of that country to make and spread generalizations about that place and people, but furthermore, it undermines not only historical but colonial legacies that are associated with a people, place and culture in those very summaries. Additionally, it permits an unauthorized and inappropriate sense of knowledge over lands, people and culture from the youth participants. This discourse is problematic because it reinforces unequal power dynamics and contributes to the paternalistic mentality that good development standards are trying to break down through capacity building and solidarity efforts. This includes building partnerships based on equality between members of the Global North and Global South and understanding and appreciating the colonial histories instead of ignoring their existence. Furthermore, this mentality supports notions of a hegemonic power crusade that gives a sense of entitlement and authority over lands, people and cultures that these youth (likely) know very little about.

As indicated above, over the course of conducting this research, ME to WE's partner charity changed names from Free the Children to WE Charity (specifically on July 20, 2016). The WE Movement released a statement explaining that for more impactful branding purposes, it made sense to rebrand the family of organizations under the "WE" movement, comprising of WE Charity – the charity (formerly "Free the Children"), ME to WE – the social enterprise, and WE Day – the event that celebrates the global impact that the movement strives for (WE, 2016). This change in language in the name to explicitly say "charity" shows that not only is the "development work" pitched in terms of helping imperatives or egoistic gains, but that the

program itself confirms and reaffirms this position of charity in the adoption of this language. On the one hand, the more explicitly "saviour" type of language associated with "Free(ing)" children is gone and the more egalitarian "WE" of implied solidarity and cooperation are introduced, however the charitable (rather than developmental) intent is now foregrounded. The term charity has strong ties to colonialism and missionary work in that there is a sense of pity for those less fortunate rather than solidarity with. This is problematic because it reinforces unequal power relations and emphasizes that those in the Global North had or continue to have a part in creating global inequalities. This is because it assumes all of the problems relating to poverty and inequality lie in the Global South and are created by the people in the Global South, and it is only through the "help" of those in the Global North by coming in to "fix" the problem (through acts such as ME to WE's voluntourism trips), that the situation can be one step closer to being rectified.

ME to WE's voluntourism is more charity and not development even though it is marketed as the latter and not the former. The focus of ME to WE's rhetoric in terms of what they say they do and what they choose to publicize about their programs is much more about adventure, identity formation for privileged youth, and playing on the participants' desire to "make a difference/impact." When there are references to "development," it is largely in the context of the "helping imperative." This is problematic because the organization uses a rhetoric that illustrates false objectives and seduces unknowing youth into purchasing its trips using a language that appeals to their desires and sympathies. Furthermore, though ME to WE outwardly claims to support "sustainable development," the paternalistic themes that underline their discourse reinforce neocolonial power relationships. This is a step backward in development and reverts toward a charity model that gives handouts as dictated by those giving them as opposed

to the oppressed seeking self-determination and dictating their own needs. It reinforces the paternalistic nature of destructive development partnerships and is detrimental to the overall goals of development.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research has been to understand how a popular Canadian for-profit VTSO, ME to WE, packages and portrays its product, voluntourism, to its target audience, youth, in its online marketing discourse and how participants in the program confirm this portrayal in their testimonials. Because of the abundance of voluntourism organizations and their widespread presence online, they occupy a space in the global development education system. When a youth searches volunteer abroad trips and comes upon a VTSO, they read and learn about "international development," regardless of whether they purchase a trip. This learning, however, is subconscious, not likely something that the youth is aware of, and given the age they are processing the marketing information at, they likely do not have the tools to critically evaluate and decipher the language, images and videos they are taking in. Furthermore, these VTSOs do not require legitimacy in terms of development standards. The presence of these VTSOs and their flashy websites full of catchy slogans, enticing images, buzz words and descriptive storylines depict a narrative that teaches youth a story and a relationship (between the Global North and Global South) without a trip even being purchased. This narrative portrays a Global South that is needy, awaiting the "saving" of those flying in from the Global North and though happy, unable to help themselves. It describes the Global North-Global South relationship as unbalanced, serving and aiming to fulfill the needs and values of the consumer that purchases the experience, who is the youth from the Global North. My research has demonstrated how these messages translate into a certain way of thinking for the youth participants and looked at what the implications of this are, namely, to seek Band-Aid solutions to large, historically-rooted problems, as well as construct an idea of how the Global North-Global South relationship *should*

work (as unbalanced giver and receiver) rather than critically evaluating the core issues that lead to global imbalances and social injustices.

I have examined how ME to WE uses rhetoric that promotes sustainable development, partnerships, building leaders, and global citizenship, however upon deeper analysis, this promotion is superficial in that the themes in the discourse point to a lack of critical reflexivity in meaningful, thick conceptions of global citizenship education, an overwhelming support for egoistic motivations over altruism in youth going abroad, a consumer-first, consumption-based mentality and a reinforcing of unequal power structures between the Global North and Global South, reverting back towards charity as opposed to solidarity as a means of development.

ME to WE has largely squandered the opportunity for thick conceptions of global citizenship education when it has access to and influence over such a large market of young Canadians. It has instead premised its marketing language on thin conceptions that do not take into account the bigger picture in international development, which would be a look at the individual's role and ethical obligations within a complex, global system. Mentions of global citizenship are tossed around but the core understanding of ethics, duties, and responsibilities is not developed in the discourse.

The language used suggests a rhetoric of taking, that the trips are geared for the benefit of the voluntourists in order to fulfill their motivations and desires for going abroad. While understanding that no act can be truly altruistic as most acts will benefit the doer, the language used plays overwhelmingly to youth's egos, which positions these youth and those of the Global North on a symbolic pedestal above those of the Global South. Furthermore, it suggests that the trips that the participants are taking part of are not necessarily exercises in development, but rather experiences for the youth consumer to benefit.

Another way that the youth of the Global North become disassociated and placed above the people of the local community of the Global South is by framing the phenomenon of voluntourism as a neoliberal practice, seeing the trip as an experience for consumption. The problem with this language – it promotes this consumption-type experience and gears the trip towards a consumer-first mentality – is that the Global South becomes a destination where youth can experiment and experience in. This positions Canadian youth over people of the Global South despite what connections are noted in the testimonials.

I have argued that ME to WE, despite using a language that superficially, promotes sustainable development initiatives and capacity building, has an underlying rhetoric that reinforces unequal power structures between the Global North and Global South and the status quo of global inequality. The discourse underlies the dichotomy of "privilege" vs. "poor" and an "us" vs. "them" mentality. These false objectives that ME to WE claims in their website content teach youth to accept a charitable approach to development as opposed to an attitude of solidarity in which a "do no harm" approach – where youth might critically reflect and decide it best to not travel abroad at all as they would be reinforcing negative stereotypes and participating in global systematic inequalities in doing so – though good for development, would put most VTSOs out of business.

In situating my research in the relevant scholarly literature, Heron (2007), amongst others, has shown how problematic it can be for highly educated, skilled adults (in their late 20s-30s) who meet technical requests for support in communities in the Global South and travel as "development workers" to partake in long-term volunteerism programs, yet here we have this phenomenon where unskilled, not well educated teens are not matched to a particular community and offer not much of anything to them for 2-3 weeks. Heron's critiques, namely of Otherness,

mixed egoistic/altruistic motivations, and desire for development impact, are magnified when comparing her research of 1-2 year placements of skilled late 20-30 year olds to ME to WE's context of 2-3 week trips involving unskilled teens.

The findings of this research raise questions about the role ME to WE plays in promoting international development, given the primary focus on the youth experience rather than host community impact. This is an important contribution to the scholarship because it examines closely the specific language used by the organization and in the promotional materials taken from past participants' quotes. ME to WE has become such a recognized name as an organization, brand, and attached to its charity, that without a critical analysis, is championed as a mover of development. Youth are neither encouraged nor given the tools to think critically within the boundaries of ME to WE, just to adopt the brand's ideology and inspire change locally and globally, whatever this "change" may be. Beyond being a case study and a qualitative content analysis as a starting point for future research, this research is significant and valuable because discourse not only has a great deal of power, it is the entry-point into how many youth will learn about international development and social justice issues. Given this, this research is significant because ME to WE reaches so many Canadian youth and teaches them about poverty in the Global South and what any individual youth's reaction should be. This is done through the power of text shown through website content, undoubtedly reinforced by being a popular company that is supported by schools and Canadian politicians, and heard of or advertised through events such as the increasingly popular WE Day. This discourse sets the tone, creates the landscape and justifies problematic programs.

The findings of this research are important because they help break down how Canadian youth are learning about international development issues and what the implications of this are in

terms of the postcolonial underpinnings that the international development community has taken so long to make significant efforts at overcoming. This is significant because it provides us with better insight into how youth are affected by the marketing of a VTSO. It also helps us understand why global citizenship education and international development education in general are important to youth at increasingly younger ages, considering they are already being subjected to these themes online and in advertisements, for example, without the critical minds to question when organizations or suggested development methods might in fact be questionable, misguided, or false. Youth are now more than ever in close contact with the rest of the world. Having access to this information, however, is not the same as providing them with the education to critically think about what they are seeing. Providing youth and students the tools and resources to think about the media content, website content, and content that social media bloggers and celebrities put out there (let alone what comes up between friends and family members online and in person), will help them ultimately become those "change-makers" and educated individuals who can think for themselves and make more ethically-engaged decisions in everyday life. Youth continuously show older generations how innovative and resourceful they can be. Guiding them with a more critical understanding to think for themselves is integral, so that students who partake in experiential learning processes such as ME to WE or other voluntourism trips do not have to unlearn the concepts and realities they absorbed and then feel guilty about participating in the process upon returning from such experiences like so many of us do.

It was this unlearning experience, followed by guilt, that I underwent a couple of years after my short-term voluntourism trip that motivated me to undertake this research. However, unlearning should not be the focus of our work. Better programming for volunteering abroad could eliminate the need for unlearning and ensure that we do no harm and that programs are

redesigned with mutual benefits and intentions and development impacts or outcomes are clear from the onset.

6.1 Limitations

In this section I examine three limitations that serve as important considerations for future research. These include personal bias, evaluating the organization seemingly by its discourse rather than the work it does (or being limited when the text offered no further answers), and making assumptions that all of the organization's programs use the same rhetoric as the voluntourism programs I analyzed.

The limitation of personal bias is an important consideration for research. Having been on a short-term voluntourism trip myself in high school (though not a ME to WE trip), I have gone through the process of unlearning, critiquing and criticizing my emotions and experiences as related to that trip. I have worked hard to ensure that the data collected and my analysis have been as impartial as possible. However, I have used my experience to fuel my passion and understanding of how and why youth become so interested and involved with the phenomenon of voluntourism (like I was myself at a younger age) as well as to better appreciate the power and influence of these VTSOs in terms of the outreach of their discourse, as this was the only resource that I consciously used to make my decision in going abroad to volunteer. Therefore, personal bias can get in the way of rigorous research but when research is done carefully and systematically, personal experience can be a valuable impetus for identification of research gaps. Furthermore, I recognize my White privilege and position as a student and citizen of the Global North writing about issues affecting the Global South.

