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# Voluntourism: What Motivates College Students to Give Back When They Travel?

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# Voluntourism: What Motivates College Students to Give Back When They Travel?

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Date: October 12, 2017

Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirement for the University Honors Scholar  
designation at Johnson & Wales University

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### **Abstract**

Volunteer tourism, also known as "voluntourism", has become a trendy way to market to culturally and environmentally conscious travelers who seek authentic experiences instead of traditional mass tourism where travelers have little interaction with the local culture.

Voluntourism aspects are being added to existing travel itineraries and entire companies have been created around volunteering to specifically target college students. This thesis seeks to examine the individual motivations of college students who have previously participated in at least one voluntourism trip, including mission trips and alternative spring breaks. The data was obtained via a series of one-on-one, in-depth post-trip interviews with program participants. After conducting interviews, the data was classified through Phillip Pearce's travel-needs theory to determine motivation. Through exploration of previous tourism literature, as well as psychological frameworks, the two research questions that were explored were: (1) would the majority of students fall under the self-esteem/development needs category of travelers?; and (2) were the interviewees dissuaded by the possible negative effects of voluntourism? The primary motivational rungs of relationship needs, self-esteem/development, and fulfillment were observed with participants generally falling under the self-esteem category.

## **Introduction**

Tourism is an industry that has shown continual growth year over year. In fact, in 2016 tourism made up over 10% of the world's gross domestic product (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). Because of its tremendous economic as well as psychological impact, tourism is now being recognized as a driving force of change for world economies (Meyer & Meyer, 2015). Tourism companies are starting to recognize that tourists, especially those in the millennial demographic, want to engage with the local country where they travel. These travelers want to give back, and are therefore moving away from traditional passive travel methods. Volunteer tourism is a new form of tourism that seeks to give travelers the chance to both engage and contribute to the communities they are visiting (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Stephen Wearing (2001) defines voluntourism as applying to:

Those tourists who volunteer in an organized way that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment (p. 1).

Wearing's parameters are widely regarded as the founding principles of voluntourism (See Wilson, 2015; Pan, 2014; Pegg, Patterson, & Matsumoto, 2012; Brown, 2005). Since voluntourism is a relatively young division of tourism, only actively formed in the 1960s, what motivates these travelers to embark on these trips is of interest to scholars and marketers alike. Major research in this field was established in the early 2000s, but the bulk of studies focused on older participants and did not analyze the possibility of negative impacts such as the perpetuation of stereotypes of the "other" and dependency on foreign aid (Pegg, Patterson, & Matsumoto, 2012). Scholars who use travel motivation theories to analyze voluntourists have historically

established a dichotomous mix of altruism and self-involvement as the primary motivators for engaging with these trips (Charlebois & Foller-Carroll, 2016; Weaver, 2015; Wearing & McGee, 2013).

This thesis utilizes Pearce's travel-needs theory as the basic lens to analyze the travel motivations of college students, a demographic that is only recently being studied in voluntourism literature. Interviews were conducted with 12 students currently attending college who have participated in a wide range of voluntourism programs internationally or domestically to determine their predominant travel motivations, including factors of altruism, religion, and self-interest. The interviews also covered their opinions of volunteer tourism after being told some of the negative aspects of voluntourism trips. This data, along with previous studies and information collected by motivational research, will help to determine the following research questions: (1) would the majority of students fall under the self-esteem/development needs category of travelers? and (2) were the interviewees dissuaded by the possible negative effects of voluntourism?

### **History of Voluntourism**

Voluntourism, in some shape or form, has existed for nearly as long as organized travel. Mentions of volunteering can be found in many historical sources, both religious and secular. Although oftentimes misguided in their analysis of what a country truly needed help with, religious missionaries have been aiding foreign countries since before the Middle Ages. Missionaries were primarily sent to spread their religious teachings, but the missionaries also helped build the infrastructure of the country and sometimes provided food and clothing to local citizens. Local volunteerism continued throughout the world during the 16th to 19th centuries,

creating volunteer programs such as the Red Cross, volunteer fire brigades, and much more local aid organizations (US Embassy, 2011).

Voluntourism became a more secular and global phenomenon during World War I. As the world was thrown into the turmoil of war, government and non-governmental organizations [NGOs] alike were formed to help support the war effort. One such organization was the British Red Cross, which formed the Voluntary Aid Detachments in 1909 to send volunteer nurses throughout Europe. After World War II, voluntourism had become a movement funded by the government with the creation of Australian Volunteers International in 1951. The American equivalent, the International Voluntary Services, was formed not long after, in 1953. Fueled by the move towards economic and social development, President Kennedy took the International Voluntary Services one step further by forming the Peace Corps in 1961 (Stowaway, 2016). In just six years, the Peace Corps developed volunteer projects in 55 countries and contracted 14,500 volunteers for a two-year service (“Peace Corps History”, n.d.). Inspired by this organization, the United Nations formed its own program for voluntourism by creating UN Volunteers in 1968 (Stowaway, 2016).

Before the 1980s, tourism was generally consumed en masse with popular trips, including bus tours, set itineraries and pre-paid meals (Wearing, 2001). Mass tourism can have devastating consequences to the host communities, as seen in the overtourism problems we currently see throughout the world. Overtourism is the phenomenon caused by an unsustainable influx of tourists to a destination that causes environmental as well as social problems in the host community (Geerts, 2017). For example, in Venice locals are protesting the environmental impact and local population decline that tourism has brought to their city. Local Venetians have been leaving the city at an alarming rate of 2,000 people each year as they are pushed out by

tourists. The city is also facing increasing floods because Venetian infrastructure was not designed for the millions of people that pass through every day (Giuffrida, 2017). Seeing the impact that tourists are having on Venice as well as many other foreign countries, mass tourism began to shift to a new form, often known as alternative tourism. Alternative tourism, along with sustainable and volunteer tourism, emerged as an attractive solution to the harm that was often caused by tourists. Alternative tourists go on more personalized trips that often go off the beaten path, make connections with locals, and may even make a physical impact like leaving a physical object from their volunteer work (Lyons & Wearing, 2008).

Today, this drive for volunteerism, for both short-term and long-term trips, has spread into the private sector. In 2008, an estimated 1.6 million travelers took volunteer tourism trips, spending between \$1.7–2.6 billion (Bailey & Russell, 2010). Now, voluntourism attracts people of all religions and backgrounds and is provided by both NGOs and private companies however, voluntourism is a largely European phenomenon (Wearing, 2013; Lyons & Wearing, 2008). In 2015, 55% of surveyed travelers reported donating time, money or supplies while traveling within the last two years and 64% of travelers felt giving back greatly contributed to trip satisfaction (Fadnis & Phocuswright, 2015). Tour operators catering specifically to voluntourists are providing trips domestically and abroad, and existing tour companies are adding voluntourism options (See G Adventures, 2017; EF Tours, 2017; Bridges to Community, n.d.).

