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"How to Follow Jesus for Life": Reconstituting Youth as Ideal Christian Subjects in Short-Term Mission

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Reconstituting Youth Participants as Ideal Christian Subjects in Short-Term Mission

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Dedicated to all who seek an equitable world

and search for ways to get there.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

I stood next to the dental chair, nervously holding a long suction tube when the first patient of the day entered the room. She was young—clutching the side of her face with one hand and her mother's arm with the other. The dentist welcomed her with a smile and, from what I could understand, began to ask the mother about the source of her daughter's pain. Once the dentist planned his course of action, he turned his focus toward me and requested that I fetch the tools he needed. I walked over to the collection of tools and panicked. My first two years of high school Spanish did not cover the names of dental tools—not that I knew them in English, either—so I grabbed a handful of various tools and sheepishly presented them to the dentist. He smiled uneasily and plucked three out of the metal bouquet I had assembled for him before getting to work on his patient. As the liquid in my suction tube turned from clear to red, I slowly realized that he was performing an invasive oral surgery before my very eyes.

This wasn't my first day at a new job, I hadn't recently completed a dental assistant training program, nor did I plan to. I was a seventeen-year-old on a short-term mission. Though there are many other short-term mission trips to other areas of the world that undertake a range of projects, my trip to Esmeraldas, Ecuador was to provide support for this pop-up dental clinic and build a house in the neighboring town. Participation in a short-term mission was seen as the pinnacle of the Christian youth experience. I had spent much of my adolescence immersed in this world as a participant in church choirs, a regular contributor to discussions in Sunday school, and an active member in youth groups. And, of course, I participated in two of these trips. My first short-term mission (STM) was to the Navajo Nation in the northwest corner of New Mexico and my second was to Ecuador. There were some key differences in these two trips: the first was

with a large Presbyterian church from a small town in Western Washington, comprised of meticulously scheduled projects focused solely on construction, while the second was with a small Methodist church from the sprawling metropolis of Phoenix, consisting of a much more slowly-paced mix of medical missions and construction. Despite their differences, the trips were trying to communicate very similar messages.

I loved being a part of my church because I thought it would change the world. Within the strict confines of my community, the church gave me a view into the world beyond the one I could see. When I was five, my church sponsored a group of Sudanese refugees. On the day they arrived, they told us stories about their war-torn country and how grateful they were to be in Tacoma—far away from that violence. My community welcomed them in and one of the men started working at my dad's furniture store. When I was in middle school, our youth group collected coins for an Ethiopian boy named Jonathan. Our leader would walk around the cafe jiggling a box of coins singing "Jonathan, Jonathan, he's got nothing, you've got something, Jonathan." My family sponsored another Ethiopian boy whose photograph lived on our fridge next to pictures of my cousins and family friends. And then in high school, we went on these mission trips. My church showed me that there were bountiful ways that my community could respond to the big, seemingly unsolvable problems of the world.

When I arrived at Bard College in the fall of 2013 and dove into the world of human rights, I began to recognize the many flaws and limitations in my church's teachings. This ethnography was born out of my desire to understand why there was such a stark difference in the way that I was taught to "do good" in these two communities—the Christian world and the human rights world. In designing an ethnography that investigated the question of how Christians are taught to "do good," I decided to study STM because it is the most overt example of the Christian community in the United States attempting to mobilize people to ameliorate the

conditions of global poverty. I wanted to situate myself in a position in which I could observe flows of short-term missionaries circulating through a single location because I wanted to understand the repeated production of this experience. Researching places in Latin America that hosted short-term missionaries, I quickly realized that I would not be granted access unless I had the legitimization of someone who knows me, so I reached out to my youth pastor from my Methodist church and my Youth Time (YT) leader from high school.

My Christian life was bifurcated into two institutions—my church and an organization that I will call "Youth Time" for the sake of anonymity. Strangely enough, these worlds did not collide and they were very different. Youth Time is a parachurch organization that partners with mostly suburban public schools instead of churches. It is non-denominational, but firmly evangelical. I will go into a more sustained analysis of Youth Time in the first chapter, but it is crucial to know that its main focus is teaching kids how to be Christian. In my area, Youth Time facilitates weekly club meetings and bible studies; annual ski trips, surf trips, and summer camps; and one backpacking trip in the glaciers of British Columbia every four years. It does not lead any short-term mission trips. The focus is on community building and Christian development rather than service.

My Youth Time leader responded to my search for a mission site by saying that he knew a YT staff member from Northern California who was attempting his second year at a short-term mission program in Baja California, Mexico. He called the program Youth Time Adventures Baja (YTAB). I got in touch with the director of YTAB, John, and a few weeks later I found myself talking with him on the phone. He questioned me about why I wanted to take on this project and I told him that I wanted to see how short-term missions attempt to teach participants how to "do good." John responded that his main impulse for running YTAB was that "when you're a Christian, you gotta care for the poor," affirming that this would be a good fieldsite. His

program took high school and college-aged students who had recently become Christians on a week-long mission trip. He described a sort of "buffet of missions" in which participants would be able to observe and participate in a range of missionary activity in the course of a week. One day would consist of "relational ministry" in which participants would interact with orphans at an orphanage called *La Casa de Esperanza*, another day would be spent working on a construction site for a future medical clinic, and a third day would be spent working to construct a house. On the last full day, students would go to the closest beach town to shop and relax on the beach, and the next day students would leave to go home. Ostensibly, this itinerary would show these new Christians that they needed to prioritize caring for the poor and teach them how to do it.

As a participant of a similar trip, I remember encountering severe poverty, but I was not provided with any tools to understand what it was or why it had emerged. The poverty I was shown was unlike anything I had seen in my life, but I was left unconvinced that the single house we built or the few patients we treated were actually helped by our efforts. I designed this ethnography to understand what kinds of lessons are intended to be taught in a short-term mission with an overarching focus on what it means to "do good." I wanted to see what explanations the organizers provided to participants for the existence of the stark poverty they would encounter. Given the United States' hegemonic role in global politics, I wanted to see if the circumstances in these countries were framed to participants as problems of a lack of faith or unfamiliarity with God perhaps in place of a rigorous engagement with history and politics. I also wanted to explore the community's place in this interaction. I wanted to understand their stake in working with these organizations. Was it largely an economic motivation? Was there genuine curiosity about Christianity, or was this just the only option to obtain basic social

services? What was the attitude toward evangelatory efforts given that Mexico is a largely Catholic country?

Eventually, John agreed to let me participate in his program. I would work as an intern along with six others and seven members of the assignment team. The interns were college-aged or recent graduates who volunteered their time to be a part of YTAB, while the assignment team was comprised of people who work for Youth Time as their full-time job, and part of their contact stipulates that they work at a camp over the summer. My fieldwork took place mainly in the summer of 2016 and consisted of wholly immersive participant observation and eleven interviews with the organizers of YTAB, the other interns and assignment team, a few participants of the trip, and one of the participants' leaders. As an intern, I was a part of all staff meetings, ate meals with the staff and participants, and joined all programmatic elements of the trip. The organizers of YTAB were warm and eager to help me be in the best position possible to complete this project both during the trip, upon our return home, and when I completed the remainder of my fieldwork in January of 2017. In January, I returned to Baja to interview long-term missionaries who served as YTAB's hosts.

Originally, I set out to understand how this evangelical Christian organization attempted to compel its participants to care for the poor. But over the course of my fieldwork, I realized that this was not actually the intention of the program. Instead, the organizers wanted to influence the trips' participants to "follow Jesus for life," which means both that organizers want participants to follow Jesus *for* the entire duration of their life, but also *with* every aspect of their life. The curriculum designed to realize YTAB's two-pronged goal consisted of instilling "five core practices" of what it means to be a Christian: Bible, prayer, community, others, and sacrifice. Each of the five days revolved around one of these practices and the programming was geared toward reinforcing the importance of each practice.

This realization caused me to shift the focus of my research from how the organizers attempted to instill in participants a desire to "care for the poor" toward how the organizers attempted to instill in participants a desire to "follow Jesus for life." To be fair, one of the five core practices is service, but this was definitely not the main intent of the program. Alex, one of the assignment team, explained YTAB as having a set of tiered goals. The top tier was the desire for participants to become faithful, lifelong Christians. On the second tier was the goal of impacting the lives of those living in Baja. However, in each of my conversations with participants, they mentioned that they came on the trip because they "wanted to serve," or "had a heart for service." In Alex's eyes as an organizer, this desire would be accommodated by the second-tier goals even if it was the primary impulse for the students' participation in the program.

The discrepancy between the intentions of the program and the motivation of the students explains my feeling of dissatisfaction with the solutions I was presented with as a high school participant. Our missions would not do anything to change the material conditions of those living in the places we visited because they were never designed to. Instead, the program was designed to teach me about being a Christian. This ethnography explores the institutional and interpersonal processes through which this program is constructed and implemented with that goal in mind. It considers how as STM asserts the evangelical Christian tradition as the exclusive path towards salvation, it insinuates to participants that aspects of white, middle-class, U.S.-American identity are also essential to being saved, ultimately reasserting their supremacy over other identities and cultures.