Another limitation to this research is that it only examined what the VTSO *says* and not what it *does*, which makes some points of analysis presumptuous and generalized. For example, in the global citizenship debate, we do not know if ME to WE does more thick conceptions of global citizenship education in reality on the ground; we can merely evaluate what it says based on its online discourse. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to the voluntourism trips while other programs administered by this organization may offer a different, overall picture of the work done in relation to development and/or charity. For a deeper analysis of the voluntourism programs, it would have been ideal to examine the pre-departure training sessions (if any) and to do participant observation of the trainings and the programs themselves. Future research could consider on-site visits to examine the delivery of pre-departure preparation/training and on-site support and activities, including ongoing interviews with the participants themselves at various stages of the experience. However, research on ME to WE programs is very challenging as the company is far from transparent, despite many of its programs working with its partner charity, and this privacy has shown to be backed by a strong legal team when dealing with their data and what is normally accessible information.

The content analysis provided here, however, offers a starting point and frame within which to conduct future research and to analyze the way that the language is or is not translating into meaningful impacts for the participants and host communities alike. Furthermore, the discourse shared on the ME to WE website (framed in this research as online marketing) plays an important role in shaping the landscape of what is perceived as important in social justice work. When the emphasis is placed on a particular self-serving rhetoric of benefits of voluntourism accrued to Northern (often privileged) youth, a normalization of this becomes evident. Language is important and the rhetoric shapes how we (in the Global North) see ourselves in the world and

what we imagine to be important, as well as how we perceive our relationship with the Global South *should* be. Based on these limitations, several recommendations are provided in the section below.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendations for Future Research

With regards to future research, I recommend similar research comparing different VTSOs to see whether the findings are similar considering different variables (i.e., those targeting youth vs. those targeting adults, those offering short-term trips vs. those offering long-term trips, those offering many countries as destinations vs. those offering specific few countries with focus in particular regions of the world, VTSOs based in Europe vs. VTSOs based in North America, etc.). It would also be of interest to see whether there are for-profit VTSOs that abide by any set of ethical standards and if so, to study if and how the discourse changes.

Another recommended avenue for further research is to analyze for-profit and non-profit VTSOs to understand if the discourse used differs when comparing organizations with similar variables. This would test an assumption that for-profit VTSOs market their products in a particular way because of the profit-oriented nature of their business. In reality, however, non-profit VTSOs also need to attract participants to purchase a voluntourism experience, despite not making profits, and must still appeal to participants and sell a product (as any non-profit charity).

A further recommendation this research supports, raised by McGloin and Georgeou (2016) is to investigate the "gendered nature of the voluntourism recruitment process" (p. 414), noting that 80 percent of voluntourists are female (Mostafanezhad, 2013a). Additionally, the

racialized aspect of this recruitment process is also important. As a general observation, in ME to WE's case, the overall group of potential volunteers depicted online would identify as "White" (and again, largely women), which is not necessarily representative of Canada, but is perhaps telling of the demographic to which the organization targets its products.

Based on my research's limited but important references to ME to WE's branding and identity as a social enterprise, a suggestion for future research would be an analysis on whether ME to WE is deliberately branding in such a way to youth because of their gullibility and naivety, even knowing how bad their product is in terms of international development. This proposed research, however, poses many restrictions and may be nearly impossible.

6.2.2 Recommended Changes to Program Delivery

Based on the findings of this research, I recommend a need for greater focus on solidarity, social justice, skill sharing and reciprocity in voluntourism discourse. This extends beyond changing the text on websites, as the language can superficially read words of development while actually pointing to notions of inequality and a paternalistic dynamic in its subtext, as was found to be the case in this research of the ME to WE case study. What is important, therefore, is a change in how we educate youth in Canada on international development topics and the relationships and issues that concern the Global North-Global South relationship beyond learning from a brand that displays its text online by marketing voluntourism programs (in addition to selling out WE Day stadiums filled with celebrity speakers and having an ethical style-line for purchase). This is something that can be implemented by school boards across Canada in encouraging a curriculum that specifically targets development issues

appropriate to grade level (but starting at a young grade level as the literature shows that youth are subjected to the media and these advertisements long before they consider partaking in these types of experiences) and fosters a critically engaged mindset. This curriculum would teach ethics and have students understand global relationships and responsibility. Even if students do not go abroad ever in their life, the skills I recommend be taught are not about how to travel, rather they could be used, for example, to critically engage with where one buys their groceries and the path that a product takes to get from farm to table.

On the notion of "help," McGloin and Georgeou (2016) raise a critical issue in their research where the reported desire to "do good" and "help" by volunteers on a non-academic, practical level is left undisputed and unchallenged (p. 411). The target audience for short-term voluntourism programs often includes high school students who may lack the critical analysis skills required to determine if the volunteer program is effective at delivering development assistance and breaking down systems of inequality. While academic options such as university-based programs in international development studies may foster such critical reflection, for-profit volunteer-sending organizations would see little value in the careful deliberation of the programs' impact and outcomes. To facilitate greater critical reflection for the large number of high school students going abroad, information about the issues and challenges need to be addressed more broadly within schools, on the news, through editorials, social media and in blogs, etc., to promote and foster meaningful discussions about the often-times harmful practices of voluntourism. Another important strategy may be to create a standard of practice for volunteer-sending organizations that would prevent companies from engaging in problematic marketing and program delivery.

Strategies to ensure better choices in the selection of volunteer sending organizations include researching the history of the program, the length of the placements abroad, whether for-profit or non-profit, among other factors, and can be facilitated using the Six Standards of Practice to guide your decisions in Global Service Learning, as found here: https://readymag.com/OCIC/iAMvol7/17/ (Duarte, 2016; also see Duarte, 2015). Programs lasting less than one month can rarely contribute to the sustainability and solidarity that are the goals of development. To better facilitate critical engagement and reflection among program participants, pre-departure training and return debriefing can be highly effective ways of establishing improved understanding of local populations, history, culture, and geography, and also to learn how to critically evaluate one's (own) position within the partnership with the local population and more broadly, the world. This will help break down barriers and hopefully position youth from the Global North on a more even footing with the people in the host communities in which they are working in the Global South.

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Appendix A: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/ on March 17, 2016

Volunteer Travel

Why Me to We trips are different

Support celebrated sustainable development

Each Me to We volunteer trip takes place in a community where our charity partner, Free The Children, puts its 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development to work. And half of our profits are donated to Free The Children—helping you make an even bigger impact on the place you visit.

Make An Impact

When you volunteer on a Free The Children development project you support one of five pillars—clean water, food security, education, health or alternative income—that eliminate the obstacles to education, eliminate poverty and empower women in a community. Your volunteer work is driven by the community and its needs. Alongside locals, you will dig trenches for water systems, lay foundations for schools, plow farmland or plant crops.

Connect with learners and leaders from a different culture

Meet and work with community members from another culture and understand their joys and challenges. Talk to learners and community leaders, who are proud, equal partners in these holistic initiatives. Expand your worldview by experiencing different culture, language and customs. Through hands-on work experience, gain empathy, compassion and understanding for different cultures and environments.

Be part of the solution

Under the guidance of highly trained and experienced facilitators, engage in leadership training, skill building workshops and action planning so when you return home, you have the tools to give back to your community. Leave a Me to We Trip with a deeper understanding of sustainability and development issues, while gaining a new perspective.

Want to learn more? Check out the ME to WE Trip FAQs.

Appendix B: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Youth Trips"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/ on March 28, 2017

Youth Trips

Youth Trips with impact

travel with purpose

It's more than a stamp in your passport. It's about people, connections and self-discovery—working together to change the world.

Travelling with purpose means being part of something bigger than yourself. It means making a positive impact while broadening your horizons and seeing the world.

Volunteer abroad this summer and explore a new culture while working alongside community members on Free The Children development projects. Change yourself and create lasting change in the communities you visit.

Already travelled on a Me to We Trip? Check out our advanced programs and offers for trip alumni on our Alumni Hub!

Why do you want to travel?

I want to make a difference

You're an epic world-changer with the desire to make a lasting imprint wherever you go.

Lay the bricks to help build a brand-new school

Get your hands dirty digging a water project like a borehole or well

Learn about sustainable development from our in-country teams

I want to explore the world

You're a fearless explorer with the thirst for raw, authentic adventure.

Take Bollywood dance lessons in India

Eat slugs with a jungle guide in Ecuador

Embark on a sunset safari in East Africa

I want to connect with a community

You're a social butterfly with a curious mind, eager to absorb fascinating stories.

Visit a local home and help a woman with her daily work in Ecuador

Go on a water-walk with women and girls in India

Take part in local sporting events in the Dominican Republic

Where do you want to go?

Kenya/Tanzania – Work alongside rural communities in the heart of the vast savannah

India – Dive into a colourful culture and explore social issues in a dynamic landscape

Ecuador – Connect with the indigenous people of the Andes mountains

Amazon – Immerse yourself in an indigenous culture on a rainforest adventure

Nicaragua – From coffee fields to classrooms: Explore life in the land of lakes and volcanoes

Rural China – Connect with students, make a difference and explore an ancient civilization

Unique Travel Experiences

Journey to Tanzania with Spencer (learn more)

Travel to Kenya with Craig Kielburger (learn more)

Alumni Trips for experienced travellers (learn more)

On your Me to We Trip you will:

Change the World

Visit a Free The Children community and work side-by-side with locals on development projects that help remove the barriers to education

Make Meaningful Connections

Spend time with local community members and put real faces, names and stories to the impact of your volunteer work.

Explore a New Culture

Experience the sights and sounds of a new culture, and have one-of-a-kind adventures led by expert local guides on a journey off the beaten path.

Get Inspired to Lead Change

Take part in leadership workshops based on issues in the place you visit.

Youth Trip Stories

You can hear the bugs, the frogs, the animals, and after a few nights you kind of fall in love with this place.

Alexie

So much physical labour went into it. But it was the start of a school for 180 students. And with having that in mind and seeing the kids around us, it was definitely eye-opening to see how much of a difference you can make.

Kaira

Ecuador gave me a purpose. Life is made up of millions of souls touching one another, giving or taking something every time their paths cross. I was touched by so many souls on this trip—it is now my turn to do the same.

Maya

The most profound moment of the trip was when we got to make roti with the mamas and go for a water walk. It was moments like these, moments when I could interact with the community members, that really made me take a step back and realize what we were doing and how differently some people live.

Miranda

When I heard stories from someone who had worked with Free The Children communities overseas, I wanted to see this work first-hand, and see how Free The Children was helping these communities lift themselves from the cycle of poverty.That's why I went on my first ME to WE Trip to Rural China.

Brennan

At the build site, I realized, 'This is what I came for.' Brick by brick, we were putting up walls for somewhere that kids will go to school.

Jessica

Appendix C: Webpage "ME to WE: Why ME to WE Trips are Different"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/living-me-to-we-old/why-trips/ on March 17, 2016

Why ME to WE Trips are Different

ME to WE Trips: a one-of-a-kind volunteer travel program with lasting impact

ME to WE Trips are impactful, life changing and provide participants with the unique opportunity to volunteer for our charity partner, Free The Children, which has a 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development work.

When you take a ME to WE Trip, you not only work in partnership with local community members, you also take a journey that has enriched the lives of more than 15,000 participants from around the world. Students, teachers, leading business figures, celebrities, world leaders and members of the Royal Family have taken a ME to WE Trip. ME to WE Trips have been profiled by publications and media around the world, including a feature on 60 Minutes!