Travelers can even find a wide variety of volunteer trips online in various areas of interest, including arts and culture, medical, environmental, elderly care, special needs care, sports, farming and many more (International Volunteer HQ, 2017). In 2012, the leading travel guide for volunteer tourism, *Volunteer Vacations: Short-term Adventures That Will Benefit You and Others*, listed over 150 organizations focused on volunteer travel (McMillon, Geissinger, &



Cutchins, 2012). Each tourist comes to these experiences with their own travel motivations and companies are catering to these changing needs.

### **Voluntourism Impacts**

Voluntourism as a subject of study first gained prominence in the early 2000s (Wearing, 2001). These early studies praised voluntourism as an ideal activity motivated from altruism and cited little to no negative impacts (Benson & Wearing, 2013). However, like any form of travel, voluntourism has positive as well as negative impacts to the host community as well as the traveler. The positive motivations for volunteer tourism are generally accepted to include altruism, self-development, giving back to the host community, participating in community development, and cultural understanding (Wearing & McGee, 2013). Bailey and Russell also conducted a conclusive case study following a volunteer-based alternative spring break program for college students and found that as a result of the trip, participants were more open to diversity, gained wisdom, and developed an increased civic attitude. Civic attitude is defined as “the belief that an individual can make a difference in the world and has the responsibility in giving back to the community” (2010, p. 360).

Another impact of voluntourism typically considered positive is the economic benefits to the host community. Although voluntourists typically spend less time at traditional tourist destinations than tourists on non-experience based trips, they are still positively impacting the economy by spending money on local restaurants, goods, and food (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011, p. 313). Voluntourists also help alleviate poverty and build infrastructure that is vitally needed in areas that may not have skilled workers in certain fields; this is known as resource mobilization. For example, doctors can volunteer in rural areas that are not generally accessible to the public

and can make a huge difference in the lives of the local inhabitants. In today's globalized world, it's easier than ever to share resources between countries such as crowdsourced funding on websites such as Kickstarter (Knollenberg, McGehee, Boley & Clemmons, 2014).

Although voluntourism may leave travelers feeling that they have made a huge impact on the host community, many skeptical scholars and journalists argue that voluntourism can do more harm than good. Daniel Guttentag summarized the negative impacts of volunteer tourism as the following: neglect of locals' desires; slowed work schedules and poor quality of completed work; decreased employment for locals and increased dependency on tourists; reinforced images of the other and rationalization of poverty; and host culture changes brought on by the demonstration effect (2009). Popular media outlets, from *The New York Times* to *The Guardian*, are bringing the negative impacts of voluntourism to light and warning tourists, who may have the best of intentions, that they may be unintentionally harming the host community (Kushner, 2016; Ferguson, 2016; Brown, 2003). Even public figures, such as JK Rowling, have condemned voluntourism as they believe that it often comes out of selfish motivation such as adding another bullet to your resume (Oppenheim, 2016). Unprepared and unskilled volunteers can be devastating to the local communities and can create undesirable products such as "orphanage tourism" where volunteers are actually funding children who have parents down the road. In this case, the children are being exploited for tourism money (Kushner, 2016).

Another negative impact of volunteer tourism is that misguided volunteer trips often cater to the needs of the tourists instead of the needs of the host community. If the tourists are looking to get their hands dirty, they may volunteer to build houses and receive little to no training to do so. And in some cases, houses may not be needed in that area at all (Ferguson, 2016). Without going through the appropriate governmental agencies and consulting the community that they are

working with, volunteer tourists can leave with a false sense of accomplishment and the host community members may not be any better off (Wearing, 2012).

Voluntourism has also been said to perpetuate negative stereotypes of cultural “others” and continue privilege. Volunteer tourism tends to focus on less developed locales whereas traditional tourism mainly occurs in more established tourist destinations, perpetuating negative stereotypes of these destinations (Benson & Wearing, 2013). When marketing voluntourism products, companies can perpetuate hurtful precolonial tropes that any non-Western culture views as mysterious, backwards, and in need of Western help (Caton & Santos, 2009; Guttentag, 2009). Caton and Santos found that the Semester at Sea program in 2006, although heralding non-profit status and a stated mission of “advancing cross-cultural understanding and respect and fostering in participants an attitude of caring and commitment to all the world’s people,” actually exotify non-Western cultures as backwards and in need of Western technologies (2009). Voluntourism can also perpetuate classism since the vast majority of those participating in volunteer trips have a privileged status compared to where they are volunteering (Lyons, Hanley, Wearing & Neil, 2011). Although some companies may have the best intentions, Wearing and Benson opined that the best way to go about volunteer services abroad is to take into account the local government and what the community needs while involving local people in the process (2012).

## Motivation Theories

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In 1940, Abraham Maslow developed his hierarchy of human needs consisting of physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and finally self-actualization (1987). Before the 1940s, it was believed that humans were motivated only by basic urges, and little thought was put into why people make specific decisions with their lives. Abraham Maslow questioned this notion and instead believed that humans operate on what fulfills real or perceived needs, or motivations. Maslow proposed that motivation can be classified in the form of a pyramid where each section needed to be satisfied in order for the person to advance to the higher rung of motivation (Figure 1). Therefore, people who do not have access to basic safety measures such as shelter will be unable to be motivated by esteem or self-respect.

**Figure 1.** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1987)



Maslow's hierarchy has been used as a simplistic lens to analyze a wide variety of human behaviors including personality, leadership, reward systems and how people satisfy their needs through traveling (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011). Maslow's hierarchy has been mapped to tourism needs such as Šimková's study mapping gastronomy trips satisfying physiological needs (2013). This theory also inspired adaptation for many different fields of study so that businesses and researchers could understand motivations in their field of study. Philip Pearce, for example, was inspired by Maslow to create a hierarchy specifically aimed at understanding tourism motivations (2005).