In my writing, all names of people, places, and organizations have been changed in order to preserve anonymity. Because of my role as an intern, this project is heavily skewed toward the perspective of the organizers and facilitators of the program rather the participants or any

residents of the town to which YTAB traveled. This is largely because there was not very much interaction between YTAB and any Mexicans, other than the orphans who lived at *La Casa de Esperanza*. The people who live and work at the ministries with which YTAB partners are U.S.-Americans, with the exception of a few Mexicans who are employed by the organizations.

In the first chapter of this ethnography, I attempt to counter evangelical Christianity's bent toward ahistoricism by rooting the phenomenon of short-term missions in terms of its historical context. I lay out the relationship between short-term and long-term missions before explaining the short-term mission phenomenon and the ways that other scholars have treated this phenomenon. Finally, I delve into the specifics of the STM on which my project is based. I consider the history and theological base of Youth Time, and then trace the birth of Youth Time Adventures Baja from that larger parachurch organization.

In chapter two, I draw on Victor Turner's concept of liminality to explore how the location of rural Mexico as a separate and different place is helpful in realizing the organizers' goal of influencing participants to "follow Jesus for life." I argue that not only is the stark separation from the campers' everyday essential for constituting them as new Christian subjects, but also creates an environment that aggrandizes their whiteness and middle classness as well.

In my third chapter, I explore the role of "Christianese," the language specific to Christian subculture, in bringing burgeoning Christians from the periphery of this group to its core. I analyze both the role of slang and the more formal presentation of the camp speaker in her attempt to communicate the importance of the five Christian practices. I also analyze the way in which narratives are shaped specifically to be useful in realizing this end.

My fourth chapter is a largely ethnographic demonstration of a narrative as it is being produced during an emergency situation. I use Victor Turner's theory of the social drama to the

particularly dramatic event in order to show the way that narratives are created and employed during these turbulent moments.

Chapter 1: Emptying Short-Term Mission and Youth Time

Although an exact figure is difficult to determine and this is likely a conservative estimate, Robert Wuthnow and Stephen Offutt—sociologists at Princeton University and Asbury Theological Seminary respectively—estimate that over 1.6 million churchgoers will embark on short-term mission trips each year (2008: 218). This rapidly growing contemporary phenomenon has stimulated a growing body of literature that attempts to understand the movement in historical, sociological, anthropological, and missiological terms. This chapter will give a brief overview of the historical understanding of short-term missions before delving into the current debates around the framework from which it is understood and the impact that STM has on its participants. Then I will attempt to situate the organization of Youth Time in the context of evangelical Christianity, explain some of its methodologies, and outline the specific practices of the STM run by Youth Time that is the field site for this ethnography.

Short and Long-Term Missions

The goal of missions is to proselytize, which means to convert a person from one faith to the missionary's faith. This goal is realized through two means: evangelism and humanitarianism. The words "proselytize" and "evangelize" are often used interchangeably, but evangelism is better understood as one tactic of proselytization. Evangelism is the sharing of the gospel by preaching or giving personal witness, while humanitarianism in this context entails working toward economic development, increased literacy, education, health care, and child care in order to demonstrate the gospel. Either tactic can be employed in order to spread the Christian faith. Historically, missions strictly focused on evangelism, but over time, evangelism has been coupled with humanitarian efforts. The integration of these two disparate threads of mission is an area that has not been researched sufficiently. When did missions shift from being principally

concerned with preaching the gospel to working to address the material conditions of people's lives as well? Today, this shift has progressed to the point that that some Christian organizations have dropped all evangelizing efforts and instead focus exclusively on humanitarian aid.[1]

In order to understand short-term missions, it is crucial to contextualize this phenomenon within the larger history of missions. The study of missions is an enormous field. Christian missions have had profound impacts on the development of the world, and for every region of the globe that has been home to mission work, there is a corresponding body of literature that attempts to track the methodologies, successes, failures, and primary actors of these endeavors. As the lifelong missionary and professor of missions Stephen Neill outlined in his comprehensive history of Christian missions, Christianity is one of only three religions—along with Islam and Buddhism—that has broken from the tendency of religion to be local and instead has "been missionary and universal in [its] outlook from the beginning" (1964: 14). Since the middle of the first century AD with Paul the Apostle's push to spread the teachings of Jesus throughout Asia minor and Europe, missions have been an essential part of the Christian tradition (Wright 2014).

In response to the profound importance of missions, an entire academic discipline—missiology—was developed to study the mission of the church. Missiology covers how the church orients itself toward the world in all of its activities, but the term is also used expressly to refer missionary work as defined by the spread of Christianity. From its inception, the discipline has been located within Christian institutions and has sought to understand and shape missions from an explicitly Christian perspective. Missiology was first formally consolidated in the 19th

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[1] Habitat for Humanity is one example of such an organization. On their website under their "mission, values and principles" heading, they state that their first goal is to "demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ" but they also have a strict policy against evangelizing. They state that "Habitat will not offer assistance on the expressed or implied condition that people must adhere to or convert to a particular faith or listen and respond to messaging designed to induce conversion to a particular faith."

century—strikingly late in the history of missionary activity which began in the 1ˢᵗ century—by a Scottish missionary named Alexander Duff. Duff developed the first comprehensive theory of missions, which focused on educating the elite in hopes that their knowledge would trickle down to the lower classes, and proposed a theory for how to evaluate missionary success (Anderson 1999). Today, the discipline focuses on theological, anthropological, and historical questions to understand missions, and it is organized around a few key academic journals: *Missiology: An International Review, The International Review of Mission, Mission Frontiers,* and *The International Bulletin of Missionary Research.* While much of the literature on missions is outside the purview of this project, it is crucial to acknowledge that this enormous body of work exists. For this project, I am only interested in the small sliver of this literature that deals with STM.

One of the issues that arises in the study of short-term mission is how scholars of STM should relate to the study of long-term missions. This relationship was created by the emergence of STM, as the term "long-term missions" only exists in contrast with the term "short-term missions." This contrast is explored by David Livermore, an advocate for the cross-cultural potential of STM. He writes:

> Throughout most of the history of Christian missions, the vast majority of missionaries have been lifelong 'professionals' who raised financial support, studied local languages and customs, and packed all their earthly belongings in a coffin to take to the mission field. Though these kinds of lifelong missionary professionals still exist (referred to as 'long-term missionaries' hereon) far more common today are 'short-term missionaries,' who serve as missionaries for two weeks at a time or less. (Livermore 2009: 271)

Livermore elucidates two key points. Firstly, he emphasizes the radical departure of STM from what was once the sole understanding of missions—that of planning for life and death in the mission field. Secondly, he underscores how the introduction of this new practice resulted in the creation of two separate categories of missions. Before STM, "lifelong missionary professionals"

or "long-term missionaries" were simply called missionaries, as that was all there was. It is only against the backdrop of this new, incredibly popular phenomenon that missionaries, as they once were known, are refashioned into "long-term missionaries."

David Livermore is one of many authors who produce "popular," as opposed to scholarly, literature on STM. His book is directed toward youth pastors seeking to plan a STM, and it aims to ensure that their trip will have a "maximum impact" on participants. Livermore's book reflects the intention of the popular literature genre which is written from an explicitly Christian perspective toward those seeking to practice STM. While some of this popular literature takes a neutral or positive stance on the impacts of STM on places where these missions visit (Judge 2005, Wilder and Parker 2010, Peterson et al. 2003), much of this work is directed toward participants seeking to mitigate the potential damages of STMs (Fann and Taylor 2006, Lupton 2012, Corbett and Fikkert 2009). The former group can be understood as promotional material or even propaganda for STM and those who financially benefit from its popularity, while the latter group is hoping to reform the way that STM is practiced in response to the critiques levied against it.

While I want to acknowledge that this popular literature exists, this literature review will be largely limited to the scholarly literature. I take this approach with two disclaimers. First, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the popular literature and the scholarly literature. The lines between these two categories are blurred because there are some scholars who make a point to take their scholarship to the popular level, by using accessible language and disseminating work through non-academic publishers, in order to shape the field of STM (Howell 2012, Livermore 2006, Priest 2008). For example, Brian Howell—an anthropologist at Wheaton College in Illinois who studies STM—talks about his decision to frame STM as a "narrative" and not a "discourse" because it "is a term smacking of anthropological jargon, one

that shows up in pretentious philosophical conversations as well as technical linguistic and anthropological studies. I certainly do not want anyone reading this book to feel they must slog through any more unfamiliar theory than necessary" (Howell 2012: 30). Even though "discourse" may be a precise framework, he opts for a term that is more digestible to readers outside the academy. Other scholars take a path that is more traditional of scholarship and study the phenomenon from a critical distance without attempting to impact the field itself (Hancock 2015). My second disclaimer is that in my ethnographic experience I observed that this popular literature, both by scholars and other practitioners of STM, is able to make it to the field and emerges as a conversation topic in a way that is dissimilar to the scholarly literature about STM. Thus, my approach may limit my ability to understanding STM on its own terms. Based on the time limitations of this research, I was constrained to the scholarly literature. If I had more time, I would do a closer analysis of the difference between the popular and the scholarly approaches.

History of the Short-Term Mission Phenomenon

The history of short-term missions is not well documented, although there is some consensus among scholars about key moments in this history. Brian Howell offers a brief account but admits that "a book-length history of this phenomenon deserves to be written" (Howell 2012: 70), and laments that he is only able to dedicate a few chapters of his book to this project. Roger P. Peterson, the founder of a STM consulting and training firm, and his co-authors Gordon Aeschliman and R. Wayne Sneed detail a "simplistic yet accurate" history of STM with the admission that it will not and cannot be a complete history of the phenomenon given the decentralized, sporadic nature of its growth (Peterson et al. 2003: 242). The history that they offer is part of the popular literature on STM, and the narrative that they present cannot be read independently of the fact that Peterson has a financial stake in the continuation of STM as tied to his consulting and training firm.