You will come away from a ME to WE Trip with a deeper understanding of social justice and development issues that will change the way you understand the needs of marginalized communities throughout the world. You will take home these lessons, along with an action plan to make a difference. Free The Children is there to support your continued volunteer efforts with campaigns that impact the global and local causes you care about.

What makes ME to WE Trips even more world changing is that half of ME to WE's net profits are donated to Free The Children—helping you make an even bigger impact on the community you visit. The other half is reinvested to grow the enterprise and its social mission. A ME to WE Trip is one-of-a-kind because:

ME to WE Trips support a holistic, sustainable development model

- Each ME to WE Trip takes place in a community where our renowned charity partner, Free The Children, puts its 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development to work
- Free The Children has been honoured with numerous awards, including the World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child; the Roosevelt Freedom From Fear Medal and the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship.
- The impact of Free The Children's development model has been externally validated by the U.S.-based social-impact consulting firm Mission Measurement.
- ME to WE Trips gives travellers a unique opportunity to engage in activities that directly contribute to Free The Children's sustainable development model.
- Free The Children believes that for children to break free from poverty, we must meet the basic needs of all members of a community and eliminate the obstacles preventing children from accessing education.
- Free The Children's sustainable model is made up of **five core pillars**: education, clean water and sanitation, health, alternative income and livelihood and agriculture and food security. Each pillar provides crucial support that enables the community to break down the barriers to education and lift itself out of poverty. Learn more about Free The Children's sustainable development model.

- Sustainability and community ownership is the goal of all of Free The Children's development projects. Free The Children strives to leave after five years, when the community takes ownership over the maintenance and sustainability of these projects.

ME to WE Trips make an impact

- When you participate in a ME to WE Trip, you contribute to Free The Children's renowned sustainable development model by contributing to one or more of the model's five pillars—clean water and sanitation, agriculture and food security, education, health or alternative income and livelihood.
- The community and its needs determine your volunteer efforts. We work in close collaboration with community members and development experts to develop holistic solutions that have lasting impacts.
- Alongside locals, you might lay foundations or bricks for schools, run summer camps for children, or support workers digging fields and planting trees. Your efforts contribute to the many important steps needed to establish the five pillars, which eliminate the obstacles to education.
- Your efforts do not take jobs away from locals. In fact, Free The Children's development projects create jobs for supervisors, skilled engineers and project managers. A ME to WE Trip participant's volunteer work is essential to completing the numerous and ongoing projects that benefit the communities where Free The Children works.
- Half of ME to WE's net profits are donated to Free The Children—helping you make an even bigger impact on the place you visit. The other half is reinvested to grow the enterprise and its social mission

ME to WE Trips connect participants with learners and leaders from different cultures

- You will gain perspective and a deeper understanding of the lives of women in developing communities when you sit under the shade of a tree with mamas learning to make handcrafted beaded accessories or hauling a jerry can of water along a stony path.
- Participants meet and work with community members from another culture and understand their joys and challenges. Participants talk to learners attending Free The Children schools and meet community leaders, who are proud, equal partners in these holistic initiatives.
- ME to WE Trips promote dialogue and cultivate relationships by giving participants a unique opportunity to spend time with local community members and put real faces, names and stories to the impact of their volunteer work.
- Participants experience and embrace the sights and sounds of a new culture, by tasting the unique flavours of local cuisines, taking part in traditional activities and learning new languages.
- We believe that the world is the best classroom, and ME to WE Trips offer the opportunity for participants to gain a first-hand understanding of social justice issues, discover a new perspective to understand the world and find the inspiration to lead change.
- You will also find adventure on a ME to WE Trip, whether you're searching the Big Five on safari in Kenya; being trained by a Maasai warrior to throw a traditional rungu; or participating in a traditional Hindu prayer ceremony in northern India.

- Each adventure puts participants side-by-side with community members who teach you skills or deepen your experience through participation.

On a ME to WE Trip your contribution doesn't end with the trip

- A ME to WE Trip kick-starts a life-long journey.
- Under the guidance of highly trained and experienced facilitators, participants engage in leadership training, skill-building workshops and action planning so when you return home, you have the tools to give back to your community.
- With interactive modules based on proven best practices, our trips empower youth with the skills, confidence and understanding to take action in their local and global communities.
- Participants leave a ME to WE Trip with a deeper understanding of sustainability and development issues, while gaining a new perspective.
- Trip facilitators continue to stay in touch with participants and make personal suggestions for opportunities to stay engaged with the organization.
- ME to WE organizes alumni events to offer past participants the opportunity to reconnect with fellow trip participants, meet other like-minded individuals who have also travelled with ME to WE Trips and to check in on what everyone has accomplished since their trips.
- Once home from a ME to WE Trip, students have many opportunities to live their passion and take action with Free The Children, including campaigns, We Act and WE Day.
- Free The Children's Educational Partner Coordinators work with student participants to support them as they transition home and look for ways to make an impact, whether globally or locally, on many of the important issues in a participant's own backyard.
- WE Day is an annual series of stadium-sized events that brings together world-renowned speakers and performers—from Malala Yousafzai and Martin Sheen to Demi Lovato—with tens of thousands of youth to kick-start a year of action through We Act. You can't buy a ticket to WE Day—you earn it by taking on one local and one global action.
- Student participants can get involved in We Act, a yearlong educational program that empowers young people to become active local, national and global citizens.
- Free The Children also has a series of campaigns that enable people of all ages to make a difference in their local communities. The campaigns to get involved I issues from local hunger to water issues to marginalization and Aboriginal issues include We Scare Hunger, We Create Change, We Bake for Change, We Stand Together and We Are Silent.

On a ME to WE Trip be the change; and be changed

ME to WE Trips have a proven impact on all travellers. In 2014, independent third-party research by U.S.- based social-impact consulting firm Mission Measurement found that trip participants were even more motivated to make change when they returned home:

- 88% believe it's cool to care about social problems
- 89% feel empowered to make a positive difference in the world
- 73% have become a strong leader
- 78% discovered a subject or issue they are passionate about
- 77% have a greater respect for their school
- 73% are motivated more than ever to go to college

ME to WE Trips have a record of safety

- Since 2002, over 15,000 youth and adults have travelled safely with our organization across the world.
- ME to WE Trips have numerous proactive safety measures, protocols and training in place, with all trips supported by an in-country team responsible for communications and decision-making in case of emergency (more on safety at metowe.com/safety).
- ME to WE Trips have extensive risk-management procedures.
- We are committed to ensuring the quality and expertise of our facilitators; many are certified teachers or have degrees in development.
- After participating in training "boot camps," all facilitator candidates must pass an extensive screening program in order to qualify to lead a trip. Thousands apply every year; only the top individuals are selected.
- Facilitators not only receive first aid and emergency-response training, but also are also equipped with a thorough understanding of group dynamics and cultural sensitivity to ensure a seamless experience for all participants.
- We work with partners who have reviewed our extensive risk-management procedures, including: YPO (Young Presidents' Organization); Virgin Atlantic; School board districts; Top universities and colleges and EF Educational Tours.

ME to WE Trips are available to everyone

- ME to WE offers scholarship and financial aid options for youth and with this support, more than 150 youth travel on ME to WE Trips each year either free of charge or with a significant reduced cost.
- There is a dedicated fundraising program to help youth raise support so they can have a ME to WE Trip experience.

If you're going to see the world, have an impact while you're at it

- We live in the world where most westerners, especially young westerners, are more connected than ever before. Travel overseas, whether it's a beach or backpacking vacation is on their bucket list. A ME to WE Trip is a chance to quench that travel bug and have an impact.
- On a ME to WE Trip participants enjoy meaningful experiences and connections with different cultures. ME to WE Trips create lasting change for participants—and the communities visited. It's a win-win.

Appendix D: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Testimonials"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/testimonials/ on March 17, 2016

Testimonials

See what Me To We Travellers have to say.

"The community of Mondana was not beautiful because of the material things they had. It was beautiful because of the people living in it. I will always remember the kids who could play for hours, our tour guide who referred to himself as Tarzan and the smiles of the women who created jewellry for a living." Maya

"You can hear the bugs, the frogs, the animals, and after a few nights you kind of fall in love with this place." Alexie

"Upon arriving in the Amazon, before beginning our task of building a school, we shared our stories with the local people. In turn, they shared theirs. This special time helped us come together as one to voluntarily work on a common goal. We learned this was called a "minga."" Madeleine

"After going on this trip, I have a new appreciation for school. Especially on those days where I don't want to go to school or I don't want to make an effort. It's changed a lot of things for me at home." Michelle

"You'd get off the boat and see all the kids lined up at the shore waiting for you, with massive smiles on their faces. It was such hard work but we were happy doing it because you got to see the reaction from not just the kids, but the community itself." Kaira

"When I returned from the volunteer trip, I got more than what I asked for. Not only did I appreciate the life I had a lot more, but the trip really ignited my passion for helping others and let me see the world in a broader view." Simon

"Building a school is so great because it opens up education. It's the most powerful thing, in my opinion, that will move the world in a positive way. I go to school every day and I see how much it impacts my life. Knowing that kids would be in that classroom in September was a moment like no other." Alexie

"The contrast between who I was before the trip and who I am now is completely black and white. I appreciate so many things like water, my family, the accessibility of food and the life I live so much more than I ever did before. The people I met who lived in poverty but continued to smile and appreciate their lives taught me so much. It really changed my outlook on a lot of things" Draby

"When I returned from the volunteer trip, I got more than what I asked for. Not only did I appreciate the life I had a lot more, but the trip really ignited my passion for helping others and let me see the world in a broader view." Simon

"Everything we did, we worked together. All the kids that went on this trip had one goal in mind: to make a difference and help these kids get education." Megan

“When I went on this trip, I met people that helped me find my voice. They helped me show my true colours. They made me feel good and happy and they inspired me to change. No matter who you are, you’ve got a voice, you’ve got to share it. You can’t just keep quiet about it. Share it with the world. Kassi

“I spent 16 days in East Africa, and I can honestly say that those were the best two weeks of my life. There’s something about the beautiful sunsets, exotic wildlife and the incredibly kind-hearted people that captivates you while you’re there and I felt like something I never knew was missing had been found. I think everyone needs to experience something like this trip at some point in their life!” John

“Being in East Africa made me realize how huge the world really is. But what touched me the most while I was there were the local people I met. I made some amazing friends who were always smiling no matter what. One little girl named Sharon taught me a lot. You can read about poverty or watch documentaries on it, but seeing it firsthand is very different. Suddenly poverty has a face and a hand to shake, and world poverty becomes much more real to you.” Darby

“I had so much fun playing with kids in the community of Salabwek! I connected instantly to Judy, a girl in Grade 7, who was so happy and full of life. We would sit together, play games and talk about everything in our lives.” Leah

Whether we were in the lorry, walking or on a plane, my group and I created memories that we will never forget. East Africa taught me more than I can express and changed the way I view everything. I miss going to and from the build site or the school and bumping up and down on the lorry, but I know I will visit East Africa and all the friends I made again one day. I encourage anyone to take this opportunity to travel to East Africa—you won’t regret it! Nicole