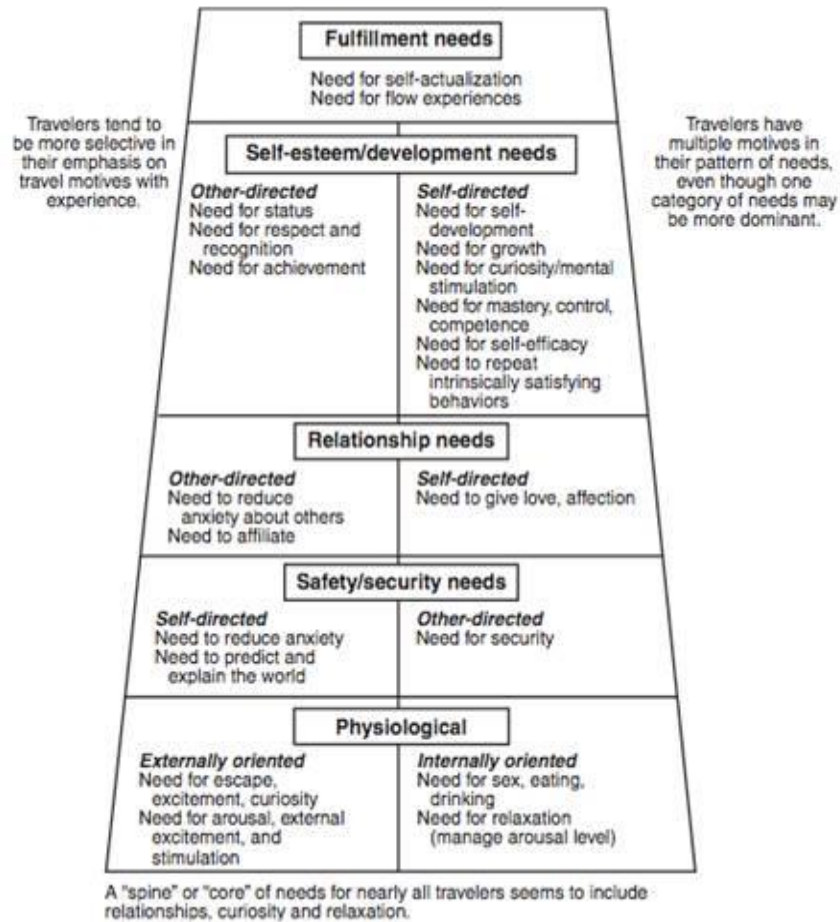
### **Pearce's Travel-Needs Theory**

Pearce's travel-needs theory is the theoretical foundation that guides the purpose of this study. Seeing the need for a motivational theory to analyze tourists, Philip Pearce developed his travel-needs theory, also known as the travel career pattern, which classifies travelers' motivations as progressing similarly to that of a work career. Pearce created this theory to avoid "the sin of homogenization" showing that not all tourists are alike (2005, p. 5). This theory explains that travelers may seek out the same destination for vastly different reasons, and will explore the activities in that destination that best fit their motivational profile (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011). The travel-needs theory was formed from over 25 years of research in the field and is modeled after Maslow's hierarchy.

Pearce is one of the most highly regarded researchers in the field of tourism motivation psychology and his book *The Social Psychology of Tourist Behavior* is the standard for most modern travel motivational studies. Just as a person can start at different levels of their career, Pearce proposes that travel motivations follow this model, and people are likely to change their

levels during their life, including moving backwards. Pearce postulates that Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often oversimplified, and that Maslow's theory is seen as a ladder of steps that aren't layered. Instead of the hierarchy found in Maslow's model, the travel-needs theory takes on a career pattern model with overlapping levels to explain the motivation for a wide range of travelers (Pearce, 2005).

Travelers will often have motivations in a wide range of categories, but the layer with the most corresponding characteristics will reflect the dominant motive of the traveler. Pearce expanded Maslow's hierarchy of needs by dividing each section into self-directed and other-directed motives (Figure 2). The first layer of Pearce's model is relaxation or physiological motivation, which encompasses the external needs for escape, excitement, and stimulation and the internal need for sex, food, and relaxation, which relates to Maslow's first rung. The second layer is stimulation, which includes the other-directed need for security and the self-directed needs to reduce anxiety and explain the world. His final rungs encompass relationships, self-esteem/development and finally fulfillment or self-actualization (Pearce, 2005). Travelers who seek these types of trips to fulfill these needs have been mapped to explain a wide range of travel motivations (Lee & Yen, 2015; Williams & McNeil, 2011).

**Figure 2.** Pearce's Travel-Needs Theory (2005)

## Literature Review

Drawing upon methods developed by Abraham Maslow and Philip Pearce, many tourism scholars have begun to conduct studies to analyze travel motivations for many different market segments. Stephen Wearing is the seminal researcher in the field of voluntourism. His many books and studies, including *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences That Make a Difference*, are referenced in most peer-reviewed articles on voluntourism. In his earliest study, conducted in 2001, he collected interviews from 11 Australian volunteer tourists, majority aged 21-22, who

volunteered in Costa Rica. From those interviews, Wearing identified seven basic motivations for volunteer travel: altruism, travel and adventure, personal growth, cultural exchange and learning, professional development, right time and place, and the individual program itself. Each of these motivations falls under a different level on Pearce's travel-motivation study and represent a complex level of motivations. These primary findings are the basis for nearly all volunteer tourism literature analyzing tourist motivations (2001).

Although the voluntourism segment is a relatively new field of study, as compared to traditional tourism, there are some other seminal studies that have been conducted throughout the world, although they are primarily focused in Australia. Following Wearing's 2001 study, Pegg, Patterson, and Matsumoto conducted semi-structured interviews and observations for participants on one specific nature-focused voluntourism trip in Queensland, Australia. The study concluded that the three main motivators were (a) the desire to meet new people while traveling, (b) experiencing a unique natural environment or geographical location where few tourists had previously visited, and (c) a desire to engage in an alternative tourism opportunity to what had been previously experienced (2012).

Another voluntourism study conducted in Australia analyzed 804 domestic travelers from a wide range of ages and focused on their motivations and barriers to volunteer at two of Australia's Gold Coast National Parks. Research was conducted through self-evaluative surveys and included both voluntourists and domestic volunteers. The study author, David Weaver, concluded that a mix of altruistic means, such as "making a difference," were just as motivating as self-interests such as having fun and socializing in the surveyed groups that chose to volunteer (2015).



Motivational studies also expanded from outside of Australia into Canada, where Charlebois and Foller-Carroll conducted research on study abroad programs that included volunteer tourism aspects for college students who attended Humber College. They confirmed previous research suggesting that altruistic motives such as “I enjoy being of service to others” and “knowing I have contributed to something larger” were important motivators for volunteer tourists. They also found that altruistic motives ranked higher than self-interested motives. However, the second predominant motivation for college students to volunteer abroad was career-related (2016).