In Peterson et al.'s section about the history of STM, they offer what is largely a timeline of events related to the development of STM rather than any theorizing about how or why STM emerged. However, one of the moments in their timeline is commonly cited as the first occurrence of a short-term mission (Brown 2005, Howell 2012). In 1895, a group of medical students worked in short periods with missionary doctors in Northern India (Peterson et al. 2003: 242). Peterson et al. evaluate the short-term structure of this particular mission as a singular event rather than the rumblings of a movement that they admit does not crystallize as a recognizable entity until the 1950s or 60s. The inclusion of this early mission in their historical account is an attempt to lend legitimacy to the contemporary phenomenon of STM that does not have any direct antecedents before the 1940s. They do not argue that later practitioners of STM borrowed tactics from this earlier instance or even knew of its existence, but rather they take a teleological approach in order to retroactively give significance to this event to prove that STM has a substantial history. While Peterson et al. identify the key organizations and moments involved in the emergence of STM,[2] they make no attempt to analyze this trend or reflect on its place in the larger narrative of missions. By building from the timeline that Peterson et al. have established, Brian Howell takes up that project.

With some slight modifications, Brian Howell acknowledges the basic genealogy that Peterson et al. present, but he delves deeper than merely compiling a chronology of significant occurrences and instead analyzes the profound historical reworking that had to occur in order be able to position short-term missionaries in the same framework as long-term missionaries. While Peterson et al. recognize that STM emerges from the practice of long-term missions, Howell asks "how did the notion of the short-term missionary in the form seen today come to occupy this

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[2] Peterson et al. point to Campus Crusade for Christ, the Bethany College of Missions, YUGO Ministries, Operation Mobilization, Wheaton College, and YWAM as some of the early, important organizations involved in STM.

prominent position in the imagination of so many U.S. Christians?" (Howell 2012: 69) Howell

attempts to answer his question with the caveat that he will focus on the "evangelical threads of

the story" and leave the "Catholic, Orthodox, Mormon, Mennonite…[and] mainline Protestant"

threads of this development for another scholar to weave together in order to offer a more

comprehensive history of STM. By evangelical, he is referring to the evangelical tradition within

Protestant Christianity and not to the practice of evangelizing that extends beyond the confines of

this tradition. This limited scope can be explained by Howell's post at Wheaton College—

arguably the most important center for evangelical intellectual life in the United States—and

Howell's personal identity as an evangelical. Because a book that comprehensively weaves

together the disparate threads of missions has yet to be written and my fieldsite, like Howell's, is

an evangelical STM, my project will also offer this limited perspective.

According to Howell, evangelical STM[3] emerged as a trend in the mid-twentieth century

that "grew around ostensibly pragmatic and theological reasons… as both an innovative practice

and a conceptual shift in the wider missionary community" (Howell 2012: 71). He attributes part

of this growth to the pragmatic appeal of STM, which offered long-term missionaries free labor

to complete projects. And to STM's innovative ability to adapt trip structure to respond to the

social and technological changes that occurred during this time. He offers a few examples of

these changes, such as air travel becoming more accessible, the success of youth movements, the

development of the tourism industry, and the increasing popularity of spring break, while

recognizing that there are "many more social, economic, and political changes [that] could be

identified as relevant to the rise of grassroots short-term mission travel" (Howell 2012: 75).

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[3] Referred to as STM from hereon while acknowledging that it is a limited perspective.

Howell dedicates most of his history to understanding the "conceptual shift" that allowed for STM to be considered mission. He makes the connection between the contemporary form of STM and an earlier trend in which young people spent anywhere from three months to three years working alongside a lifetime missionary, offering temporary relief from his post or providing additional labor to accomplish specific projects. He focuses specifically on an organization called Short Terms Abroad (STA), which was established in 1967. For Howell, this organization was the impetus for a series of conceptual shifts that were not complete until the 2000s, beginning with a shift in time commitment. Although at its origin, STA "remained a more significant commitment of time and energy than it would be twenty years later, by reorienting recruitment from lifetime commitments, STA began advancing a discursive change that would open the possibilities for thirteen days in the Dominican Republic to be 'real missions'" (Howell 2012: 83). Before the emergence of STA, missions were thought of strictly as lifelong commitments. Although STA maintained the practice of mission work centering around long-term missions, their methodology of partnering young people in short-terms with long-term missionaries broke open this simple definition such that a STM independent of long-term missionaries could later be seen as legitimate.

Howell argues that the tendency to pair young people in short-terms with long-term missionaries remained until two organizations, Youth with a Mission (YWAM) and Operation Mobilization (OM), broke from this trend after World War II and sent youth into the world to complete their own projects without being tied to long-term missionaries. Both organizations were started by men who were drawn into the wave of evangelicalism inspired by Billy Graham and his crusades, and in response to a missiological context in which "conservative Christians, particularly young people, found many of the established mission agencies to be insufficiently evangelistic" (Howell 2012: 89). At the time, missionary projects were medical, educational, and

otherwise humanitarian; while evangelism was of secondary concern (Neill 1964: 459). YWAM and OM responded to this desire for evangelism brought about by the rise of the evangelical youth movement by sending youth out in teams to undertake their own projects. They exploded in popularity, which led to the development of "a case for the trips being considered missionary work in themselves, rather than a means of recruiting future, career missionaries or directly supporting the work of current ones" (Howell 2012: 91).

Short-term missions oriented toward high school graduates, such as the ones led by YWAM and OM, refashioned youth as capable of enacting change in the world. It was not until the 1970s that middle and high school students were enveloped into this practice, which necessitated a further shift wherein the justification of these trips was less about addressing the problems in the host country and more explicitly about "personal growth and spiritual development" (Howell 2012: 97). The shifting metrics for success indicate this conceptual shift. For example, one organization noted that many participants enrolled at Bible colleges rather than liberal arts colleges after participating in a STM trip (Howell 2012: 98). At this point, STMs were not proselytizing people in communities where participants had traveled, but were instead proselytizing the participants themselves. Along with this shift in evangelatory focus, there was also a shift in the time commitment required of a STM trip. Due to these new, younger participants of STM trips, the time commitments were necessarily shaved from anywhere between three months and three years down to a week during spring break or ten days during summer vacation to accommodate whatever free time these young people had.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the debate around STM shifted from being concerned with who could be called a missionary and "whether these trips should be called mission—to conversations about how helpful, effective or worthwhile they are in their own terms" (Howell 2012: 115). In itself, this shift is an indication of the successful integration of this fringe practice

into the accepted realm of missions because the doubts about STM's legitimacy were abandoned in place of a search for efficacy. Due to the rapid ascension of short-term missions, in a matter of a few decades, missions shifted from being entirely professionalized to being amateur, from entailing a lifelong commitment to merely requiring a few weeks, and from consisting of predominantly adult participants to being youth dominated.

Short-Term Mission as an Object of Study

Despite the growing popularity of short-term mission, there persists an anxiety that not enough scholarly attention is directed toward this phenomenon. This anxiety is felt in the scholarship that has been produced thus far. Robert J. Priest is the leading scholar on STM. He is an anthropologist at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, was previously the president of the American Society of Missiology, and has been the editor of the two theme issues on STM published by *Missiology: An International Review*—the most comprehensive collations of the current debates within STM. He edited the first issue by himself and the second in conjunction with Brian Howell. Priest is demonstrably troubled by the limited amount of scholarship on STM as this lack, in his view, delegitimizes STM as a form of mission. As one of the scholars dedicated to this study, he sees STM as "a grassroots and populist phenomenon almost completely divorced from scholarship, from missiology, and from seminary education" (Priest et al. 2006: 434). The disconnect between the scholarship on missions and the practice of missions is problematic in part because there are far more people engaged in STMs than there are in long-term missions, but the research does not reflect this proportion. Instead, there is a fetishization of the long-term missionaries as a more authentic exhibition of mission work. In other places, Priest and Howell have written about how scholars of STM have had to justify their choice to study what is seen as a trivial phenomenon (2013). In part, this could be explained by the fact that

STM in its current form has only existed for three or four decades, but Priest and Howell invite

more missiologists, social scientists, and historians to take up STM as their object of study.

Another scholar of STM is Terence D. Linhart, an assistant professor of youth ministries

at Bethel College who received his doctorate in curriculum studies. He focuses on the curricular

nature of STM in what it tries to accomplish. In his attempt to grapple with the lack of

scholarship on STM, he attributes this dearth to the fact that "there is no system or network"

(Linhart 2005: 256) with which to gather data on all the various STM trips that are led by

churches from the United States. Due to the fact that STM trips stem from churches of every

denomination as well as large, youth-centric, non-denominational congregations; parachurch

organizations; and Christian universities, and because each of these organizations has a different

focus and objective, there is not a central body that dictates how they operate or collects

information on their methods or results. Although there have been attempts to address this need,[4]

they have been primarily concerned with developing uniform practices rather than collecting

information to promote research and these attempts have not been widely accepted. Ultimately,

Linhart reaffirms Priest's and Howell's assertion that STM trips are valued projects that should

be researched because of the multitude of agencies that coordinate such trips and the volume of

their participants.