“At the build site, I realized, ‘This is what I came for.’ Brick by brick, we were putting up walls for somewhere that kids will go to school.” Jessica

“Traditional weapons training in East Africa! Stephen, our Maasai Warrior, demonstrates incredible ability with a bow and arrow.” Dana

“Me, halfway through the water walk back to Mama Nancy’s home in the Maasai Mara region of East Africa! The walk may have been difficult, but the significance of it and the impact this left on the mamas made it all worth it.” Caroline

“New friends, new memories and two lives changed forever.” Carlee

“Chizi Kama Ndizi! The local kids taught us how to say “crazy like bananas” in Swahili. We would always say it when we were with them!” Jenna

“Mama Betty invited me to come dance with her and the other local mamas. This picture was taken by a young girl at the school who took my camera and offered to photograph this once-in-a-lifetime moment for me.” Ellen

“In East Africa I met a girl named Joyline. We really connected because we were about the same age and both at the same place in our lives—but completely different places in our lives because of where we live.” Michelle

“Ecuador gave me a purpose. Life is made up of millions of souls touching one another, giving or taking something every time their paths cross. I was touched by so many souls on this trip—it is now my turn to do the same.” Maya

“The trip to Ecuador was incredible! Being able to be part of the school-building projects is something that I will always carry with me, Our group also grew into a family on this trip and I can’t even begin to describe how strong of a connection we had with one another and the community members we met.” Tina

“This summer I travelled to Ecuador, where I learned things that can never be taught in school. We met so many incredible people that were always smiling and cheerful, despite the conditions they were living in.” Madeleine

“I travelled to Ecuador with my Girl Guide group, and a highlight of the trip was meeting the girls' and women’s groups. Those ladies were really inspiring. Coming from a place where you can say whatever you want, it was amazing not see how originally in their culture they’re expected to be sort of closed off and shy. But seeing the women start to break out of their shells was a really great experience.” Jessica

“Having the time of our lives this summer in Lullin, Ecuador! Helping to build the walls for this information centre with this group of incredible change-makers was nothing short of awesome!” Nadine

“A baby and a sheep sharing a moment in Chimborazo, Ecuador.” Samara

“I know that I will do anything to help the kids in Asemkow continue their education and go on to live great lives. After this experience, I will try my best to never waste anything. I know that I will never take anything for granted.” Logan

“Looking back on my short time in Asemkow, I remember my initial intentions for volunteering to go. I wanted to help, to give people hope for a future through education, and empower generations of students to go to school! However, I never could have anticipated the renewed hope that this community would instill in me as well.” Emily

“My Me to We Trip to Ghana was different from my previous trip to East Africat in almost every way. I got to see the beginning stages of how Free The Children comes into a country to partner with communities, as we volunteered in the community of Asemkow on their second elementary school.” Jessica

“The people were phenomenal, the culture was brilliant and the landscape in the country was breath taking. The main thing that I realized on this trip was that it is something you will never truly understand until you experience firsthand. It gives you something amazing and I strongly recommend it to anyone.” Olivia

“I travelled to India with my school and I thought it would be an amazing experience but it turns out it was a life-changing experience and something I would do over and over again . . . I have a different perspective on the world.” Olivia

“The most profound moment of the trip was when we got to make roti with the mamas and go for a water walk. It was moments like these, moments when I could interact with the community members, that really made me take a step back and realize what we were doing and how differently some people live.” Miranda

“We started out as excited tourists who roamed the crowded streets full of life on foot and by bus. We saw poverty, but we also saw raw happiness. We saw people happy simply because they were alive. We saw girls, boys, women, and men excited to see us, and we returned the ear-to-

ear grins with grins of our own. We were often welcomed with laughter and cheerful, sincere, "Namaste"s." Sydney

When we got back from India, we did some action-planning and I realized that no impact is too small. Every single person could truly make a difference in someone else's life. I had this feeling in my chest of excitement, inspiration, hope, and goals. I cannot explain how unstoppable I felt. Alison

"Taking a water walk in India and spending a day in the life with a woman made me realize how fortunate I am. What I amazed me was how content these people were. Living in a world of materialism, it's a true eye-opener." Anusheh

"You can hear the sounds of music and bells, you can see the whirling colours and dancers, and you can just let loose in the community. In India, even the language and culture barriers can't stop people from connecting." Zain

"In India, we did a walk for water with the mothers and daughters in the community. It was an amazing experience carrying the pots and getting a perspective of what the women have to do multiple times per day! The journey really made me realize how lucky we are to have such easy access to clean, cold and hot water." Robyn

"Before work began in Barind we took part in a special Puja ceremony to bless the site, the tools, the workers and the future students and teachers. The ceremony was conducted in Sanskrit, one of the world's oldest languages." Grace

"I was so excited but nervous at the same time. Being away from home for the first time for so long was so scary, but once I stepped on the plane, I knew what I was doing was for a good cause, the chance to meet new people and make a difference in other people's lives. It was a self-empowering feeling." Anusheh

"So much physical labour went into it. But it was the start of a school for 180 students. And with having that in mind and seeing the kids around us, it was definitely eye-opening to see how much of a difference you can make. Kaira

"I always had in my mind that education is important, but my Me to We trip definitely really motivated me more. If there's ever a time I'm in school and it's been stressful or frustrating, or I don't want to be there, I just remember the kids I met, and think about how happy they are to be in school." Julie

"This trip will re-instate your beliefs to see first hand what you are doing is making a difference and to anyone who thinks that what we're doing isn't worthwhile because there is no way that after a trip like this they will feel that way." Sydney

"Closing ceremonies in the community of Los Campos after spending an incredible 12 days in Nicaragua!" Victoria

"The lives of each and every one of us are connected. Love, acceptance, hope, understanding, education and laughter connect us with the world around us. This is us walking from the construction site to the field with the children from Los Campos, Nicaragua." Setareh

"Travelling to China dramatically changed my life. Not only do I now have lifelong friends all over the world, I have gained such perspective on being a global citizen and creating positive change." Alexandra

“My favourite part of the trip was meeting all these great new people I would never have met if it wasn’t for Me to We. I also enjoyed being able to talk with the kids who lived in the communities we worked in, and know that by taking this opportunity I was making a difference in someone’s life.” Ana

“Having that hands-on experience and getting to build relationships with these people that we’re helping— it’s one of those motivators. When you are actually with these people, you realize how much of a change you’re making. I know that there’ll be that connection forever.” Kaylee

“I learned so much on this trip. Being there and meeting people in the communities really helped to change those preconceived notions that you already have going into it as a typical tourist.” Michelle

When I heard stories from someone who had worked with Free The Children communities overseas, I wanted to see this work firsthand, and see how Free The Children was helping these communities lift themselves from the cycle of poverty.That’s why i went on my first Me to We Trip to Rural China. Brennan

Appendix E: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Frequently Asked Questions"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/faq/ on March 29, 2016

Frequently Asked Questions

What makes Me to We volunteer trips different?

Me to We provides meaningful, life-changing volunteer trips for travellers of all ages. Me to We Trips are unlike any other volunteer travel program, and we are proud to share and celebrate the one-of-a-kind experiences and program elements that Me to We Trips offer. Learn more about what makes Me to We Trips different.

See the world and make a positive impact

Dig deep into a developing community; enjoy meaningful experiences and connections with different cultures. Me to We Trips create lasting change for you—and the communities you travel to.

Support celebrated sustainable development

Each Me to We volunteer trip takes place in a community where our charity partner, Free The Children, puts its 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development to work. And half of our profits are donated to Free The Children—helping you make an even bigger impact on the place you visit. The other half is reinvested to grow the enterprise and its social mission.

Make An Impact

When you volunteer on a Free The Children development project you support one of five pillars—clean water, food security, education, health or alternative income—that eliminate the obstacles to education, eliminate poverty and empower women in a community. Your volunteer work is driven by the community and its needs. Alongside locals, you will dig trenches for water systems, lay foundations for schools, plow farmland or plant crops.

Connect with learners and leaders from a different culture

Meet and work with community members from another culture and understand their joys and challenges. Talk to learners and community leaders, who are proud, equal partners in these holistic initiatives. Expand your worldview by experiencing different culture, language and customs. Through hands-on work experience, gain empathy, compassion and understanding for different cultures and environments.

Be part of the solution

Under the guidance of highly trained and experienced facilitators, engage in leadership training, skillbuilding workshops and action planning so when you return home, you have the tools to give back to your community. Leave a Me to We Trip with a deeper understanding of sustainability and development issues, while gaining a new perspective.

Travel with a record of safety

Since 2002, over 15,000 youth and adults have travelled safely with our organization across the world. Me to We Trips has numerous proactive safety measures, protocols and training in place, with all trips supported by an in-country team responsible for communications and decision-making in case of emergency (more on safety at metowe.com/safety). Me to We Trips have extensive risk-management procedures.

Travel available to everyone

Me to We Trips are available to everyone. Me to We offers scholarship and financial aid options for youth and with this support, more than 150 youth travel on Me to We Trips each year either free of charge or with a significant reduced cost. There is a dedicated fundraising program to help youth raise support so they can have a Me to We Trip experience.

Be the change; and be changed

Me to We Trips have a proven impact on all travellers. In 2014, independent third-party research by U.S.- based social impact consulting firm Mission Measurement found that trip participants were even more motivated to make change when they returned home:

- 88% believe it's cool to care about social problems
- 89% feel empowered to make a positive difference in the world
- 73% have become a strong leader
- 78% discovered a subject or issue they are passionate about
- 77% have a greater respect for their school
- 73% are motivated more than ever to go to college

How does Me to We work with Free The Children on these trips?

Free The Children is Me to We's charity partner. Each Me to We Trip takes place in a community where Free The Children puts its 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development to work. And half of Me to We's net profits are donated to Free The Children—helping participants make an even bigger impact on the place they visit. The other half is reinvested to grow the enterprise and its social mission. Learn more about the relationship between Free The Children and Me to We

Youth around the world fundraise to support this model and their funds help support the core pillars (education, health, clean water and sanitation, alternative income and livelihood, and agriculture and food security) in the communities where Free The Children has long-standing programs and partnerships with local leaders and community members.

Alongside community members, participants might lay foundations or bricks for schools, run summer camps for children, or support workers digging fields and plan trees. These volunteer efforts contribute to the many important steps needed to establish the five pillars of Free The Children's sustainable development model, which eliminate the obstacles to education.

What is Free The Children's development model?

Free The Children's development model is called Adopt a Village, and it focuses on five pillars that are crucial to sustainable development. They are education, health care, clean water and sanitation, alternative income and livelihood, and agriculture and food security.

Adopt a Village embodies Free The Children's 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development work. It empowers entire communities to break the cycle of poverty by implementing sustainable solutions to issues that they identify as barriers to education.

All programs put in place under the Adopt a Village model are designed to be owned and maintained by the community, within the five-year period after the project is implemented.

Free The Children empowers community sustainability by:

- Collaborating with local community members at the start of a development project to address issues that community members identify
- Developing and nurturing the capacity of community members to be leaders and manage the implemented projects, such as water systems
- Empowering families (especially women) with opportunities to participate in alternative income and micro-credit programs
- Equipping community members with the skills and tools—such as financial literacy training, business planning workshops and leadership seminars—to be entrepreneurs, who give back to their community
- Tackling local environmental issues, and working in partnership to provide solutions based on local knowledge to ensure programs are truly sustainable
- Learn more about Free The Children's sustainable development model.