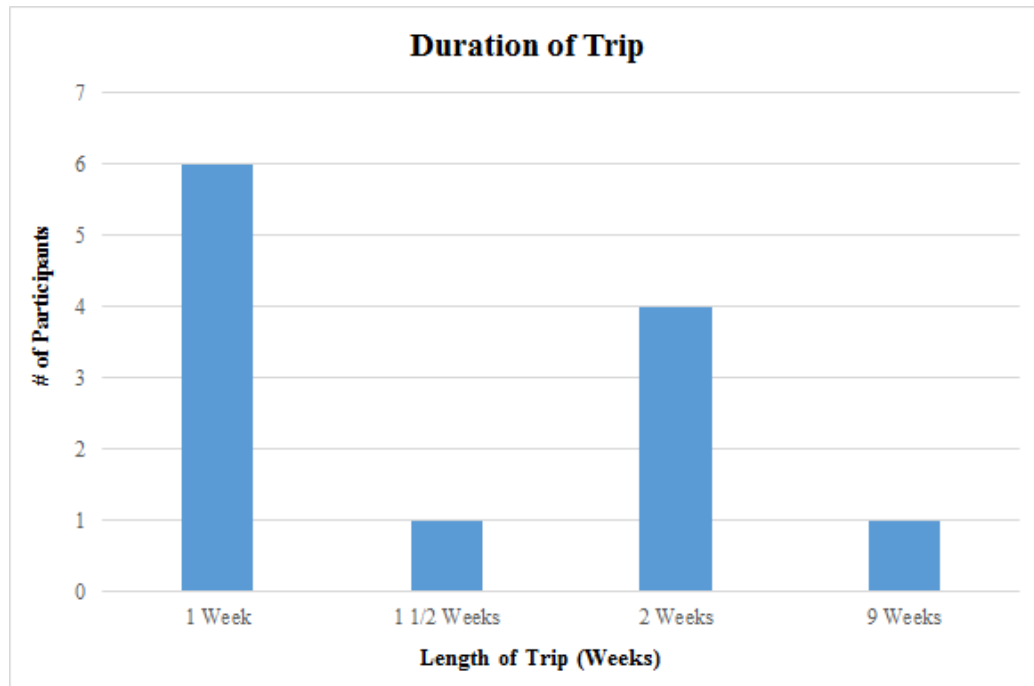
Most studies found in current volunteerism literature focus on the motivations of voluntourists from one volunteer trip and are often conducted by facilitators who are employed by the organization that they have surveyed. Since these researchers were involved in the success of their test subjects and the growth of the voluntourism business, these studies often biased towards positive outcomes (Wilson, 2015; Pegg, Patterson, & Matsumoto, 2012).

## **Primary Research**

### **Methodology**

This research aims to address the wide range of motivations of college students participating in volunteer tourism trips. A qualitative research methodology was chosen in this study instead of a quantitative approach, such as structured survey, to allow for personalized responses of volunteers (See Charlebois & Foller-Carroll, 2016; Lee & Yen, 2015; Andereck, McGehee, Lee, & Clemmons, 2012). In order to capture the post-trip experiences of each traveler, primary research was obtained through 12 semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Participants are aged 19 through 22 and are currently attending eight different private and public universities in the United States. This methodology is similar to that of prior research on the nature of volunteer tourists' experiences (Pan, 2014; Pegg, Patterson, & Matsumoto, 2012; Wearing, 2001).

The participants consisted of students from a wide range of backgrounds, universities and volunteer trips (Table 1). Students went on religion-focused, education-driven, and leisure volunteer trips. They also took trips ranging in length as short as one week and as long as over a month (Graph 1). While one interviewee volunteered for nine weeks in Kenya and reported spending 90% of her trip volunteering, another reported only spending one half-day volunteering out of a week-long trip. However, all participants classified their trips as volunteer-focused. Three participants had been on multiple volunteer-focused vacations whereas this was their first time on a volunteer trip for the 9 other participants. The majority of respondents were women [75%], which is consistent with the demographics of current volunteer tourists and my personal network (Andereck, McGehee, Lee, & Clemmons, 2012). All participants remarked that they had traveled in leisure capacities before embarking on this trip and 75% had traveled outside of the United States prior to participating in their volunteer trip.

**Graph 1.** Duration of Participants' Trips

I obtained participants using two different methods. First, I called for interviews on my personal Facebook page with a request for college-aged students who had been on volunteer-based trips such as missions, alternative spring breaks, or other vacations where they gave back to the communities with which they traveled. I also purposely surveyed known students at Johnson & Wales University who had completed volunteer-based trips and the campus-run alternative spring break trip in particular.

A convenient time was established. Interviews were conducted on a wide variety of sources over a month's time once contact information was obtained for each interviewee. Three interviews were conducted over FaceTime video software, three interviews were conducted over Facebook video, two were conducted over Skype video, and four interviews took place in

person. Interviewees were asked 11 standard open-ended questions (Appendix A) with follow-up questions asked to further expand upon their experiences. All interviews were conducted in a quiet space without distraction and varied in length from 16 to 40 minutes based on how willing the participant was to answer questions.

Post-interview, the website VoiceBase was used for the primary transcription of audio into text, and I edited the computer-generated content manually for accuracy. I then analyzed the data using the inductive content analysis method (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) to find common themes, a method common in analyzing motivational studies (Pan, 2014). This method first involved preparing data by transcribing each interview and coding common themes. Then data was analyzed by reading the interview transcripts multiple times asking key questions such as “what is happening?” The final process in inductive content analysis is to organize the data into categories. I classified my data by keywords that occurred in multiple interviews like friendship, career building, and religion. I then placed each keyword in its overarching motivational category of relationship, self-esteem/development, and fulfillment (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Demographic information was obtained through a questionnaire filled out by the participants prior to the interview (Appendix A).

**Table 1.** Demographic information of study respondents

	Age	Gender	Religion	University	Destination	Organization	# of Volunteer Trips
<b>Interview #1</b>	19	Female	Jewish	Private University	Brooklyn, NYC	Hillel International	1
<b>Interview #2</b>	20	Female	Christian	Private University	Cangrejo, DR	Mustard Seed Communities	1
<b>Interview #3</b>	20	Female	Non specified	Private University	New Jersey, Maryland/Washington D.C., South Africa	Various (Americorps, Boys & Girls Club)	3
<b>Interview #4</b>	20	Male	Non specified	Private University	New Jersey, Maryland/Washington D.C., South Africa	Various (Americorps, Boys & Girls Club)	3
<b>Interview #5</b>	22	Male	Christian	Public University	Long Island, NY	Next Step Ministries	1
<b>Interview #6</b>	19	Female	Non specified	Private University	Brooklyn, NYC	Hillel International	1
<b>Interview #7</b>	19	Female	Non specified	Private University	Brooklyn, NYC	Hillel International	1
<b>Interview #8</b>	21	Female	Christian	Public University	Panama and Trinidad	American Field Service	4
<b>Interview #9</b>	21	Male	Christian	Private University	New York City	CRU	1
<b>Interview #10</b>	21	Female	Christian	Public University	Nairobi, Kenya	Empower A Child	1
<b>Interview #11</b>	20	Female	Jewish	Private University	Lisbon, Portugal	International Volunteer HQ	1
<b>Interview #12</b>	21	Female	Jewish	Private University	Krakow, Poland	BBYO	1