Even with the anxiety about the paltry volume of scholarship on STM, there is a growing

body of literature that addresses the phenomenon in anthropological, sociological, and

missiological terms from both evangelical and secular perspectives. I have attempted to organize

the debates that emerge in the literature on STM into two categories with porous boundaries.

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[4] In 2003, Christianity Today announced that a coalition of evangelical missionary organizations released a set of seven "Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission" (Walker 2003). This set of standards has transformed into an accrediting agency (SOE) that ensures that its member organizations utilize these standards. As of February 2017, 126 organizations are SOE members, but joining is not a prerequisite for embarking on a STM and the vast majority of STM organizations are not affiliated with SOE including the STM studied in this project.

These are debates that develop either because these scholars are talking directly to each other or conversing indirectly by addressing the same concepts, but the language used to describe these categories is my own creation. The names I have settled on are fraught, but I have called these two categories the framework debates and the impact debates. The first category is concerned with how STM is understood, perceived, and otherwise engaged with at the level of discourse; while the second is concerned with how STM trips operate as well as the impacts they have on participants and on local communities. I will begin by delving into the framework debates.

Framework Debate

The scholars that address short-term mission in terms of its framework are concerned with the language that exists to address the phenomenon and the way it is framed, understood, as well as whose perspectives contribute to this understanding. These scholars are concerned with how STM is talked about and thought about rather than how it functions or what its impacts are.

Before addressing the debates that emerge from this scholarship, I want to point out a striking omission in these texts that is crucial to understanding STM. I was unable to find a linguistic analysis of the spatial terms used to describe the places from which short-term missionaries come and the places to which short-term missionaries go. Scholars uneasily settle on their terms without giving much explanation for why they have chosen these terms or what they signify. Some scholars refer to "sending countries" and "receiving countries" (Zehner 2013), without addressing the fact that the term "receiving" signifies a level of consent that does not exist. Other scholars refer to the "home context" and "host context" (Brown 2005), and still others shift the focus from place to people and talk about "North American participants" and "the poor" (Fanning 2009) to delineate this separation. These distinctions between here and there reinforce a perception of us and them, rely on a simplistic and nativist understanding of place, and prevent an engagement with the dynamic flows that define the contemporary world. The

seemingly neutral terms also obfuscate differences in class, race, and power that are entrenched in these interactions. This theme is rich with possibilities for research and should be developed to attain a greater understanding of the distinctions that are created and reified through language.

Because there is no uniform language within studies of STM and the aforementioned generalizing terms are problematic, in my project I will attempt to use the most specific label when referring to individuals or groups. For the young people who attend the STM, I will use the term "participant," "camper," or sometimes "student." For the adult leader of these groups of campers, I will use the term "leader." For the people who design and execute the STM experience (as the ethnographer and intern I sometimes fall into this category), I will use the term "staff." At times, this group will be further divided into "intern" and "a-team," with the first referring to college-aged volunteers and the second as a shortened version of the "assignment team," which refers to people who work for Youth Time and are working at this STM as part of their contract. I sometimes refer to the "organizers" of the STM who are people like John who planned the trip beforehand and made the necessary connections so that the trip could be executed. Lastly, I use the term "long-term missionary" to refer to the U.S. citizens who live and work in Baja running various ministries with which YTAB partners.

From here, I will delve into the framework debates that interrogate two questions. The first question concerns how the impetus for STM is conceived, while the second concerns whose voices are considered in these debates. C.M. Brown, who was a PhD candidate at Trinity International University at the time of publishing, compiled a statement on the debate surrounding the impetus for STM that was prevalent in the relevant literature as of 2005. Although he was a graduate student and this was an unpublished paper, I will cite it because both Brian Howell (2012) and Robert Wuthrow (2009) make a point to identify this paper as one of

the more valuable resources in relation to the current debate about STM. Unfortunately, Brown

passed away before he could more formally present this research.

One of the tensions he identifies is the debate about the impetus behind STM (Brown

2005: 1). On one side of this debate, proponents of STM argue that "because the phenomenon is

large and growing, it must necessarily be of God, not just blessed by God, but 'God

commanded'" (Peterson et al. 2003, 118)" (Brown 2005:1). These proponents view the success

of STM as an illustration of God's hand in the phenomenon. Brown does not accept this line of

logic and instead seeks to locate the exponential growth of STM in terms of "human factors"

(Brown 2005: 3). He goes on to address the social and economic factors in the "home context"

and the social factors in the "host context" that can help to explain the prevalence of STM. Some

examples he gives for the social factors in the "home context" are the decline in religious

participation, the increase in expendable income, and a social system that encourages charitable

giving (Brown 2005). For Brown, it is crucial to ground the discussion of STM in material

conditions that can help to explain its rise rather than attributing it to God. It is not as if he does

not believe that God could be responsible for this trend, but rather that he wants to engage in a

careful analysis of the "human factors" that could explain some of this growth before attributing

all of it to God. He notes that this explanation does not seek to explain away the possibility of

God's presence in this phenomenon, but that understanding the human factors can point to the

"divine intervention" that happens on these planes as well (Brown 2005: 25).

For Mary Hancock, a secular anthropologist at the University of California, Santa

Barbara, the tension over where the impetus for STM comes from can be explained by the way in

which evangelicals view the world. Based on her reasoning, the impulse to view the STM

movement's success as an index of God's presence within it is an example of the "postsecular"

imaginary in which participants of STM operate. She sees these evangelicals as inhabiting a

radically different social imaginary than that of secular civil society. If civil society is predicated on a historically contingent and human constructed understanding of the past (Asad 2003), then evangelicals experience "the temporal world as a space in which divinity is immanent, if unrecognized, and expressed affectively and relationally, through experiences of spirituality" (Hancock 2015: 219). While Brown's claim is similar to Hancock's, the claim that Hancock makes is much more encompassing. For Hancock, evangelical and secular people operate in two distinct social imaginaries and "STM practice, especially that targeting non-Christians, might be considered as a laboratory or improvisational stage for experimenting with this social imaginary" (2015: 220). It is in this practice that evangelicals try to realize this imaginary by seeking to envelop those who are not yet immersed in it. However, the "postsecular" is not only about seeking to convert, as "for Christians committed to missional practice, it works both to critique the secular and to promise an alternative that will succeed it" (Hancock 2015: 220). For Hancock, the use of this postsecular framework is crucial to understand the impetus behind STM because it is this imaginary that propels the experiment of STM.

Edwin Zehner, who studies the presence of Christianity in Thailand, is similarly concerned with the way that scholars seek to understand STM. Zehner is a professor of Asian studies and anthropology at Walailak University, and he is also an evangelical Christian. Zehner critiques the fact that the vast majority of the scholarship about STM is written from the North American perspective, which is the "sending" place. He sees the scholarship on STM focusing on "questions of financial efficacy, spiritual and attitudinal formation among mission participants, de-professionalization of the global mission force, 'dependency' among the recipients of short-term mission, relative effectiveness of the short-term missions in achieving their stated purposes, and the potential for damaging local ministries due to lack of cultural training and sensitivity" (Zehner 2013: 131). The unifying thread that flows through each of

these questions is the uncomfortable reality that the North American perspective defines the contours of this scholarly debate. For Zehner, the perspective of the "receiving" countries is lacking in these discourses.

Even though Zehner is a North American scholar who lives and works in Thailand and is not a Thai scholar himself, he finds that his informants' perspectives on short-term missionaries visiting their churches reframes some of the most pressing concerns in the STM debate. One example he cites is in relation to the argument that STM creates dependency on foreign missionaries in the host churches. With his understanding of some Thai perspectives, he argues that "many Thai leaders were using the relational networks to access moral and material resources that enhanced ministerial vitality and independence" (Zehner 2013: 130). Zehner reframes the view that STM creates "dependency" by demonstrating the benefits that emerge from these networks built by the STM exchange. While he does not argue that STM is without its problems, he is identifying a disjuncture in the concerns of North American scholars of STM and the benefits that Thai religious leaders see in these exchanges, and he thus is advocating that the perspective of the "other" is incorporated into these debates in order to lessen the likelihood that this disjuncture occurs.

It would be myopic for me not to briefly mention that as much as I agree with Zehner's critique, my ethnography is focused largely on the on the organizers and participants of YTAB rather than those living in Baja. In my original project design, I wanted to incorporate the perspective of some Mexicans, but this desire was unable to be realized because of the lack of interaction between YTAB and those living in the communities in which YTAB works. A subsequent study would do well to incorporate the perspectives of the families for whom YTAB builds houses.

Impact Debate

The other category around which I have organized the scholarship on STM concerns questions regarding the impact that STM has on the world. In this realm, scholars are concerned with both how STM impacts those who "go" and those who "receive." This debate is not limited to simply the scholarly literature in the same way that the framework debate is. While the framework debate engages questions of representation, the impact debate deals with the actual practice of STM.