How is participating in development projects on trips meaningful for participants?

When you take a volunteer Me to We Trip, you not only work in partnership with local community members, you also take a journey that has enriched the lives of more than 15,000 participants from around the world. Students, teachers, leading business figures, celebrities, world leaders and members of the Royal Family have taken a Me to We Trip. Me to We Trips have been profiled by publications and media around the world, including a feature on *60 Minutes!*

On the trip participants volunteer on a Free The Children development project that supports one of five pillars— education, health, clean water and sanitation, alternative income and livelihood, and agriculture and food security —that eliminate the obstacles to education, eliminate poverty and empower women in a community. Volunteer efforts are driven by the community and its needs. Alongside community members, participants will dig trenches for water systems, lay foundations for schools, plow farmland or plant crops.

Trip participants have the opportunity to meet and work with community members from another culture and understand their joys and challenges. Talk to learners and community leaders, who are proud, equal partners in these holistic initiatives. Expand their worldview by experiencing different culture, language and customs. Through hands-on work experience, gain empathy, compassion and understanding for different cultures and environments.

Under the guidance of highly trained and experienced facilitators, travellers also participate in leadership training, skill-building workshops and action planning so when they return home, they have the tools to give back to social causes they care about.

How do you ensure that communities are not dependent on the services provided by trip participants?

Success for our non-profit partner, Free The Children, is when people no longer need charity.

Free The Children empowers people to be partners in identifying solutions that are barriers to transformation, to help them implement solutions, and then to educate and empower them so they can be independent.

That is Free The Children's definition of sustainable development.

Trip participants volunteer alongside community members. Whether it's helping to lay the foundation for a new school, or planting crops or digging trenches for water systems, they contribute towards the goals of Free The Children's sustainable development model. Sustainability and community ownership is the goal of all of Free The Children's development projects. Free The Children strives to leave after five years, when the community takes ownership over the maintenance and sustainability of these projects.

We ask participants not to bring donations or gifts because the goal is to empower communities to be independent through sustainable development work. We believe in giving a helping hand, not a hand-out.

Does work continue on projects when the participants go home? Who takes care of the projects?

Free The Children's sustainable development model is not about implementing stop-gap measures and temporary fixes.

Sustainability and community ownership is the goal of all of Free The Children's development projects. Free The Children strives to leave after five years, when the community takes ownership over the maintenance and sustainability of these projects.

Work is carried out all year by local contractors and construction workers who Free The Children employs. Work schedules and logistics are overseen by on-the-ground, local staff who ensure projects run smoothly and donations are being used effectively in communities that need them most.

Furthermore, participants' volunteer efforts help pre-planned projects move along more quickly.

Do trip participants take away jobs from local people?

No, they do not. In fact, Free The Children's sustainable development model creates local jobs.

The main objective of Free The Children's model is to ensure sustainable development. Free The Children empowers local community members to become key contributors to the health of their community. With Free The Children, they find jobs as engineers, project managers, supervisors, support staff, among many other roles—all in communities where work is incredibly difficult to find.

Me to We Trip participants volunteer on pre-planned projects. They volunteer alongside community members and paid local Free The Children employees. Participants' efforts do not determine which projects we start or work on, rather they get projects completed more quickly.

Free The Children employs many local people who work on its projects year round, both when trip participants are on and off-site.

How do Me to We staff help participants deal with culture shock?

We prepare participants for the culture shock they may experience before they land in a Free The Children community, and for possible "reverse culture shock" they may experience when they return home.

Before each trip, participants are given a detailed overview of the community they will visit, as well as a list of books, resources, films, etc. that they may use to get a better sense of their destination.

These materials discuss issues that affect the community, development needs, provide details about current projects, as well as information on cultural and traditional practices.

In addition, all trip facilitators are trained to ensure that participants are prepared to handle the cultural differences they will see and experience. We encourage participants to embrace these differences.

Reverse culture shock may occur when participants come home after a life-changing experience. Me to We Trip facilitators prepare participants for this possibility and Me to We staff and past trip participants are available to support travellers who may experience challenges adjusting to life back home.

We also take the trip experience a step further. Trained Me to We Trip facilitators and staff empower trip participants with tools and tips on how to take their experiences and turn them into long-term activism. This preparation begins while participants are still on the trip.

What are the benefits of a Me to We Trip, for participants and communities that you travel to?

Me to We Trips create lasting change for trip participants—and the communities they travel to.

Each Me to We volunteer trip takes place in a community where our charity partner, Free The Children, puts its 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development to work.

Half of our profits are donated to Free The Children—helping trip participants make an even bigger impact on the place they visit.

When participants volunteer on a Free The Children development project they support one of five pillars of sustainable development in the Adopt a Village model— education, health care, clean water and sanitation, alternative income and livelihood, and agriculture and food security.

This means participants know they are helping to eliminate the obstacles to education, eliminate poverty and empower women in a community.

Their volunteer work is driven by the community and its needs. Alongside community members, participants will dig trenches for water systems, lay foundations for schools, plow farmland or plant crops.

In 2013 alone, trip participants contributed almost 80,000 volunteer hours to development projects in Free The Children communities.

Participants have the opportunity to talk to learners and community leaders, who are proud, equal partners in these holistic initiatives. They come to understand their joys and challenges.

Participants expand their worldview by experiencing different culture, language and customs. Through hands-on volunteer experience, they gain empathy, compassion and understanding for different cultures and environments.

Me to We Trips have a proven impact on all travellers. In 2014, independent third-party research by U.S.- based social-impact consulting firm Mission Measurement found that trip participants were even more motivated to make change when they returned home:

- 88% believe it's cool to care about social problems
- 89% feel empowered to make a positive difference in the world
- 73% have become a strong leader
- 78% discovered a subject or issue they are passionate about
- 77% have a greater respect for their school
- 73% are motivated more than ever to go to college

Me to We Trips also offer many benefits for the communities that our charitable partner, Free The Children, carries out its sustainable development work.

Me to We Trips create jobs for local community members employing translators, drivers, mechanics, cooks and household staff to maintain accommodations, and so many more, in communities where it is extremely difficult to find work.

Do Me to We Trips have a negative impact on the environment?

Me to We is committed to reducing our ecological footprint as much as possible.

We offset the carbon footprint of each trip by growing organic produce in local gardens. We also have a tree nursery program, which supports reforestation projects.

Since 2008, Me to We has planted almost 700,000 trees and saved almost 40,000 pounds of pesticide.

In addition, Free The Children ensures all development projects that are part of its sustainable development model take environmental sustainability into account.

How do you ensure that the volunteer work provided by trip participants is needed in the community?

All the volunteering that participants do on Me to We Trips supports our charity partner, Free The Children's sustainable development model.

Free The Children ensures development projects are driven by the community's needs. Because community leaders and members are engaged in every step of the development work, they are proud, equal partners in our sustainable initiatives.

Sustainability and community ownership is the goal of all of Free The Children's development projects. Free The Children strives to leave after five years, when the community takes ownership over the maintenance and sustainability of these projects.

The community's priorities drive the volunteer efforts. Volunteers help accelerate the implementation of Free The Children's initiatives, which benefit everyone.

Who leads Me to We Trips?

Each trip is led by highly trained and experienced facilitators who help the participants understand the history and politics of the region, the culture of the community they are in and, of course, assist with translation. Everyone in the group takes language lessons while they are in the host country. These lessons are a useful tool for beginners to learn simple phrases and pleasantries so participants can more easily interact with community members.

Furthermore they engage participants in leadership training, skill-building workshops and action planning so when you return home, you have the tools to give back to your community.

Me to We facilitators travel with participants at all times. In the community, participants are also accompanied by local guide(s).

How long have you been running trips?

Me to We has been running volunteer trips for over a decade. Me to We Trips are impactful, life changing and provide participants with the unique opportunity to volunteer for our charity partner, Free The Children, which has a 20-year history of holistic, sustainable development work.

When you take a volunteer Me to We Trip, you not only work in partnership with local community members, you also take a journey that has enriched the lives of more than 15,000 participants from around the world. Students, teachers, leading business figures, celebrities, world leaders and members of the Royal Family have taken a Me to We Trip. Me to We Trips have been profiled around the world, including on *60 Minutes!*

We have a well-developed infrastructure in all the countries and communities we offer volunteer travel in.

What is included in the cost of a trip?

The "ground price" (cost after airfare) is competitive and all-inclusive.

It includes all accommodation, travel within the country, three meals a day plus snacks, purified drinking water, Me to We facilitators, security guards, all in-country materials (language books, etc.) and in-country excursions.

You will not need to purchase anything except for proper documentation (i.e. visa, exit fee).

Some of the experiences you'll enjoy include:

- Direct involvement in Free The Children's sustainable development projects
- Leadership training
- Community interaction and cultural education: We have strong ties and a history with all the communities in which we work. Participants get the opportunity to see and experience the communities that Free The Children partners with and meet local citizens
- Visits to historic landmarks and cultural sites
- Hands-on volunteering, which allows participants to give back in a meaningful way
- For young people, certification of participants' volunteer work for resumes, post-secondary applications, graduation requirements, course credits, etc.

- Social issues education: Guest speakers, facilitators and in-country staff share their knowledge of the country and the issues it faces
- Renewed sense of community: Nurturing a sense of empathy, compassion and a full understanding of the power of community to change the world
- Action planning: All participants learn how to set goals and build personalized action plans for making change happen when they return home

We ask that participants not bring cash or gifts of any kind for local people and children on any Me to We Trip. Why?

Free The Children works to empower overseas communities and work with them as equal partners. Partnerships are developed with communities to create sustainable solutions, not give hand-outs

Participants' volunteer efforts are driven by community needs through Free The Children's holistic development model. It helps to advance the time in which Free The Children and community members can implement programs.

It's important that trip participants know this is how their volunteer work is a gift to the community they visit.

What destinations do you offer?

Me to We offers trips for adults, corporate groups and families in Ecuador, Kenya and India. Trips for youth and schools are offered in the Amazon and Ecuador, India, rural China, Nicaragua, Kenya and Tanzania, and the Dominican Republic.

Are Me to We Trips safe?

Since 2002, over 15,000 youth and adults have travelled safely with our organization across the world. Safety is top priority and we have numerous proactive safety measures, protocols and training in place.

Our safety measures include:

PRE-TRIP

- Me to We Trips abides by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs travel advisories and monitors these updates prior to and during travel
- Canadian and American participants are registered with their respective embassy before departure to ensure accountability in case of emergency. For all other nationalities, Me to We strongly recommends participants register with their embassy prior to travel
- Copies of all passports, medical and travel insurance, emergency contact information, and dietary and medical requirements are collected well in advance of the trip
- Our extensive facilitator training program includes emergency evacuation protocols, standard operating procedures and crisis prevention and risk management. All facilitators are trained in first aid and carry a first-aid kit at all times
- Emergency communication is available 24 hours a day between our in-country team and our headquarters Local hospitals with Western medical standards are aware of our trips and prepared to handle minor or major medical situations

DURING TRIP

- All accommodations have a 24-hour security system and participants are given an orientation to their accommodations and know where to find resources
- All transportation is run by our trusted private transportation providers, and all travel occurs under the guidance of Me to We's in country team
- Purified bottled water is available at all times and all food prepared by cooks who are trained in proper food preparation
- During all building activities, participants are given thorough instructions on the use of equipment and wear protective gear at all times. For a more information on Me to We's safety procedures, please visit: http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/safety/

Are Me to We Trips focused solely on school-building?