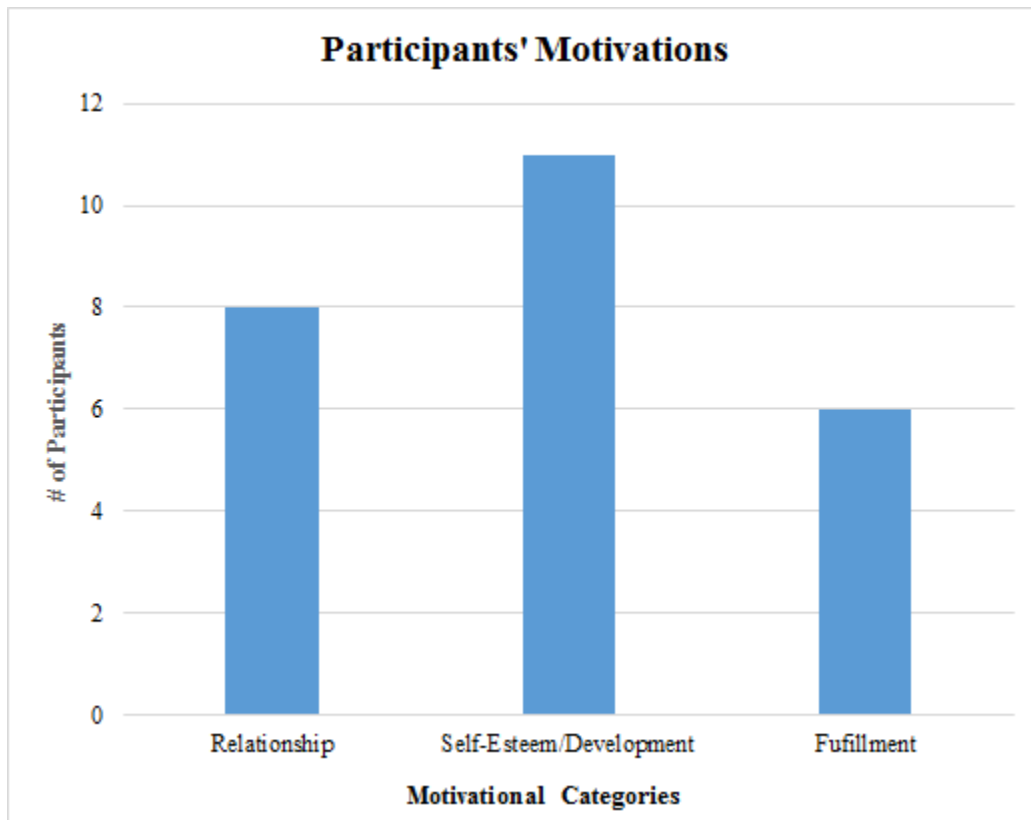
## **Findings**

Each respondent had a wide category of motivations for participating in a volunteer trip, but all participants fell into a range of three primary motivational categories (Graph 2).

According to previous research, the main motivators for volunteer tourism are altruism and self-development, which fall under the self-esteem/development and fulfillment categories

(Charlebois & Foller-Carroll, 2016; Weaver, 2015; Wearing & McGee, 2013). Consistent with these findings, interview participants can be divided into the following categories in Pearce’s Travel Career Model: (a) relationship needs (b) self-esteem/development but also (c) fulfillment needs were shown. Participants were also asked to remark on how the negative impacts of volunteer tourism affected their opinions.

**Graph 2.** Participant’s Motivations



Participants volunteered with religious and non-religious organizations with different predicted outcomes and mission statements. Eight of these students went on volunteer trips with organizations that had a religious affiliation. Participant 1, 6 and 7 went on a trip with their university's branch of the non-profit Hillel International. Hillel International is the "world's largest Jewish campus organization" founded in 1923 with the goal of conveying Jewish values to a younger generation ("History", 2017). The voluntourism branch of their organization is called Tzedek, the Hebrew word for social justice, and their website boasts that "college students want to change the world." Students from campuses across the United States participate in their Alternative Spring programs with the goal of helping "students explore the intersection of universal and individual values" (Hillel International, 2017). Funding for these programs are provided by the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, which is a Jewish foundation focused on funding non-profits, and Repair the World as well as personal donations (Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, 2017).

Similarly to Hillel International, Participant 9 volunteered with CRU, or the Campus Crusade for Christ International, another faith-based non-profit organization focused on college campuses. However, CRU also has campus ministry involvement on the high school level ("What We Do", Campus Crusade for Christ International [CRU], 2017). CRU's tourism branch provides short-term mission trips for high school as well as college students from 1-12 weeks in length and study abroad opportunities for college students. CRU organizes faith-based voluntourism as well as traditional tourism trips such as Athletes in Action which brings together Christian athletes to explore a locale and strengthen their faith. The vision of these volunteer trips varies from each location, "Some trips focus on reaching individuals with the good news of

Christ either on college campuses or in beach and resort communities, while others minister to people of specific ethnic or economic backgrounds” (“Upcoming CRU Mission Trips”, 2017). They promise that when students take these trips they will “help make a huge impact in the lives of a person close to home or far away in a completely different culture or among people who still haven’t heard the name of Jesus” (“Upcoming CRU Mission Trips”, 2017).

Participant 12 went on her voluntourism trip with the non-profit BBYO, another Jewish organization that engages with youth participants but, unlike Hillel International, focuses on teens. Their mission is “more Jewish teens, more meaningful Jewish experiences” and their voluntourism branch is called BBYO Passport and states that they are “the leading provider of travel experiences for Jewish high school and middle school teens” (“Who We Are”, 2017). Their founding principles are community, Jewish life, cultural understanding, personal growth, role modeling, safety and fun (BBYO, 2017).

Participant 2 went with the non-profit Mustard Seed Communities whose mission is:

Inspired by the healing and caring Ministry of Jesus Christ, we aim through the positive interaction of caring, sharing and training, to uplift the most vulnerable members of society, especially disabled and abandoned children, and marginalized communities. We are committed to the fostering of homes and communities, which will lead us all too loving service and mutual respect and which will bring us joy, hope and dignity.

Mustard Seed Communities is based out of the United States and provides mission trips to Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica where volunteers assist abandoned children with special needs and partners with universities primarily in New England such as Salve



Regina, University of Rhode Island and Boston College as well as other groups such as alumni organizations, high schools, and corporate groups. (Mustard Seed Communities, 2017).

Participant 5 volunteered with the non-profit organization Next Step Ministries which is founded with the mission “to provide opportunities for students to explore their faith, experience God, and extend service to others, all in the name of Jesus Christ” (“About Us”, n.d.). In 2013 they acknowledge that their organization was so caught up in their rapid growth that their volunteer trips were not doing as much good for their communities. Their website states that the organization was troubled when they learned the negative impacts of volunteering, but they are inspired to create a space where the beauty and power of short-term trips can connect to real sustainable community development” (“History”, n.d.). The organization hosts one-week faith-based domestic and international missions for youth participants from middle school to college-aged students. Volunteer work is conducted during the day and evenings are devoted to Christian-based learning (“Mission Trips”, n.d.).

Participant 10 went on her mission trip with the non-profit Empower a Child which is based in Uganda and organizes short term [1 week-5 months] and long-term mission trips (5 months to 2 years) for individuals and groups in Uganda and Kenya. The vision of Empower a Child is “to bring confidence and self-sustainability to orphaned and vulnerable children of East Africa by teaching modern skills, giving the opportunity of education, and enlightening through the word of God.” Empower a Child stresses the positives of volunteering abroad saying “your life and heart will be impacted no matter how short or long your trip. Not only that, you will also be making a positive impact on almost every child that you encounter” (Empower a Child, 2017).