For scholars who study STM, there is somewhat of an agreement that there are flaws in the current praxis of STM, but there is disagreement regarding how studies seeking to understand these flaws should be undertaken and who they should center around. For one, even the notion of studying the participants of STM trips is a question that scholars of STM grapple with. As Linhart explains, "some would see research that centers on those who 'go' to serve as having an errant focus, noting that the theological purpose for mission is not to affect those who go" (Linhart 2005: 258). The underlying critique is that it should not be the participants who are studied because it should not be the participants who matter during this encounter. The existence of this concern underscores that the very objective of STM is up for debate. But as Howell (2012) detailed in his history, the goals of STM shifted over time from being about impacting communities to impacting participants. Whether or not the focus on participants addresses the "theological purpose of missions," many scholars have decided to raise questions about the impacts on participants.

Scholars' observation of and response to differing objectives of STM suggests that rather than possessing clear, singular goals, the objectives of STM are multivalent. One of these goals is how STM impacts participants' religious experiences. Jenny Trinitapoli, an associate professor of the sociology of religion at the University of Chicago, and Stephen Vaisey, a professor of sociology at Duke University, conducted a study that determined that "the short-term mission is

a transformative experience insofar as it galvanizes American adolescents in terms of their religious beliefs and practices" (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009: 139). Their empirical data, taken from a longitudinal study that spans two years, measures the religious depth that is shaped by a short-term mission experience. Religious depth is measured in terms of factors such as church attendance and willingness to go on a second STM, and they argue that STM positively impacts these factors.

Scholars are also concerned with how STM impacts participants' worldviews. Some proponents of STM argue that the trips create a more global citizen (Tuttle 2000). The argument is that this level of engagement with "the other" abroad might translate into an embrace of pluralism at home. For Brian Howell, however, the way in which STM is framed to participants undermines the possibility for increased solidarities across national boundaries. Howell argues "the language of short-term mission too easily becomes an all-engulfing category, subsuming a wide variety of trips by creating a discursive commonality between disparate places and experiences" (2009: 206). Because STM does not embrace the specificity of the context of each place but rather absorbs all locations into a similarly experienced "other," the possibilities for STM to positively impact participants' view of the world is sharply limited.

Overall, the intended audience of current literature on STM is slowly shifting from practitioners of STM toward academics. This shift is occurring as STM trips are increasingly understood as being part of a larger phenomenon that has ramifications that extend beyond its participants and beneficiaries. For much of its history, scholarship on STM has largely stemmed from Christian institutions that seek to improve upon this model while still generally maintaining a commitment to the idea of a short-term mission. The few secular scholars or scholars from secular institutions who seek to understand this phenomenon (Hancock 2015, Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009, Wuthnow 2009), have contributed a great deal to the understanding of this practice

in terms of how it should be framed and how it impacts the world. However, there is much that still remains untheorized about this popular movement that should be considered from both secular and Christian perspectives.

A History and Theology of Youth Time

Up to this point, I have been treating STM as a general phenomenon. However, the majority of this ethnography deals with a specific STM: Youth Time Adventures Baja. Youth Time Adventures Baja has specific characteristics due to its relationship with Youth Time, a much larger parachurch organization. Youth Time's website describes their organization as "a group of caring adults who go where kids are, win the right to be heard and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them."[5] These "caring adults" are volunteer leaders who facilitate the "clubs" and "campaigners" that make up Youth Time. Rather than being affiliated with a church, Youth Time clubs are organized around public schools and the volunteer leaders have roles in the school as teachers, coaches, cafeteria workers, volunteers, fans, or simply as visitors handing out pizza and donuts before and after school. Youth Time is not designed for Christians; rather it seeks to introduce Christianity to youth who otherwise would not encounter it, and package it in a way that is exciting and subverts kids' understanding of what religion entails.

Youth Time's weekly clubs occur in one of the participant's homes on a weeknight and have a careful progression that engages students in the program before culminating in a religious message. A typical night's program will unfold as follows: a few mixer games will be introduced to engage the entire group, the group will sing a selection of secular songs, a few participants will play a game in front of the audience, the leaders will perform a comical skit, the group will

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[5]For the sake of confidentiality, I will not offer a direct citation to this website or for any references to Youth Time. All quotes in this section are taken directly from the organization's main website under the section labeled "History."

sing one song with a vaguely Christian message, and one leader will give a short talk that covers some aspect of the gospel to end the night. Volunteer leaders organize and facilitate these clubs and also act as mentors to the students, especially at "campaigners" and during outreach camp. Campaigners, the name of which harkens back to a time when Youth Time was called the "Youth Time Campaign," is the counterpart to the weekly club meetings for students who have further developed their faith. It is an additional weekly meeting that functions more like a Bible study where students plunge deeper into their faith by considering passages beyond the gospels. Many of these students made the transition from solely participating in Youth Time's weekly clubs to also being a part of campaigners during their time at outreach camp. Outreach camp is a week during the summer that is branded as "the best week of your life," where the gospel is shown to the participants in full. Throughout the year at club, students may have been introduced to a handful of gospel stories, but during the week of outreach camp, students are presented with the full arc of the gospel and are finally given an invitation to accept Jesus as their savior at the end of the week. This presentation is the culmination of all the programming throughout the year at club and the week at camp that prepares students to receive this invitation. Students are told that the sin of humankind has created a distance between humankind and God that was not originally intended. To close this gap, Jesus died on the cross and created the possibility for people to have a personal relationship with God. According to Youth Time, all students need to do is accept this truth and they will enter into a relationship with God on earth and will later be granted eternal life in heaven.

The idea for Youth Time was conceived in 1938, when a young Presbyterian minister named Tim Sundy came to realize that the teenagers in his small Texas town "had no interest in engaging with traditional church programs." Sundy designed a program around the maxim that "it's a sin to bore a kid," striving to create a Christian environment that exemplified how faith in

God was "fun, exhilarating and life changing, all at the same time." In what he viewed as Jesus

Christ's methodology, he began an effort to connect with kids in his town by going to where they

were rather than having them come to him, a strategy he called "contact work." As part of this

contact work, he would go to basketball games, hang out in parks, and otherwise make himself

available to interact with students. Sundy and the other leaders he trained worked to "win the

right to be heard." Rather than preaching the gospel upon first encounter with students, they

sought to develop relationships with the students before broaching the topic of religion. Along

with contact work, Sundy would also hold informal meetings that took place in students'

homes—a practice that has now become known as club. Eventually, he formalized this strategy,

and Youth Time was officially born in 1941. From his first club in Texas, Sundy slowly spread

his strategy to other areas in the state. Once he cultivated a few dozen leaders, he moved the

headquarters to Colorado Springs and began to develop the program throughout the rest of the

country.

Youth Time has had a profound impact on the way that youth ministry operates.

According to Mark Senter, an associate professor of educational ministries at Trinity

International University, the methodology of Youth Time was adopted by other parachurch

organizations and eventually transformed the way that churches themselves engage in youth

ministry (Senter 2010: 218). Youth Time's focus on merging popular and fun activities with

evangelism proved to be wildly successful in increasing participation in Christian programming.

However, this shift is not without its shortfalls. Dave Wright, the coordinator for youth ministry

in the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina laments that this method of youth ministry separates

the youth from the rest of the congregation, relies on consumer culture to create excitement about

Christianity, and communicates "that we have to dress up Jesus to make him cool" (Wright

2012). Wright recognizes the profound impact that Youth Time has had on youth ministry, but

ultimately argues that presenting this reductive repackaging full complexity and excitement of

the gospel does a disservice to the students that participate in this ministry. However, Youth

Time may be indirectly responsible for Wright having a job. According to Senter, Youth Time

initiated the professionalization of youth ministry. He writes, "though the early Sunday school

teachers and Sunday school missionaries had been paid and YMCA workers received modest

salaries, for the most part youth ministry was a volunteer-led operation until the middle of the

twentieth century" (Senter 2010: 292) with the emergence of Youth Time. The popularity of

Youth Time caused churches to adapt to their strategies; when Youth Time had the entertainment

value to draw students to their programming and the full-time staff to design and implement their

vision, churches were forced to compete at that level.

During the early days of Youth Time, the ministry focused on white suburbia. A film

produced in the early 50s entitled "The [Youth Time] Story" found on a Vimeo channel called

"[Youth Time] Archives," perfectly captures this racial myopia. In the film, the narrator asserts

that "all kinds of kids come to Youth Time clubs: big kids, little kids, rich kids, poor kids, kids

from all sorts of religious backgrounds," while the screen pans across a sea of white faces

gathered in a suburban basement. Later in that same video during a moment at camp in which the

group was climbing to the top of a mountain, the narrator says "it gets hot sometimes and it's

good to have a slave along to fan you" while a young white male uses his cap to fan a young

white female. Evidently, this racial gap was identified and Urban Youth Time, now called Urban

and Multicultural Youth Time, was launched sometime in the early 70s.[6] During my research, I

was unable to find any primary or secondary sources that provide any insight into this shift.

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[6] On Youth Time's official website, the start date for Urban Youth Time is cited as "the mid-50s," but another video in the archives that was produced contemporarily locates the start date in the early 70s. I do not have enough evidence to make a strong claim to which date is more accurate, but it is possible that the earlier date is an attempt at a revisionist history to assert Youth Time on the forefront of desegregation whether or not this was the reality.

Today, Urban and Multicultural Youth Time groups have separate weeks from suburban Youth

Time groups at outreach camp. While there are obviously some people of color who attend the

suburban Youth Time weeks of camp and some white people who attend the Urban and

Multicultural weeks, the racial segregation of these two groups demonstrates the results of

complex processes of residential segregation and the construction of white-dominated suburbia.