No.

We work with our charity partner, Free The Children, and travel to communities in which it carries out its 20-year history of holistic and sustainable development programs.

Volunteer efforts include digging trenches that are crucial to water systems, plowing fields, planting crops and laying the foundations for schools to name a few. All these volunteer hours (more than 80,000 in 2013, alone) support one of five Adopt a Village pillars—clean water, food security, education, health or alternative income—that eliminate the obstacles to education.

Can I send my teen on his/her own?

Me to We offers Open Youth Trips during the summer, giving young people a chance to volunteer abroad on their own. These trips have pre-scheduled dates, and are usually 14–20 days long and are available to teens ages 13 and older.

Am I fit enough to participate on a trip?

Me to We welcomes participants of all ages and fitness levels.

All participants are encouraged to work at their own pace and take breaks whenever necessary.

If you have any physical conditions that will hinder your participation in any of the activities, please let our staff know and we will be happy to accommodate your needs.

Is there a minimum age for participants?

Me to We suggests a minimum age of participants of four years old. But, we leave it up to you to determine whether the trip will be appropriate for your children.

Our facilities are well equipped to handle kids and our facilitators have extensive experience working with children.

In addition, we offer trips for youth during the summer period that allow them to travel on their own. The minimum age is 13 years-old for travel without a parent or guardian.

When do Me to We Trips take place?

Corporate, adult, family and school volunteer adventures run year-round.

Individual youth volunteer adventures take place during school breaks. View all available trip travel dates.

Are Me to We Trips “voluntourism”?

Voluntourism is a term that refers to travel which includes volunteering for a charitable cause.

While our trips are overseas and have a volunteer component, they are vastly different from most “voluntourism” experiences. We’re proud of what makes our trips stand out.

They empower socially conscious travellers to make an impact in the very communities where our charity partner, Free The Children, has a 20-year history of sustainable development, working with community leaders and members in a true partnership.

Me to We Trip participants get a first-hand look at Free The Children’s sustainable development model and make a hands-on contribution to its legacy of community-building.

On Me to We Trips, participants volunteer alongside community members on projects that support one of the five core pillars of the Adopt a Village: education, health, clean water and sanitation, alternative income and livelihood, and agriculture and food security.

These five pillars are designed to provide sustainable solutions and empower communities to be active participants in their transformation, and ensure their sustained well-being.

Trip participants may dig trenches for water systems, lay foundations for schools, plough farmland or plant crops. Again, trip participants volunteer alongside community members and learn about sustainable development from this partnership.

On our trips, volunteer efforts are driven by the community’s needs.

Community leaders and members are empowered, equal partners in Free The Children’s development work. They welcome trip participants’ volunteer contributions, and recognize the value for everyone in the cultural exchange, connections made and opportunity to work together on sustainable development projects.

Me to We Trips are guided by highly trained and experienced facilitators.

They provide participants with leadership training, skill-building workshops and help them develop action plans. When participants return home, they then have the tools to take action on social causes as well as a deeper understanding of sustainability and development issues.

In addition, Me to We Trips have a proven impact on all travellers. In 2014, independent third-party research by U.S.-based social-impact consulting firm Mission Measurement found that trip participants were even more motivated to make change when they returned home:

- 88% believe it’s cool to care about social problems
- 89% feel empowered to make a positive difference in the world
- 73% have become a strong leader
- 78% discovered a subject or issue they are passionate about
- 77% have a greater respect for their school
- 73% are motivated more than ever to go to college

What makes Me to We Trips even more world changing is that half of Me to We’s net profits are donated to Free The Children—helping you make an even bigger impact on the community you visit. The other half is reinvested to grow the enterprise and its social mission.

What do you say to young people who want the type of experience a Me to We Trip offers but can't afford it?

Me to We Trips are available to everyone.

We offer scholarship and financial aid options for youth. With this support, more than 150 young people travel on Me to We Trips each year, either free of charge or with at a significantly reduced cost. Learn more about scholarship and financial aid options.

There is a dedicated fundraising program to help youth raise support so they can have a Me to We Trip experience. Learn more about fundraising for a Me to We Trip.

Appendix F: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Youth Trips: Amazon"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/amazon/ on March 17, 2016

Amazon

Amazon | Immerse yourself in an indigenous culture on a rainforest adventure

$3895 per person. Flights Included. (15 days) *

As you travel from Ecuador's capital, Quito, toward the Amazon basin, the environment starts to change and the temperature steadily rises. Moving into the lush forest, everything grows more exotic and tropical. The plants are larger, with broad palm leaves as big as people. Waterfalls burst out of cliff-sides. Make your way via motorized canoe to the Minga Lodge, your home-away-from home situated on the banks of the Los Rios, a waterway that feeds into the world's second longest river. Nestled in the heart of the jungle, visit an indigenous community and join locals in building a school or clean water project. Learn Spanish and the native Kichwa language, try your hand at weaving crafts from materials found in the jungle, and visit the home of a local family to learn about traditional culture and ways-of-life. Hike the rainforest and discover the amazing array of plant, insect and animal species that call the rainforest home, led by your trusty jungle guide. Uncover the secrets of the rainforest on this unforgettable adventure.

Trip Overview

Journey through the jungle and take in the sights and sounds.

Settle into your accommodations and get ready to meet a local community.

Dive into learning about indigenous Kichwa culture and women's equality with a visit to a local artisans group.

Join a "minga"—a project where all members of a community work together toward a shared goal—to contribute to a development project that will help remove the barriers to education.

Tour a cacao farm to learn about this important source of local income. Don't forget your chocolate sample!

Head out on a jungle hike in the Amazon Rainforest, one of the world's most bio-diverse areas.

Trip Highlights

Embark on a jungle hike

Visit with a local artisans' group

Meet a Shaman and learn about traditional jungle weaponry

Volunteer on a development project alongside community members

Take part in a traditional cooking class

Social Issues You Will Explore

Women's Rights

Learn about the challenges faced by women in indigenous, rural communities such as limited economic independence and a lack of voice within their own households and communities.

Indigenous Rights

Find out how income distribution and racial inequality have had an impact on rural indigenous communities.

Rural Access to Education

Explore the issues experienced by remote communities in the Amazon in accessing education, including unsafe classrooms, extreme weather conditions and lack of transportation to schools.

Free The Children's Development Projects in Amazon

Education

Water

Alternative Income & Livelihood

Health

See how you will make a difference

ME to WE Trip participants partner with communities like Bellavista to build safe new classrooms, complete with a soundproof roof to prevent loud rainfalls from interrupting classes. Access to education has always been limited in this region. The existing classrooms near the community were dilapidated and unsafe, and would often flood during heavy rainfalls. When it rained, the noise on the school's wooden roof made it too loud for students to hear their teachers.

Access to clean water is also a challenge in Bellavista. Water collected from the Napo River is often polluted by toxic waste that comes from larger cities in the surrounding area, and community members are left vulnerable to waterborne diseases. ME to WE Trip participants are partnering with Bellavista to build projects like a new clean water system and hand-washing stations. Free The Children projects also include running workshops about hygiene and sanitation.

For parents in Bellavista, it can also be difficult to earn a sustainable income to support their children. In partnership with Free The Children, Bellavista community members have started an artisans' group for women. On a ME to WE Trip you will connect with artisans who find materials in the jungle to make jewellery such as necklaces and bracelets that they will be able to sell to earn an income—letting them pay for things such as school fees or medical costs for their children.

2016 Trips

Amazon Youth Trips

Departure Dates

Pick a date to book

Travel with us and you'll not only impact a community, you'll change your own life.

95% of ME to WE Trip participants report feeling a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of people in developing countries when they return home.

66% of participants felt they have experienced ‘transformative’ growth in their development as a leader.

85% of participants are involved in volunteering in their communities after returning from a ME to WE Trip.

93% of participants intend to play a leadership role in social justice activities in their community.

Hear what other ME to WE travellers are saying

“The community of Mondana was not beautiful because of the material things they had. It was beautiful because of the people living in it. I will always remember the kids who could play for hours, our tour guide who referred to himself as Tarzan and the smiles of the women who created jewelry for a living.” Maya

“You can hear the bugs, the frogs, the animals, and after a few nights you kind of fall in love with this place.” Alexie

(Amazon Video Testimonial 0:52)

“Upon arriving in the Amazon, before beginning our task of building a school, we shared our stories with the local people. In turn, they shared theirs. This special time helped us come together as one to voluntarily work on a common goal. We learned this was called a “minga.”" Madeline

“After going on this trip, I have a new appreciation for school. Especially on those days where I don’t want to go to school or I don’t want to make an effort. It’s changed a lot of things for me at home.” Michelle

“You’d get off the boat and see all the kids lined up at the shore waiting for you, with massive smiles on their faces. It was such hard work but we were happy doing it because you got to see the reaction from not just the kids, but the community itself.” Kaira

Appendix G: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Youth Trips: China"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/china/ on March 17, 2016

China

China | Connect with students, make a difference and explore an ancient civilization

$5395 per person. Flights Included. (19 days) *

An adventure to China offers breathtaking views of the old and new—from city to countryside. Start in Beijing, a bustling city that is one of the most populous in the world. Explore the city's fascinating ancient history with visits to Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. As you head out of the capital, stop to explore one of the world's most famous monuments—the Great Wall of China—which spans more than 8,000 kilometres. Then, discover the contrast between China's booming cities and vast countryside as you volunteer alongside locals in a rural community. Practice your Mandarin, teach English at a primary school and help build a school or clean water project. End your trip with a visit to the city of Shaolin to learn about meditation and martial arts with a monk, and to spend a day volunteering at an orphanage. Get ready for an incredible journey like no other!

Trip Overview

Journey beyond the bustling cities to a rural community.

Get settled in your accommodations and get ready to make new local friends!

Volunteer on a Free The Children project and work alongside community members.

Discover the contrast between urban and rural life in China and its impact on the local economy.

Volunteer teaching English at a community school and learn about the structure of education in the region.

Explore historical sites in Beijing and the surrounding area, including the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square and the Great Wall of China.

Trip Highlights

Explore the Hutongs, one of the oldest areas in Beijing

Discover the Great Wall of China and take a city tour

Visit the Shaolin Temple and join monks for a Kung Fu lesson

Teach English to local children

Learn Mandarin

Social Issues You Will Explore

Urban/Rural Issues

Discover the contrast between life in rural and urban China, and how this relates to issues such as access to resources like education, health care and clean water.

Income Disparity

Learn about the main sources of income for communities in rural China, and the issues that occur as a result of families having limited ways to earn a sustainable income outside their home.

Access to Education

Explore the challenges rural communities face in accessing education, including under-funding of rural schools and lack of safe transportation for children to get to schools in urban centres.