Four participants volunteered with non-faith based organizations. Participants 3 and 4 volunteered with various organizations on their Alternative Spring Break trips sponsored by their university, with guidance from the non-profit organization Break Away. Break Away provides training for Universities to sponsor “quality alternative spring break programs” (“About Us”, n.d.). The Break Away program is a non-religious program that emphasizes “active citizenship” where assisting in communities becomes a long-term priority in the student’s life. They achieve this through 8 points: strong direct services, full engagement, diversity and social justice, orientation, education, training, reflection, and reorientation (“Eight Components of a Quality Spring Break, n.d.).

Participant 8 volunteered with the secular organization American Field Service. American Field Service is a non-profit organization that hosts international academic and volunteer programs for high schoolers and college students. An outcome that they hope to achieve is “making a difference in the world begins with understanding your place in it” by having programs that are led by local community members. Graduates of their program are supposed to be able to “gain new maturity and independence, and develop a better understanding of what their passions and long-term goals are” (American Field Service, n.d.).

Finally, Participant 11 found her volunteer site through the non-faith based International Volunteer HQ [IVHQ]. IVHQ’s mission is “to change the face of volunteer travel” and they hope to do so by providing affordable, responsible, safe and high-quality volunteer trips (International Volunteer HQ, n.d.). They match volunteers with trips in 35 overseas destinations and cater to all age groups, although most photos on their website showcase youth volunteers, and trips can range in duration from one week to 6 months. IVHQ is certified by B Corporations as a company which has minimal impact on the environment (B Lab, 2017). They believe “in a future where

any traveler, anywhere in the world is empowered to make a meaningful difference in the community they are visiting” (International Volunteer HQ, n.d.).

### ***Relationship Needs***

Pearce’s category of motivation for relationship needs is subdivided into the “self-directed” needs to affiliate and to reduce anxiety and the other-directed need to give love and affection. Previous research by Brown has found that seeking camaraderie is a common motivation for volunteer tourists, although the average sample age in her study was 40+ years, much older than this study, where the average age is 20 (2005). Weaver also found that relationship needs were important motivating factors for volunteer tourism trips (2015). Eight respondents expressed motivations that fell under this category (Graph 2). Friendships and the need to affiliate were cited by 5 interviewees as their primary motivation for traveling as well as an important part of their favorite memories of the trip. Interviewee 11 responded that her favorite memory of the trip was when she stayed in a hostel with other volunteers. “I really loved hanging out with them and exploring the city,” she said. Similarly, when asked if she changed as a person after taking her volunteer trip, Respondent 1 said:

I definitely have a bigger understanding of other cultures in relationship to Judaism... I think a lot of bits and pieces from different conversations I think I'll carry with me, but in terms of like do I feel more connected to service or anything like that like, probably not. Which is unfortunate, but I'm really grateful for the experience.

Other participants went on trips with their friends and gained new ones along the way. Respondent 9 traveled with a campus-run organization and went on his volunteer trip with the

express intention of making friends within the organization. His favorite part of the trip was also “being able to know other people within the organization that I didn’t know before.” Interviewee 5 was persuaded to go on his volunteer trip by his friend who didn’t want to go alone.

Participant 2, who volunteered with special needs kids, found affiliation and friendship with the children that she was there to assist. Her favorite memory was “over the week developing the relationship with them and enjoying the time just sitting there hanging out with them. There was just one little kid that would grab your hand like put it on their face and put it on their heart.”

Respondent 4 was unique, as her need to affiliate was not motivated by friendship alone, but through family and the need to give love and affection. She expressed this sentiment as follows:

I really got into them [volunteer trips] because my older sister did a lot of volunteer work and alternative spring breaks when she was in college and now my little sister is actually continuing on the tradition. She just went on hers down in Louisiana. It's just we grew up just learning to help others and learn about other cultures and embrace other cultures and differences, how there are so many people in the world who aren't, as my mom always called us, "blessed" as us. So we always just kind of learned to give back, that influence from my older sister because she did a trip every year while she was in college down in West Virginia. That kind of just fell on me, and then when I found out my university had one, I really wanted to go on it. I think it does align with my values. It is just how I grew up.

Although relationships like friendship and family were the primary motivators, they weren't the only thing that motivated participants to volunteer. College is seen as a time for self-discovery and voluntourism trips are seen as a way to facilitate this learning.

### ***Self-Esteem/Development***

Similar to previous voluntourism studies (Weaver, 2015; Wearing, 2001), I found self-esteem and development are the primary motivators for college students to participate in volunteer-focused vacations. Under the self-esteem/development parameters, the primary motivators are the need for self-development and self-growth, mastery, and other-directed needs of status, respect and recognition.

Participants were asked to discuss if they felt if they had changed as a person as a result of their volunteer tourism trips (Appendix A). Participants 3 and 4 attended the same three volunteer-focused trips with their university. Both of them believe that they have personally grown from each volunteer trip that they have participated in. Participant 3 said that he believes he hasn't changed as a person but instead each trip "changes how I react and what my mindset is like. After each trip I am able to see me and get more inspired." Participant 4 believes she has grown with each trip and is "no longer the freshman that I used to be."

From when I started these programs until now, I have grown so much in terms of appreciating what I have, and appreciating how other people live. My big revelation, and now that I've thought about it in the past two trips. It's not that we are any better than them, or they are any better than us, or they are better off or we are better off. It has nothing to do with that, it's just they are all different ways of life... I have come to appreciate other people's cultures, the way other people live, to understand more that maybe they are in this situation because of this, because of

that. So you really just have to learn to read in between the lines and not just be like, "Oh that family's poor." Well, why are they poor? What has caused them to reach poverty? So I have definitely grown in that sense, just appreciating more what I have and appreciating other cultures. I've just learned so much about this, grown and become more mature. I have gained a better understanding of the world and how we are all connected, how we need to serve each other because it brings us all together and connects us.

A common sentiment expressed by Participants 2, 3, 4, 8, 11 and 12 is that going on volunteer trips have made them more appreciative of their privilege in comparison to the communities in which they volunteered. Privilege and appreciation are common themes expressed in previous volunteer tourism studies as well (Caton & Santos, 2009; Guttentag, 2009). Participant 2 expressed what she took away from the trip to volunteer with special needs kids:

I think my biggest takeaway was just finding joys in the simplest of things. The kids that are there, that's their whole lives - they never failed to smile or find the best in each day. I think that was one of the best things was just learning that you don't need everything else, you don't need technology or everything else in your life, you can find happiness in small things.