Youth Time's divergent strategies for outreach in each community reifies the difference. While I

do not have the information on the programming for each faction of Youth Time, I would

strongly doubt that Urban and Multicultural Youth Time engages in STM.

Today, Youth Time has grown into an international organization that has thirty-one

summer camp properties in the U.S. and Canada, and operates clubs in over one hundred

countries. In addition to its flagship high school ministry, the organization has branched off into

a multitude of ministries that are geared toward specific populations:

- Youth Time College
- Small Town Youth Time/Rural Initiative
- Urban and Multicultural Youth Time
- Youth Go, an international exchange that pairs students with Christian families in the US
- Youth Time Capernaum for mentally and physically handicapped youths
- Little Youth for middle and high school girls who are pregnant or raising their children
- Youth Time International for students across the globe
- Youth Time Expeditions for U.S.-American students to go on trips abroad
- Youth Time military which operates on military bases
- Wyldtime for middle school students

These ministries utilize many of the methods that the high school ministry has cultivated, while

slightly molding the structure in order to meet the particular needs of the population they serve.

Youth Time is a multi-sited missions project that operates on many planes.

The theological base of Youth Time is difficult to fully grasp. As a parachurch

organization, Youth Time does not partner with any specific denomination, but that does not

mean that it does not have a clear set of values. Youth Time markets itself as non-

denominational—just *Christian*. The term non-denominational refers to churches and other institutions that distance themselves from historical denominations while still holding recognizable and largely uniform beliefs. This term allows these institutions to simultaneously present themselves as being representative of the whole of Christianity, while smuggling in a set of beliefs that are incredibly specific, historically rooted in a recent past, and often exceptionally conservative. Stephen Prothero, a professor of religion at Boston University, argues that non-denominationalism obfuscates the complexity of Christianity, which ultimately leads to a potentially dangerous lack of religious literacy (Prothero 2009). Prothero asserts that a simplified understanding of religion leads to communities fetishizing singular issues that are not representative of the totality of what the religion seeks to put forth. He cites a lack of religious literacy as part of an explanation for conflicts in Sudan, Iraq, and Israel as well as domestic disputes over stem-cell research and same-sex marriage. In my experience, the dispute over same-sex marriage is an especially poignant arena in which the specificity of non-denominationalism is revealed.

During 2009-2013 when I was involved in these institutions, the debate over same-sex marriage was a recurring issue in Youth Time and in my Methodist church, although they came to vastly different conclusions. In my church, three out of the seven members of the praise band in which I played guitar were openly homosexual—the two front men were married. Conversely, in order to occupy any leadership position in Youth Time, an applicant is required to sign what is called the "Faith and Conduct Policy." The form outlines the biblical passages Youth Time cites as theological evidence for this policy,[7] before presenting it:

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[7] Youth time cites three passages in the Bible to justify their policy toward homosexuals: the creation narratives (Genesis 1-2), and Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees over the "nature and purpose of marriage" (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7-8). Youth Time's conclusion that any these passages definitively ban homosexual marriage has been debunked by biblical scholars, although there is not a clear consensus within the scholarship.

> We do not in any way wish to exclude anyone from being recipients of ministry of God's grace and mercy as expressed in Jesus Christ. We must, however, clearly state that individuals who are sexually active outside of a heterosexual marriage relationship should not serve as staff or volunteers in the mission and work of [Youth Time].[8]

Even though Youth Time makes an attempt to hide their condemnation of homosexuals within a prohibition of any sexual activity outside of a heterosexual marriage, this clause is a thinly veiled ban against homosexuals obtaining leadership positions. From personal experience as well as various blogs that track Youth Time's treatment of homosexuals,[9] I can say that this policy is enforced much more heavily on homosexuals than on heterosexuals who engage in extramarital heterosexual sex. The issue over the place of homosexuals has been fiercely debated in the church and in no way has been resolved, even though Youth Time presents the issue as if it can and has been settled by Biblical evidence. The theological evidence has been contested and the majority of mainline Protestant churches now embrace same-sex marriage and perform wedding ceremonies in their churches (Markoe 2015), even though, with some exceptions, the Methodist Church drags its feet on the issue.

Youth Time Adventures Baja as a Short-Term Mission Trip

Along with the many different branches of Youth Time, the Youth Time brand can be attached to other specific initiatives. One of these programs is Youth Time Adventures—a discipleship camp in Northern California. At this camp, students go surfing, mountain biking, skateboarding, and learn to "follow Jesus for life" through a curriculum based on the five core Christian practices. The camp emerged as a response to the lack of programming available for those who have undergone outreach camp and accepted that Jesus is their savior, but have not yet

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[8] This is quoted from a page on their website titled "Faith and Conduct Policy."

[9] I am unable to cite the names of these blogs because they have Youth Time's real name in their titles, but throughout my research I found multiple blogs run by former YT leaders who were forced to step down from their leadership position due to their sexual orientation.

become enveloped in a church in order to deepen their understanding of their Christian faith within that institutional structure. After a decade of operating this camp in California, John began thinking about how to make the service component of the program more central.

John is the director of Youth Time Adventures and the brains behind the whole program. His wife Christine—who is also his partner in ministry and has equal share in the preparation of camp even if she sometimes takes a less active role in facilitation—and their two bright, young children are the archetypal Youth Time family. The Scott's are the perfect representation of the image that Youth Time wants to project. Even though John's trademark Scott blonde hair is greying, he still has a youthful appearance as though he could have walked up from the beach when he leads meetings. He wears cargo shorts, Converse shoes, Oakley sunglasses, and his Youth Time Adventures trucker hat every day. He keeps a delicate balance between offering a comforting lightness, and holding the weight of responsibility he has as the director of the program.

At first, he experimented with adding an element of service to the camp in Northern California, but eventually he decided that the best way to accomplish this goal would be to create an entirely new program based on the idea of short-term mission. As he described it, there were "a couple variables at the same time" that led to the creation of Youth Time Adventures Baja, one being logistical and one being ideological. For one, the camp in Northern California was becoming too popular. He explained that there were "a couple weeks in July that were consistently overbooked and we could not grow the number of beds." But more compelling than this logistical problem was his belief that "service is such a significant part of our faith in our relationship with God that kids needed an opportunity to experience that." The host of YTAB is a boarding school for the deaf called *El Rancho de Dios* (The Ranch of God) in the state of Baja California, Mexico. The ranch is a free school that operates from September through May. Along

with offering students an opportunity to communicate through Mexican Sign Language, the ranch also teaches students about Christianity. The connection between YTAB and the ranch was established through one of John's friends who is a filmmaker. He was making a film about the story of the ranch and how God used one man in North Carolina to reach the deaf population of Mexico, when he learned about the ranch's dissatisfaction with their empty property during the summer months. Later, when he was visiting John, they were talking about John's desire to make the service component of Youth Time Adventures more central to their efforts. As a result of this conversation, John's friend made the connection between John and the ranch in 2013, and their respective problems were solved through the birth of Youth Time Adventures Baja, which began operating during the summer of 2015.

Throughout my fieldwork in the summer of 2016, I honed in on the ways in which this trip was framed differently to specific groups in order to meet their respective goals. Sometimes it was referred to as a mission trip to the participants, other times the staff was told directly that it was not a mission trip, and sometimes it was referred to as discipleship camp like its cousin in Northern California. When I asked John about this, he drew from the mission of Youth Time to explain this discrepancy:

> *Looking at the profile of kids that [Youth Time] goes after. We really pursue kids that have faith, that aren't plugged into the church, that are disinterested in God and try to show, explain, and have them experience that God really wants to be in relationship with them and has the best possible way to live life mapped out and when you grab folks with no biblical background or no Christian context, there's a little bit of helping them understand what following Jesus looks like.*

For John, Youth Time itself is a mission. He and other leaders and staff members of Youth Time are the missionaries and the mission fields are the high schools, middle schools, and colleges around the world. Among people immersed in Youth Time culture, Youth Time is often referred

to simply as "the mission." For example, "how long have you been in 'the mission?'" is a

question one could expect to hear at a gathering of Youth Time people.

If the mission of Youth Time is to create Christians out of suburban kids, YTAB is an

extension of that mission. John continues on the difference between YTAB and a mission trip:

> *I guess in my head, I would see a mission trip as someone who's pretty grounded in their faith, and is at a spot where they know what it means to serve others and are making themselves available to do that. Whether that mission trip is in a foreign country or in their backyard. I believe that missions happen right next to you and far away from you. So the reason I don't think this is as much of a mission trip is we're still helping these high school and college age kids learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to be a Christian. And so they're exposed to what missions looks like, but our focus is helping them grow in their faith… more than uhh ya know… I mean that's probably more of a goal than impacting the communities around there, I mean obviously, when you give somebody a house that radically changes their life… Uhh, but we don't...I guess it's maybe holistic, as I'm rambling here. There's not this separation of umm...like following Jesus and serving others is like all this..it's all wrapped up together. There's not this separation or categorization.*

For John, the primary goal of YTAB is to impact the participants who go on the trip. He wants to

teach them how to follow Jesus, and until they mature in their faith, they will not fully be doing

missions—either at home or abroad. John started off extremely confident and articulate when he

was identifying the difference between YTAB and mission, but then grew unsure and started to

contradict himself when he attempted to explain the primary goal of the program. It becomes

clear that he is unable to fully articulate which goal is most important, even though the pedagogy

of the trip he designed clearly elucidates which goals he has privileged. Simultaneously, he

wants to accommodate the different reasons that participants have come on the trip, so he does

not fully discount the benefits that the trip is able to provide to the community, even though

impacting the community is not his impetus for running the program.