Free The Children's Development Projects in China

Education

Agriculture & Food Security

Water

Alternative Income & Livelihood

Health

See how you will make a difference

ME to WE Trip participants volunteer in communities like Aluo in rural China to help rebuild destroyed classrooms, ensuring that children have a safe place to learn close to home. For a long time, there were no schools in this region. Aluo's existing classroom was destroyed in an earthquake, and though there were three makeshift classrooms built, they were too unsafe to be used by students. Children were forced to walk great distances to access even the most basic education. Without a safe transportation system in rural China to help children access urban schools, students are often forced to take overcrowded, dangerous buses to get to class.

Access to clean water in Aluo was a major challenge, due to drought, pollution and the long distance most community members needed to travel to reach the nearest municipal water source. Community members had to collect water from a nearby pond, but because this water was also used by animals, the water was full of contaminants that left people vulnerable to waterborne diseases. ME to WE Trip participants worked with community members in Aluo to build a clean water system and hand-washing station, ensuring people had access to a source of safe, clean water.

2016 Trips

China Youth Trips

Departure Dates

Pick a date to book

Travel with us and you'll not only impact a community, you'll change your own life.

95% of ME to WE Trip participants report feeling a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of people in developing countries when they return home.

66% of participants felt they have experienced ‘transformative’ growth in their development as a leader.

85% of participants are involved in volunteering in their communities after returning from a ME to WE Trip.

93% of participants intend to play a leadership role in social justice activities in their community.

Hear what other ME to WE travellers are saying

“Travelling to China dramatically changed my life. Not only do I now have lifelong friends all over the world, I have gained such perspective on being a global citizen and creating positive change.” Alexandra

“My favourite part of the trip was meeting all these great new people I would never have met if it wasn’t for ME to WE. I also enjoyed being able to talk with the kids who lived in the communities we worked in, and know that by taking this opportunity I was making a difference in someone’s life.” Ana

(China Video Testimonial 1:14)

When I heard stories from someone who had worked with Free The Children communities overseas, I wanted to see this work firsthand, and see how Free The Children was helping these communities lift themselves from the cycle of poverty.That’s why I went on my first ME to WE Trip to rural China. Brennan

“I learned so much on this trip. Being there and meeting people in the communities really helped to change those preconceived notions that you already have going into it as a typical tourist.” Michelle

“Having that hands-on experience and getting to build relationships with these people that we’re helping—it’s one of those motivators. When you are actually with these people, you realize how much of a change you’re making. I know that there’ll be that connection forever.” Kaylee

Appendix H: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Youth Trips: Ecuador"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/ecuador/ on March 17, 2016

Ecuador

Ecuador | Connect with the indigenous people of the Andes Mountains

$3995 per person. Flights Included. (15 days) *

The longest continental mountain range in the world—also known as the Andes—is where your adventure takes place. Journey to the sky on long, winding roads, past green quilts of rolling hills and with the spectacular background of snow-capped mountains and volcanoes. Step into an indigenous community to volunteer with local women's groups, join communities in a "minga" to help build a school or clean water project, and explore Ecuador's history of economic disparities and human rights struggles. Then, your retreat to the Amazon will take you from these mountains among the clouds to the lush jungle miles below, giving you a better understanding of these different climates and how they're each affected by environmental degradation. From the peaks of the Andes to the basin of the Amazon, this is an adventure packed to the brim.

Trip Overview

Journey to the magnificent mountaintops of the Chimborazo region.

Get settled in your accommodations and take in the spectacular mountain views.

Spend time with women's and girls' groups to learn about indigenous culture and women's equality.

Join communities in a "minga"—a project where everyone works together toward a shared goal—to help build a school or volunteer with local women in beading groups and shearing sheep.

Take on the role of a local family, living on $1 a day, as you explore a local market and try to purchase food to feed your family.

Experience stunning views of Chimborazo, an inactive volcano in the Andes where you'll encounter vicuña—llama-like animals—roaming the slopes.

Trip Highlights

Visit with Sumak Ahuana, a local women's group

Stand on the equator in Quito

Day in the Life market activity

Retreat to the Amazon rainforest

Volunteer on a development project alongside community members

Social Issues You Will Explore

Women's Rights

Explore the issues faced by women and girls in rural Ecuador, and how projects such as girls' and women's groups are empowering women and girls to earn an income and develop their leadership skills.

Indigenous Rights

Learn about how income distribution and racial inequality have an impact on rural communities. Find out how the historic hacienda land-holding system still has an impact on rural Ecuador today.

Access to Education

Learn about the challenges faced by rural communities that prevent children from accessing education, including a lack of safe, quality classrooms and the inaccessibility and cost of secondary school.

Free The Children's Development Projects in Ecuador

Education

Agriculture & Food Security

Water

Alternative Income & Livelihood

Health

See how you will make a difference

ME to WE Trip participants worked alongside communities like San Miguel to build bright, safe classrooms. Within this region of Ecuador's Chimborazo province, access to education was limited—especially for girls. There was a lack of safe school facilities and children were needed to help with chores at home. There were also no nearby secondary schools, and most children did not continue their education past primary school. Today, San Miguel even has its own high school. Through Free The Children programming, parents were encouraged to send their daughters to school and began to see the benefit of girls getting an education.

San Miguel also lacked access to safe drinking water and community members were often forced to walk long distances to communal sources. Often, this water was contaminated, leaving people vulnerable to waterborne diseases. Illness was also commonly spread by water collected in dirty containers. ME to WE Trip participants partnered with community members in San Miguel to build new clean water projects like a water-piping system, hand-washing stations and school bathrooms.

Free The Children also partnered with San Miguel to start girls' clubs, which empower young girls with the tools and knowledge to become leaders in their communities. Through these groups, girls in San Miguel work on projects such as guinea pig rearing and weaving traditional crafts—gaining the skills to earn an income that they can put toward their education.

2016 Trips

Ecuador Youth Trips

Departure Dates

Pick a date to book

Travel with us and you'll not only impact a community, you'll change your own life.

95% of ME to WE Trip participants report feeling a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of people in developing countries when they return home.

66% of participants felt they have experienced 'transformative' growth in their development as a leader.

85% of participants are involved in volunteering in their communities after returning from a ME to WE Trip.

93% of participants intend to play a leadership role in social justice activities in their community.

Hear what other ME to WE travellers are saying

"The trip to Ecuador was incredible! Being able to be part of the school-building projects is something that I will always carry with me, Our group also grew into a family on this trip and I can't even begin to describe how strong of a connection we had with one another and the community members we met." Tina

"Ecuador gave me a purpose. Life is made up of millions of souls touching one another, giving or taking something every time their paths cross. I was touched by so many souls on this trip—it is now my turn to do the same." Maya

"This summer I travelled to Ecuador, where I learned things that can never be taught in school. We met so many incredible people that were always smiling and cheerful, despite the conditions they were living in." Madeleine

"Having the time of our lives this summer in Lullin, Ecuador! Helping to build the walls for this information centre with this group of incredible change-makers was nothing short of awesome!" Nadine

"I travelled to Ecuador with my Girl Guide group, and a highlight of the trip was meeting the girls' and women's groups. Those ladies were really inspiring. Coming from a place where you can say whatever you want, it was amazing to see how originally in their culture they're expected to be sort of closed off and shy. But seeing the women start to break out of their shells was a really great experience." Jessica

Appendix I: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Youth Trips: India"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/india/ on March 17, 2016

India

India | Dive into a colourful culture and explore social issues in a dynamic landscape

$4995 per person. Flights Included. (18 days) *

Jaw-dropping views of towering mountains, colourful spices and aromas filling the air and yogis practicing on a terrace set the scene for you to explore spectacular India. You'll begin your journey in Udaipur, also known as the "city of lakes," where white palaces stretch across endless waterways. Explore unforgettable historical sites like Ranakpur Temple or Kumbhalgarh Fort. On roads snaking through the countryside, discover one of Free The Children's rural partner communities where you'll get your hands dirty working on a volunteer project like a school, clean water project or health centre, and learn a bit of Hindi while talking to local elders and playing with kids. Begin each morning with yoga, and soak up Indian culture, from learning Bollywood dancing to making roti and samosas. You'll also engage in vibrant discussions of complex social issues that affect the country and understand how they connect to your life at home. Prepare for a massive adventure that will leave you craving more.

Trip Overview

Arrive in Rajasthan and journey to a rural village where Free The Children works.

Get rested in your accommodations and get ready for the exciting days ahead.

Take part in a Poja Prayer Ceremony. Every new build project begins with a traditional blessing to ensure its success and prosperity.

Volunteer alongside locals on a Free The Children project to help improve access to education—from building a school to helping dig a well.

Be invited into the home of a local woman to learn how to prepare roti, a traditional Indian dish.

Explore Udaipur's stunning Ranakpur Temple, one of the Wonders of the World.

Trip Highlights

Water walk with local women

Traditional prayer ceremony

Bollywood dancing

Morning yoga

Volunteer on a development project alongside community members

Social Issues You Will Explore

Women's Rights

Explore gender roles, cultural traditions and family life in rural India, and how this affects girls' and women's ability to get an education and work outside the home.

Access to Education

Find out the barriers in rural India that prevent children from attending school, such as a lack of proper and safe facilities and resources, and a need for children, especially girls, to help with chores at home.

Access to Healthcare

Learn about the challenges posed in rural communities by a lack of nearby, quality medical facilities.

Free The Children's Development Projects in India

Education

Agriculture & Food Security

Water

Alternative Income & Livelihood

Health

See how you will make a difference

On ME to WE Trips to communities in India's Rajasthan region like Lai Gow, participants partner with community members to help build projects like bright, new classrooms. Within these communities access to education was a major challenge. There was a lack of proper educational facilities and resources, and a high prevalence of child labour.

Access to clean water is a major challenge in the region, often due to drought and changing weather patterns. The nearest water sources are contaminated rivers, leaving people vulnerable to waterborne diseases. ME to WE Trip participants worked alongside Lai Gow community members to help build projects like hand-washing stations.

In communities in rural India like Lai Gow, access to proper health care is also a challenge. The nearest health clinics are often miles away, and if villages do have existing facilities, they are often inadequate. ME to WE Trip participants worked with Lai Gow to help rebuild the community's anganwadi, a health centre that provides services like immunizations, child care and health workshops.

With a lack of opportunities to earn an income, many families were forced to look for work outside their village or even keep their children out of school to work. Through Free The Children's goat-rearing projects, local women are able to earn a sustainable income to support their families.

2016 Trips

India Youth Trips

Departure Dates

Pick a date to book

Travel with us and you'll not only impact a community, you'll change your own life.

95% of ME to WE Trip participants report feeling a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of people in developing countries when they return home.

66% of participants felt they have experienced 'transformative' growth in their development as a leader.

85% of participants are involved in volunteering in their communities after returning from a ME to WE Trip.

93% of participants intend to play a leadership role in social justice activities in their community.