When deciding on how to allocate their vacation time, participants often stated that they chose volunteer trips because they were more fulfilling and meaningful than traditional vacations or relaxing at home. Participant 8 has been on many volunteer trips throughout her life and even before coming to college, experienced a phenomenon described as "increased civic attitude"

(Bailey & Russell, 2010). She feels that volunteering makes her a “good part of the community and a good human being” and instead of changing because of her trips she feels that:

I started doing these at a time in high school where it's a time when I am figuring out where I am. When I started going on these trips, I was in that ambiguous stage of who am I, what do I want to be. So instead of changing me, I think they shaped me. I know I like to volunteer, travel, be outgoing, try new things, be friendly, and meet new people. But they have definitely helped me be more outgoing and understanding, there have been so many places that I have been too and they have a unique style of communicating and doing things and how they act with people they know, people they don't know. It has definitely helped me be more independent talking to people I don't know. I have also become more open-minded, patient and understanding. I am always that friend who plays devil's advocate, like have we thought about this, have they thought about that. It has shaped me to be a more versatile human.

On the other hand, the other three surveyed participants did not think they experienced any personal growth because of their volunteer trips. Participant 7 felt that she was most changed immediately after the trip, but that the impact has faded since reflecting on the trip only three weeks after returning.

Trips abroad, especially experientially focused trips, are also often opportunities for self-reflection and growth (Pan, 2014). Participants in this study understood the impact that these trips can have and sought recognition of the knowledge that they gained on these trips. This outcome confirms previous studies of college-aged participants on volunteer trips who sought to improve their resumes while volunteering (Charlebois & Foller-Carroll, 2016; Smith, Cohen, &

Pickett, 2014). Seven of the 12 study participants indicated that they in some way reflected this experience on their resume or talked about volunteering in job interviews. Participant 1 was a leader of her volunteer trip and included her participation on her resume for a volunteer-based fellowship even before going on the trip. She remarked that “it's definitely on my resume because I'm sure it probably will look really good and there's a lot of good stuff that I can talk about.” Participant 2 also listed her volunteer trip as job-related experience to apply for an internship at the tour management company that ran her volunteer trip.

Many participants also chose volunteer trips that closely related to their college majors or had applicable skills which they reflected on their resumes. Three students (Participants 3, 10 and 11) are interested in going into a tourism-related field of study, so this is a valuable experience to reflect on their resumes. Participant 11 remarked that she:

Got a certificate from volunteering abroad, which I have hung up on my wall at home. I do include it on my resume, especially since it relates to my major, Travel-Tourism and Hospitality Management. It also relates to my internship as well, which is a company that creates and gives tours to middle and high school students.

These results are similar to Foller-Carroll and Charlebois' findings that tourism-related majors found that voluntourism trips reflected positively on their resumes (2016). Four of the survey participants participated in university-sponsored programs with faculty from the university and paired the volunteer trip with the need for mastery and knowledge. Participant 8 chose her college volunteer trips based on skills that related to her major of biology and took classes on reforestation while abroad, working on putting those skills in practice by volunteering.



Not all interviewees demonstrated self-development motivations, some even connected their voluntourism experiences to a higher cause of fulfillment.

### ***Fulfillment***

Fulfillment, or the self-actualization rung on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and fulfillment in Pearce's travel-needs theory are considered the highest form of achievement. This level of motivation is only available when all other needs are met (Pearce, 2005; Maslow, 1987). Volunteering has been viewed as a way to experience the fulfillment of a higher non-personal cause and has been related to true altruism (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Six participants discussed their motivation for fulfillment on their volunteer trips (Graph 2).

Religion is a way that many people structure their life in search of a higher cause, and religious belief has been linked as one of the ways that people can achieve self-actualization, although it has not been proven that it is the only way (Kamath & Ashok, 2015). Religion was a major factor in choosing volunteer trips, and more than two-thirds of the study participants went on a trip sponsored by a group with religious affiliations (See BBYO, 2017; CRU, 2017; Mustard Seed Communities, 2017; Hillel International, 2017; Empower a Child, 2017; Next Step Ministries, n.d.). Participant 5 went on a faith-based trip and remarked that "when you are looking in the eyes of Jesus, it changes the way that you see the world" and that his volunteer trip to New York repairing houses was for a higher cause. Echoing that sentiment, Participant 9 also was motivated to "show the love of Christ" by being of service and stating that he went on the trip without selfish motivations such as the need for publicity or to look good for other people. Participant 10 also went with a Christian-based organization, Empower a Child, where she worked with an orphanage in Kenyan slums and taught them about the Bible:

When I was a junior in high school, I had really prayed where God wanted me to volunteer. I knew that he was calling me to some sort of mission work, I just didn't know where. And in college, it became clear that he wanted me to go to Kenya and this was my opportunity to renew my faith.

Participant 1 and 12 were also motivated to go on their service based trips because of a similar call to action but from their Jewish faith instead of Christianity. Participant 1 said she was called on the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur, which celebrates the Jewish Day of Atonement and it is custom to set goals for self-improvement:

On Yom Kippur, which happens in September or October, I realized that most of the work that I had done on campus for the first semester was all for myself, and that like didn't feel good. Because back home I used to volunteer all the time, and I realized that since being in college and not being in the situation where I really had to volunteer, I just didn't, and I had gotten really caught up in the campus bubble. So I made a resolution that for that second semester I wanted to be volunteering and get more involved in the community and give back because like I know what it's like to be on the other side of that line of poverty... So this trip was one of the ways that I got back into volunteering and doing stuff that affects people just outside of me.

Participants 1, 6 and 7 all went on the same trip to New York City with their university, but the three students had completely different interpretations of the role faith played on the trip. Participant 1 was the only follower of the faith of the sponsoring institution, Hillel International. Participant 7 remarked that "the Jewish discussion was my favorite part of the trip. I want to be a

religion minor, so it was very interesting to learn about that.” Although all three participants were on the same volunteer trip, while Participant 1 was motivated by the fulfillment of her faith, Participants 6 and 7 motivations were primarily in development. Participant 6 said that she was not motivated by religion at all and didn’t remember any of the Jewish discussion that took place.

### *Negative Effects of Tourism*

Although volunteer tourism can sometimes be seen as all positive, there are negative impacts to the communities as well. The interviewees were asked to remark on their feelings about the reported negative effects of tourism, and they had a broad range of responses (Appendix A). The following quote from The New York Times was provided for context on the argument: “Unless you’re willing to devote your career to studying international affairs and public policy, researching the mistakes that foreign charities have made while acting upon good intentions, and identifying approaches to development that have data and hard evidence behind them — perhaps volunteering abroad is not for you.” (Kushner, 2016). Three participants agreed with this statement, six people disagreed and three people were undecided about Jacob Kushner’s stance on volunteer tourism.

The largest number of respondents disagree with Kushner’s stance on volunteer tourism that the negatives outweigh the small number of positive effects of volunteer tourism. Interviewee 5 disagreed with Kushner, saying that “you should be aware and not try to do bad, but that shouldn’t stop you from volunteering your time.” Another respondent argued that if you are purely looking at the monetary impact you make, voluntourists should just send their money

directly to the host country, but to her volunteer tourism “isn’t always about money, it is about hope.”