However, his statement that "when you give somebody a house that radically changes

their life" does not paint the full picture of what YTAB does when it executes a house build.

YTAB partners with *La Casa de Esperanza* for the house build. It was not until I talked with JT,

the director of the orphanage, upon my return to Baja that I understood the process that a family

undergoes in order to obtain a house. The process begins with a family submitting an application

to the orphanage declaring that they want to have a house built. In order to submit the

application, the family must have purchased a lot within the town limits and constructed a

cement slab that will serve as the foundation of the house. At this point, the family has invested

about $22,000 in U.S. dollars with $20,000 of that investment spent on the lot of land and $2,000

on the cement slab. Once the application has been submitted, the family waits until a church

group or a group like YTAB partners with the family to fundraise the money for the house

materials. In the months leading up to YTAB's arrival in Baja for the summer 2016 trips, the

following message appeared on promotional materials in order to solicit donations:

> One of the opportunities we'll have in Mexico is to build a house for a family in need.
> We'll be building a home for Mora, who is widowed and lives with her two sons, one of
> their wives and two grandchildren. We are currently raising the funds ($7,000) in order to
> pay for this house, and invite you to share this with your family and friends so that they
> can have the chance to be a part of what you'll be doing! Below is a link to more
> info/pictures that you can send to your friends and family, which includes a link to give
> online. How cool would it be to have people you know help buy a house that you get to
> build?!

The $7,000 goal was reached, but with no explanation, the house build was initiated for an

entirely separate family. This family was comprised of a young couple with two daughters, but

there was no clarification on what happened to Mora's family or whether or not her house was

built. Mora served as a symbol for Mexican poverty rather than a representative of herself. It was

not deemed important whether or not the house was specifically built for her, but her image and

her story were appropriated to solicit the necessary donations that were then used to build a

house for this other family. In the course of the two weeks of camps, the house was built. Four

walls and a roof went up with some partitions to separate the rooms, but that was it. According to

JT, the septic system, water, and electricity probably cost the family an additional $10,000.

YTAB's gift to this family was about one fifth of the cost of their house—definitely not insignificant, but also not the gift of an entire house. During my conversation with John when he was defending the impact his STM had on the community, he wanted to imagine that YTAB gave this family an entire house in order to suggest that the trip was not solely for the participants. At other times, he liked to emphasize that it was a shared endeavor by the family and YTAB. This was a way that he could mark his STM apart from the general critiques of STM practices. One of the critiques levied against STM is that building free houses creates dependency on foreign aid and disrupts local economies. On John's STM, the shared investment demonstrates that the family has a desire for their house and a stake in its longevity in a way that is ostensibly dissimilar to their attitude if they "just had the keys handed to them."

In this way, YTAB embodies a capitalist understanding of serving others. Instead of adhering to Jesus' teaching that everyone, however flawed, is equally deserving of grace, in this conception of "doing good," participants should only seek to serve those who can demonstrate that they possess a shared set of social values oriented around material markers of economic viability. The act of salvation—that YTAB performs for the family in the act of "gifting" them a house—is conditional on their ability to perform their worthiness of that salvation. For YTAB, it is not just about believing in an evangelical path toward salvation, but also in an meritocratic articulation of that salvation.

Chapter 2: Creating Christian Subjects

Travelling to *El Rancho de Dios* was not a simple process. To reach this destination, campers had to get themselves to the airport closest to their house, fly to San Diego, board a bus chartered by YTAB, drive to the border, disembark and walk through the border checkpoint, board another bus on the other side, and finally ride the rest of the distance to *El Rancho de Dios*. The logistics involved in getting a group of over fifty campers to rural Mexico were incredibly complicated. However, it was not always clear to me exactly why the element of travel was so essential to the structure of the STM. If a short-term mission is about leading students to care for the poor, why wouldn't each group invest itself separately into poor communities in their own area? If the purpose is to teach students about Christianity, why wouldn't organizers focus on facilitating Christian education at home? What was accomplished by entering into a space that was discursively construed as wholly different from the participants' everyday lives?

These questions were different versions of one that I kept returning to during informal conversations and formal interviews: "Why are we here? Why Mexico?" This chapter will attempt to address the ways in which my informants answered this question as they grappled with what they sought to accomplish by designing this experience in the context of rural Mexico.

Separated and Equalized

My research joins scholars who employ Victor Turner's concept of liminality to theorize travel, summer camps, religious pilgrimages, and short-term missions in the framework of a rite of passage (Tillery 1992, Howell 2012). Turner was a foundational mid 20th century British anthropologist who worked on symbols, rituals, and rites of passage. A rite of passage is comprised of three stages: separation, liminality, and reincorporation (Turner 1969). I will argue that the short-term mission is a rite of passage for campers and that campers are reconstituted

intentionally as Christian subjects and unwittingly as middle class and white subjects through this experience.

To begin, I will outline the larger framework of a rite of passage before returning specifically to the liminal phase to argue that the short-term mission exhibits this stage. In a rite of passage, "the first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both" (Turner 1969: 94). Campers in YTAB have left their homes and their everyday lives to come to Baja to participate in the short-term mission. They have been physically separated from the social structure in which they exist and are thus unable to live out their lives as they normally would. The second phase is the liminal stage in which the ritual subject "passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner 1969: 94). I will argue that this is the stage that most precisely describes the experience of undertaking a short-term mission. Finally in the third phase of reincorporation, the participant reenters their social structure and is "expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions" (Turner 1969: 95). This is the goal that the leadership of YTAB have in mind for the campers. However campers come to the program, the organizers want them to leave the STM with the tools and drive to "follow Jesus for life."

YTAB works toward building liminality from the moment that campers arrive at *El Rancho de Dios*. As soon as campers get off the bus, they are ushered into a series of "initiative games" which orient them to the property and its rules, introduce the ethos of the week as somewhat lighthearted, and begin to develop a collective experience. For the games, the entire camp—an aggregation of groups from six different areas in the Southwestern United States—were split into three sections. Each section rotated around stations that housed games designed to

communicate different rules about the week. As an example, one game was called water balloon volleyball and was coupled with rules about water usage. Participants were divided into two teams, paired up, and each pair was given a pillow case. The game facilitator gave a water balloon to one pair and they had to try to launch the water balloon over the volleyball net by using their pillowcase. The other team would try to receive the water balloon and send it back over to the other team. When the water balloon broke, or was launched out of bounds, a point was awarded. After one team reached ten points, the game facilitators gave a short presentation on the importance of staying hydrated, how to know which water was potable and which was not, and where on the property campers were free to explore and which areas were off limits. Following the completion of these three stations, the entire group gathered for a large name game so that campers could begin to form relationships with people from different areas. This series of initiation games served to build the collective liminality that campers would inhabit for the remainder of the week.

The liminal phase is one in which all members are stripped of their rank or status. Members lose their previous identity and are reduced to a *tabula rasa.* In his explanation of liminality, Turner offers a structural analysis wherein he contrasts the attributes of liminality with those of the status system in a series of binary oppositions (Turner 1969: 106). Many of these binaries can be applied to YTAB in order to demonstrate its categorization as a liminal state. From his list of dozens of binaries, I will select those that apply to the STM experience and offer an in-depth analysis of some of them. They are as follows:

Liminality (STM)	Status system (Everyday Life)
Transition	State
Absence of property	Property
Absence of status	Status
Absence of rank	Distinctions of rank
Unselfishness	Selfishness
Communitas	Structure

Nakedness or uniform clothing	Distinctions of clothing
Sacredness	Secularity
Sacred instruction	Technical knowledge
Continuous reference to mystical powers	Intermittent reference to mystical powers
Acceptance of pain and suffering	Avoidance of pain and suffering

Along with the example of initiation games to build liminality through flattening hierarchy, I will discuss the sacred, the transitional state, and the uniform clothing to argue that YTAB is a liminal experience. One of the more obvious ways that YTAB is liminal is in its relationship to the sacred. Every moment is imbued with holy significance which is continually recalled during casual conversation and formal instruction. Another example is its property as a transition rather than a state. For campers in YTAB, there is no possibility that this week will come to be their quotidian reality. It is set up as a temporary experience, and campers are expected to return home to their everyday lives once the week ends.

The creation of a liminal state is also achieved through clothing. As described by Turner, liminal entities may "wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands" (Turner 1969: 95). While the liminal entities in this description look much different than YTAB participants, there is still a concerted effort at YTAB to constrain the visual expression in order to create unity among campers. In an email sent out to all the campers and their families before the trip outlining what to pack, the following notice was attached to the packing list:

> **A reminder that modesty is key when it comes to clothing attire. We want to be culturally sensitive and model Jesus well. This tends to affect girls more than guys - ladies, please make sure your shorts are not too short, and your shirts aren't too low cut or show your midriff. Better to err on the side of too modest & covered up than not modest enough.

This gendered demand for modesty and the pressure to avoid offense, whether or not this actually corresponds to a cultural norm in Baja about modesty, has the effect of limiting what campers are able to wear. With this limited choice of clothing options for the climate of Baja, campers uniformly wear running shorts or jeans and boxy t-shirts.