Hear what other ME to WE travellers are saying

"I travelled to India with my school and I thought it would be an amazing experience but it turns out it was a life-changing experience and something I would do over and over again . . . I have a different perspective on the world." Olivia

"The most profound moment of the trip was when we got to make roti with the mamas and go for a water walk. It was moments like these, moments when I could interact with the community members, that really made me take a step back and realize what we were doing and how differently some people live." Miranda

(India Video Testimonial 1:04)

"Before work began in Barind we took part in a special Puja ceremony to bless the site, the tools, the workers and the future students and teachers. The ceremony was conducted in Sanskrit, one of the world's oldest languages." Grace

"In India, we did a walk for water with the mothers and daughters in the community. It was an amazing experience carrying the pots and getting a perspective of what the women have to do multiple times per day! The journey really made me realize how lucky we are to have such easy access to clean, cold and hot water." Robyn

"Taking a water walk in India and spending a day in the life with a woman made me realize how fortunate I am. What amazed me was how content these people were. Living in a world of materialism, it's a true eye opener." Anusheh

"We started out as excited tourists who roamed the crowded streets full of life on foot and by bus. We saw poverty, but we also saw raw happiness. We saw people happy simply because they were alive. We saw girls, boys, women, and men excited to see us, and we returned the ear-to-ear grins with grins of our own. We were often welcomed with laughter and cheerful, sincere, 'Namastes.'" Sydney

Appendix J: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Youth Trips: Kenya/Tanzania"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/kenya-tanzania/ on March 17, 2016

Kenya/Tanzania

Kenya/Tanzania | Work alongside rural communities in the heart of the vast savannah

$5495 per person. Flights Included. (20 days) *

Hop into a lorry for an unforgettable journey through the ever-changing landscape of Kenya/Tanzania, from vast plains dotted with acacia trees, to rolling hills, lush forests and endless horizons. Travel through the Great Rift Valley to a remote Maasai or Kipsigis community, where you'll spend your days diving into the vibrant and joyful local culture. Volunteer with locals on a project to improve access to education—whether you're laying bricks that will become a school or digging trenches for a well that will provide clean water. Learn Swahili, bead with mamas, meet community elders and hear stories that have been passed on through generations. Embark on a safari in the Maasai Mara or Ngorongoro Crater and get up close and personal with the "Big Five"—lions elephants, buffalos, leopards and rhinos as they roam the wild land of the Serengeti, named after the Maasai word for "endless plains." Get ready to journey off the beaten path for an adventure like no other.

*All trips will fly into Nairobi, Kenya and will volunteer in a community in Kenya or Tanzania. Communities will be assigned closer to trip departure dates—participants cannot choose their community.

Adventure awaits in Tanzania!

Be a part of it all–from the beginning! Break ground on new development projects as you explore a stunning landscape with views of Mount Kilimanjaro. Experience life in a Maasai village and make connections with people in communities newly partnered with Free The Children.

Trip Overview

Journey through the sprawling savannah in a lorry on the way to a community.

Drop off your bags at your accommodations and get ready to make a difference.

Work side-by-side with locals on a Free The Children development project that will help remove the barriers to education—from building a classroom or school kitchen, to planting a school garden or working on a clean water project.

Learn first-hand about women's empowerment, and how alternative income projects such as beading circles and goat-rearing make a difference.

Walk in the footsteps of a local mama on a journey to collect water from a nearby river.

Join a local guide on a safari through the Maasai Mara National Reserve or the Ngorongoro Crater.

Trip Highlights

Volunteer on a development project alongside community members

Embark on a water walk with a local woman

Try your hand at making a Rungu, a traditional talking stick

Go on a safari

Bead with a local artisans' group

Social Issues You Will Explore

Rural Access to Education

Learn about the barriers children in rural communities face in accessing education, including a lack of proper educational facilities and resources.

Women's Rights

Explore the issues experienced by women in this region, especially in terms of access to education. Learn how with an education, girls' self-confidence can flourish, empowering them to become leaders.

Maintaining Cultural Heritage

Dive into learning about local indigenous culture, and find out the difficulties communities can have in keeping their traditions and way of life alive in a changing world.

Free The Children's Development Projects in Kenya/Tanzania

Education

Agriculture & Food Security

Water

Alternative Income & Livelihood

Health

See how you will make a difference

In the rural community of Salabwek, access to education was a major challenge. There was a high primary school dropout rate, especially for girls, because of poor educational facilities and resources and a need for children to tend to their family's livestock. On ME to WE Trips to Salabwek, participants partnered with community members to help build projects like bright, new classrooms.

Access to health care is limited in this region due to a lack of doctors and local health clinics. Without proper health care, kids are unable to attend school. Free The Children partnered with Salabwek and other nearby communities to build the Baraka and Kishon Health Clinics, which provide services including preventive health care, immunizations and mother and child health services.

This region also faces challenges in accessing clean water, often due to drought and changing weather patterns. The nearest water sources are often contaminated rivers, leaving people

vulnerable to waterborne diseases. ME to WE Trip participants worked alongside Salabwek community members to help build projects like hand-washing stations and water systems.

In communities like Salabwek, food insecurity and drought can be a major barrier to kids attending school. Many children suffer from malnutrition. Free The Children partnered with Salabwek to start a school lunch program that provides students with a warm meal of maize, beans and vegetables each day. This program not only helps keep students well-nourished, it also increases school attendance and performance by encouraging students to come to class.

With a lack of opportunities to earn an income, many families were forced to keep their children out of school to work and help look after livestock. Through Free The Children's alternative income projects like beekeeping and ME to WE Artisans beading groups, local women are able to earn a sustainable income to support their families.

2016 Trips

Kenya Youth Trips

Departure Dates

Pick a date to book

Travel with us and you'll not only impact a community, you'll change your own life.

95% of ME to WE Trip participants report feeling a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of people in developing countries when they return home.

66% of participants felt they have experienced 'transformative' growth in their development as a leader.

85% of participants are involved in volunteering in their communities after returning from a ME to WE Trip.

93% of participants intend to play a leadership role in social justice activities in their community.

Hear what other ME to WE travellers are saying

"I spent 16 days in East Africa, and I can honestly say that those were the best two weeks of my life.There's something about the beautiful sunsets, exotic wildlife and the incredibly kind-hearted people that captivates you while you're there and I felt like something I never knew was missing had been found. I think everyone needs to experience something like this trip at some point in their life!" John

"Traditional weapons training in East Africa! Stephen, our Maasai Warrior, demonstrates incredible ability with a bow and arrow." Dana

(Kenya/Tanzania Video Testimonial 1:13)

"I had so much fun playing with kids in the community of Salabwek! I connected instantly to Judy, a girl in Grade 7, who was so happy and full of life. We would sit together, play games and talk about everything in our lives." Leah

Whether we were in the lorry, walking or on a plane, my group and I created memories that we will never forget. East Africa taught me more than I can express and changed the way I view

everything. I miss going to and from the build site or the school and bumping up and down on the lorry, but I know I will visit East Africa and all the friends I made again one day. I encourage anyone to take this opportunity to travel to East Africa—you won't regret it! Nicole

"At the build site, I realized, 'This is what I came for.' Brick by brick, we were putting up walls for somewhere that kids will go to school." Jessica

"Being in East Africa made me realize how huge the world really is. But what touched me the most while I was there were the local people I met. I made some amazing friends who were always smiling no matter what. One little girl named Sharon taught me a lot. You can read about poverty or watch documentaries on it, but seeing it firsthand is very different. Suddenly poverty has a face and a hand to shake, and world poverty becomes much more real to you." Darby

Appendix K: Webpage "ME to WE: Volunteer Travel: Youth Trips: Nicaragua"

Retrieved from http://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/nicaragua/ on March 17, 2016

Nicaragua

Nicaragua | From coffee fields to classrooms—dive into life in the land of lakes and volcanoes

$3995 per person. Flights Included. (15 days) *

Beaches hugging blue waters, volcanoes capped by clouds and lush rainforests provide the backdrop for your adventure in Nicaragua. As Central America's largest country, it's a place where some areas seem untouched by time. In the country's southwest region, you'll live and work among some of the most spiritually rich people in the world and learn about the colonial history of Granada. By participating in grassroots projects in rural communities, you'll not only get your hands dirty but help remove the barriers to education for young community members. Taking advantage of your exotic flora and fauna surroundings, you'll also learn about conservation and rural development challenges. Get ready to grip adventure by the tail.

Trip Overview

Arrive in your community and take in breathtaking views of lakes and volcanoes.

Get rested in your accommodations and get ready for the exciting days ahead!

Learn about the impact of natural disasters, like earthquakes and floods, on Nicaragua's infrastructure.

Volunteer alongside locals on a Free The Children project that will help remove the barriers to education—from building a classroom or school kitchen to digging a well that will provide clean water.

Explore the bustling Masaya Market

Tour Masaya Volcano and take in stunning panoramic views of Lake Nicaragua and the city of Grenada.

Trip Highlights

Visit Cafe Las Flores coffee plantation

Volunteer on a development project alongside community members

Masaya Volcano tour

Pottery workshop

Los Sonrisas café visit

Social Issues You Will Explore

Disaster Relief

See first-hand the effects of natural disasters on Nicaragua's infrastructure, and learn about the work Free The Children has done in partnership with communities in response to these catastrophes.

Access to Employment Opportunities

In rural Nicaragua, most families rely on agriculture for their income, but this is threatened due to limited resources and natural disasters.

Access to Education

Learn about the challenges communities face in rural Nicaragua in accessing education, including a lack of proper education infrastructure and resources.

Free The Children's Development Projects in Nicaragua

Education

Agriculture & Food Security

Water

See how you will make a difference

ME to WE Trip participants worked alongside communities like El Trapiche to build the community's first school. This bright, clean space will help educate children in the region for generations to come! In this community, located in the Central Pacific Region of Nicaragua, access to education has been a major challenge. Primary school dropout rates are high, largely due to poor education facilities, a lack of access to quality health and sanitation facilities, and a high incidence of child labour.

In El Trapiche, access to clean water is also a challenge. The nearest water sources are often contaminated, leaving people vulnerable to waterborne diseases and causing children to miss school. ME to WE Trip participants worked with community members to build new clean water projects. This includes a water piping system that brings clean water from a natural spring to El Trapiche Primary School.

2016 Trips

Nicaragua Youth Trips

Departure Dates

Pick a date to book

Travel with us and you'll not only impact a community, you'll change your own life.

95% of ME to WE Trip participants report feeling a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of people in developing countries when they return home.

66% of participants felt they have experienced 'transformative' growth in their development as a leader.

85% of participants are involved in volunteering in their communities after returning from a ME to WE Trip.

93% of participants intend to play a leadership role in social justice activities in their community.

Hear what other ME to WE travellers are saying

“So much physical labour went into it. But it was the start of a school for 180 students. And with having that in mind and seeing the kids around us, it was definitely eye-opening to see how much of a difference you can make." Kaira

(Nicaragua Video Testimonial 1:13)

“I always had in my mind that education is important, but my ME to WE Trip definitely really motivated me more. If there’s ever a time I’m in school and it’s been stressful or frustrating, or I don’t want to be there, I just remember the kids I met, and think about how happy they are to be in school.” Julie

“This trip will re-instate your beliefs to see first-hand what you are doing is making a difference and to anyone who thinks that what we’re doing isn’t worthwhile because there is no way that after a trip like this they will feel that way.” Sydney

“I was so excited but nervous at the same time. Being away from home for the first time for so long was so scary, but once I stepped on the plane, I knew what I was doing was for a good cause, the chance to meet new people and make a difference in other people’s lives. It was a self-empowering feeling.” Anusheh