A common response to this question was that it depends on the participants’ motivation/mindset and whether the volunteer work was a negative or positive experience. Interviewee 11 responded that “if the person has the right mindset, then I think it will only be a positive experience.” Interviewees 3, 4 and 8 agreed with this statement, saying that if the volunteer was motivated by building their resume or just used the trip as a vehicle to sightsee, then the volunteer impact would be negative. Interviewee 3 said the following about those volunteers who apply to her university’s volunteer trips with improper motivations:

Students who have applied for these trips, like in South Africa, “I want to see a lion or I want to go on a safari.” And that is not the point of the trip at all... there are people who volunteer just simply to go to that destination. They don't understand what it's about or the work that they are going to be doing. It's a really tough issue but it angers me, because there is a point to this and there is a point to service. So it angers me when people abuse it.

## **Discussion**

### **Discussion**

In general, this study supported the conclusions of previous literature that voluntourists are motivated by both altruism and personal development (Charlebois & Foller-Carroll, 2016; Weaver, 2015; Wearing & McGee, 2013). When considering vacation options, participants often sought volunteer tourism because their alternatives were limited by time, distance or funds. Participants 1, 6, and 7 said that their trip was heavily discounted which contributed to their motivation for going on the Alternative Spring Break. Although ideally all voluntourist trips are motivated by pure altruism as indicated by early voluntourism studies (Brown, 2003; Wearing, 2001), this study shows that this is simply not the case among the surveyed participants.

It seems that it really is true what Hillel International boasts on their voluntourism webpage, that “college students want to change the world”; however, they are motivated by other aspects as well (“Tzedek”, 2017). College is often a time where students are looking to grow professionally and personally, and participants recognized that volunteer trips can provide both of these benefits. Voluntourism trips expand student’s networks and provided resume building opportunities. Participants 3, 10 and 11 all studied the field of tourism and their voluntourism trip provided them an opportunity to experience tourism products first-hand, which they reflected in their resumes and spoke about them in job interviews. The results of my study contribute to a deeper understanding of college students’ motives to participate in volunteer tourism trips and add to volunteer tourism literature.

This study is unique because participants went on volunteer focused trips with a broad range of providers. Many of the college student’s reflected motivations that were projected in the mission statements of their trip organizers missions. For example, Participant 10 reflected on the

power of God and Jesus which called her to her voluntourism trip, something Empower a Child states will happen on their site (Empower a Child, 2017). Participants 3 and 4 also reflected the ideal outcomes stated by their organization. They both stated that because of the impact of their volunteer trips, volunteerism is a lifelong pursuit (Break Away, n.d.).

I also found that the trip organizers websites often minimize the potential negative impacts that voluntourism can provide. For example, Empower a Child states that “you will also be making a positive impact on almost every child that you encounter”, a claim that no volunteer trip can possibly substantiate (2017). On the other hand, Next Step Ministries admitted the negative impacts of volunteer tourism. In 2013 they were not doing as much good for their communities because they were caught up in the rise of their company. They understood that they weren’t working close enough with their host communities and restructured to do greater good.

Once reminded and/or made aware of the negative effects of tourism, interviewees had strong opinions for or against this form of travel, but, more interestingly, proposed ways that they can mitigate the negative effects in the future by implementing training or interviews to determine motivation before volunteers go on their trips. They also said that taking longer trips and having other groups take over to complete service projects once one group has left the country will continue the work of short-term volunteers.

Findings from this study can assist universities in putting together voluntourism programs that satisfy the needs of a wide range of college students. It can also assist tourism marketing organizations to understand the underlying motivations for voluntourism participants. Marketing the positive effects of volunteer tourism trips such as personal and professional growth would be more likely to attract college students looking to give back.

### **Possible Limitations**

Despite its contributions, this study has various limitations. In order to find more conclusive results, a study would need to be conducted with a larger number of interviews to increase the sample size. This study focuses on one-on-one interviews and did not have a control group of college students who did not participate in volunteer tourism trips during their college careers. Another limitation was the range of institutions and volunteer organizations. Further research should be conducted with participants from colleges across the United States for more conclusive results. This study, like all interview based research, was also affected by memory distortion as many participants were removed by a year or more from their volunteer experiences. This time lapse may cause participants to forget experiences from their trips or distort their motivations based on opinions of peers or other sources. Participants were also self-selected, so the results may be skewed by those who have strong opinions of their volunteer trips.

Also, all participants were also obtained through my personal connections, so results are skewed in favor of those who may have had similar upbringings and interests as the person analyzing the results. Although I did not have a previous relationship with many of the participants, 3 participants are close friends which could have changed my personal reaction to their responses. Finally, my post-interview analysis can also be influenced by my personal viewpoint. Qualitative research coding is highly subjective and “disciplinary background and interest in particular will exert a deep influence on analytic coding” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 151).

### **Future Research Directions**

Future longitudinal research is required for conclusive results about the motivations of college students with regard to voluntourism. This study focused on post-trip reflections, but more comprehensive research is required regarding pre-trip motivations as well as the motivations of college students who are prospective volunteer tourists but may not have decided on a trip and those who decided not to participate. As volunteer tourism continues to grow and mature to include new itineraries and cater to different needs, primary motivations will evolve as well. More research is also required in the field of non religious-inspired volunteer tourism as compared to religiously inspired trips.

The unique contribution of this study is that it is the first of its kind to include participants from a wide range of volunteer tourism companies in a qualitative study. It is also unique because it focuses on the experiences and motivations of college-aged students, a growing age segment attending volunteer tourism trips. Additional research is needed to expand on this study and further the understanding of the complex field of volunteer tourism as well as its impacts around the world.



## **Appendix A**

The participants were asked the following open-ended questions during one-on-one interviews:

1. Where did you volunteer and what service project did you complete while you were there?
2. Have you traveled before?
3. Which organization did you go on the trip with?
  - a. Did you research the company prior to choosing your trip?
4. What brought you to choose a volunteer trip over a non-experience based vacation?
5. What is your favorite memory of the trip?
6. Did you use social media to post pictures of your volunteer experience?
7. How did you talk about your volunteer trip after coming back home?
  - a. Is this volunteer trip reflected on your resume? LinkedIn?
8. Do you think you changed as a person after taking this volunteer trip?
9. In 2016, Jacob Kushner published an article in *The New York Times* about the negative effects of voluntourism. What are your opinions about the following quote, “Unless you’re willing to devote your career to studying international affairs and public policy, researching the mistakes that foreign charities have made while acting upon good intentions, and identifying approaches to development that have data and hard evidence behind them — perhaps volunteering abroad is not for you.”

The following demographic questions were answered prior to the interview:

1. Name
2. Gender
3. Age
4. Declared College Major
5. Where do you go to college?
6. What is your hometown?
7. Where did you travel for your volunteer experience(s)?
8. How long was your volunteer trip?
9. What percentage of the trip do you estimate that you volunteered for?

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