John used the example of everyone having the same color shirt to describe the way that hierarchy was flattened at YTAB through clothing. Without using the term "liminality," he was explaining that he viewed YTAB as a liminal environment. He was referring to a grey and orange "Youth Time Adventures" t-shirt that the assignment and intern team wore when campers arrived at camp, and that campers were given on their second-to-last day of camp. For John, this sameness is a signifier of the collective nature of YTAB that is distinct from typical Youth Time camps. In other Youth Time camps, the assignment team, intern team, work crew team, and summer staff team all have different colored t-shirts and operate separately from each other. Due to the small scale of YTAB, there was a more collective spirit than would have existed at any other Youth Time camp. However, John's comment belies the fact that there is a clear hierarchy within YTAB that is crucial to its operation. Each person on staff has a specific role, and within the staff, the assignment team holds a higher position than the intern team. The staff as a whole holds knowledge over the campers so that the schedule is always a surprise to them. Thus, I will reserve the concept of liminality for trying to understand the experience of the campers and not of the staff and argue that the staff intentionally works to create a liminal experience for the campers in order to imbue them with a new Christian subjectivity.

Randall Tillery, an anthropologist formerly at the University of Texas Austin, uses the concept of liminality to address a summer camp. For Tillery, "camp consciously presents an image of being a liminal environment (without ever using the word, of course), and that camp uses ritual and metaphoric processes to reconstrain and direct children toward 'socially

responsible' roles'' (Tillery 1992: 380). The liminality of camp is not shielded, but rather the distinction between camp and the quotidian world is one of its selling points. Tillery traces the way in which camp seeks to construct and present an environment that is purposely outside of social hierarchy in order to shape children into responsible adults. Camp disparages the "man-made" world and places an emphasis on the "natural" world by teaching campers how to hike, build a fire, pitch a tent, canoe, and swim. The pure and moral associations with the natural world are utilized to instill particular values in campers that they will take back into their everyday lives as newly constituted subjects.

In the same way, YTAB is organized around the principles of taking risk and being outside of the everyday, not because of the possibilities for making a profound impact on the lives of those living in Baja, but rather to create a liminal state for its participants such that they are reconstituted as Christian subjects upon reentry into their everyday lives. Like Tillery acknowledged, my informants obviously did not call upon Turner to express this intention, however when I asked Nellie, the camp speaker, about what she thought the mission experience communicated to campers, the way that she articulated her experience mirrored much of Turner's theory:

> *What it did for me was gave me a taste of heaven in a sense. Ya know like you take their phones away, they're not distracted by their little world they've created back home where everything just seems to be one way. It gives them a taste of being in community. It gives them a taste of being alone with the Lord. Ya know all these things that God created for us to experience and have more often but we don't step into that as much... It doesn't have to be Baja where you go. I know we talked about this a little bit just like going to a foreign country and seeing something different and serving people that aren't like you. It's just really about getting out of your comfort zone. It makes you stop depending on yourself so much and it makes you think for yourself of like how do I depend on the Lord? Do I depend on the Lord? What does that look like? Like not being comfortable all the time.*

In this single answer, Nellie called upon four of Turner's ideas about liminality: lack of property, unselfishness, communitas, and continuous reference to mystical powers, but instead of using the term "liminality," she articulated this different state as a "taste of heaven."

To give some context for Nellie's comments, campers are required to give up their cell phones before arriving to camp. While they do have other property such as clothing and luggage, this piece of property—that Nellie argues is so integral to the formation of their identities at home—must be relinquished. Campers must cease selfish behavior and serve those around them by building houses and working with children. This unselfishness leads to the creation of a community fostered in YTAB that is dissimilar to one that exists in the home context. This is an example of Turner's understanding of *communitas* or collective liminality which he draws from Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence (1912)—which refers tow the unity that occurs when a community participates in collective action and thought—as has been examined by various scholars (Olaveson 2001, E. Tuner 2011). Nellie continually referenced the "Lord" and how the separate space of Baja allowed for more interaction with this mystical power than would have occurred in the home context.

For Nellie, the experience of being on a short-term mission is a liminal space in between heaven and earth. She is not the only one who articulates YTAB in this way. The idea that Youth Time offers a "taste of heaven" is a commonly held belief within YT culture; one Youth Time camp is colloquially referred to as "the thin place" because the distance between heaven and earth is flattened in this special place. For Nellie, the heavenly environment does not necessarily have to be Baja, nor a foreign country at all; the important component is "getting out of your comfort zone." It may seem paradoxical that Nellie identifies "a taste of heaven" with discomfort, but it is in this liminal space defined by an "acceptance of pain and suffering" that she is able to imagine what heaven could be like. Nellie is not arguing that heaven will be a work

camp in rural Mexico where U.S.-American youth build houses, but she sees that the interruption of daily practices allows for campers to reframe their focus away from themselves and onto God. It is only in this liminal space that participants are moved to shift toward asking spiritual questions that they would not confront at home.

As Nellie explains, it is integral to the design of this trip that participants be pushed outside of their comfort zones, as this discomfort helps to constitute a break from their everyday realities and thus allows them to be imbued with new Christian practices. This is an intentional and thus conscious part of the design. I will argue that in this attempt to create Christian subjects, additional subjectivities that would not be articulated by the organizers of YTAB are also formed.

Risk Culture and the Rearticulation of Whiteness

Nellie's recognition that part of YTAB is "serving people that aren't like you" is a subtle affirmation of the racial hierarchy of the STM in which a group of largely middle-class, white travelers come to offer help to a group of largely poor, indigenous Mexicans. However, she elides the inequality inherent in this interaction, which is actually essential to the success of STM. "People that aren't like you" would exist in Paris, Berlin, or Tokyo, but would not offer the type of difference that is useful for STM. I will theorize the racialized inequality that exists in YTAB in two ways: first, by utilizing the concept of "voluntary risk" as developed by Bruce Braun, a geographer at the University of Minnesota, to argue that whiteness and middle classness are in part reproduced by the STM, and second by utilizing the concept of the "ethnoscape" as developed by Arjun Appadurai, an anthropologist at New York University, to explore the role of the few Mexican-American participants of the STM.

Bruce Braun—a scholar who focuses on the intersection between colonialism and environmentalism—employs the concept of "risk culture" to interrogate the ways in which the

natural world is a site "through which effects of race are produced and naturalized even after the apparent dismantling of biological racism" (Braun 2003: 176). He confronts the contemporary cultural moment in which the idea of a "post-racial" society is attractive and asserts that this idea is a fallacy. Because biological racism has been largely dismantled, there is an impulse to conceptualize a society that has also dismantled racism. Braun interjects and undermines this post-racial sentimentality by introducing the concept of "risk culture," which he uses "to call attention to the cultural and representational practices that produce risk as culturally meaningful" (Braun 2003: 178). To make this argument, he interrogates outdoor magazine advertisements during a resurgence and mainstreaming of outdoor adventure in the early 2000s, demonstrating the way these materials are in part "constitutive of white middle-class identities, for it consists of an important set of discursive practices through which race, class, and gender differences are articulated and temporarily sutured" (Braun 2003: 178).

Braun moves beyond a surface analysis of evaluating the lack of representation of people of color, and instead expands the scope of his inquiry to think about the ways in which whiteness and middle classness are produced by risk culture itself. For Braun, it is not as if whiteness is only represented in outdoor magazines because only white people undertake these activities, either due to differences in cultural practice or economic ability, but rather that the act of performing outdoor adventure is essential to the construction of whiteness. He makes this claim by drawing from scholars who have traced the connection between adventure and race, gender, and nationality in the United States (Haraway 1984, Seltzer 1992). Braun is careful not to take the realness of racial categories as a given. He prefaces his analysis by challenging two assumptions: "that race exists as a category of analysis and thus has an ontological priority; and that what is significant about risk culture lies elsewhere than in its practices since it merely expresses or reflects underlying social reality to which is contributes nothing of its own" (Braun

2003: 178). Instead, he seeks to locate an "absent" black or Latina outdoor adventurer to demonstrate that the lack of representation is about more than an "economic or sociological" matter, and actually reflects how the black or Latina adventurer "has no proper place" in the outdoor adventure schematic.[10]

For Braun, the importance of risk culture in the construction of whiteness is that the risk is voluntarily absorbed. He makes a poignant distinction between "taking risks" and "being at risk," in which the former is voluntary while the latter is imposed. The concept of "risk culture" can be employed to reveal the ways in which whiteness is further constituted by the experience of a STM trip. Braun contends that whiteness is aggrandized by the act of going into nature and subjecting oneself to the risks associated with outdoor adventure. The testing ground of unbridled nature constitutes subjects as more moral, white, and middle-class. In YTAB, risk's testing ground is not about going into nature, but about adventuring into a less privileged foreign context that is laden with perceived risk constitutes subjects as more white, middle-class, and Christian.

In YTAB, campers are encouraged to step outside of their comfort zones into a generative space of uncomfortability. This voluntary risk is distinct from the conditions of not having enough to eat, not having clean water to drink, or being orphaned—conditions that do exist in the communities in which YTAB participants work. The choice for YTAB participants to "take risks" is distinct from the communities being "at risk." Participants are able to move freely between the experience of being "at risk," however voluntarily, and the experience of safety and security back at home, which reasserts the power and freedom of mobility granted by whiteness

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[10] Braun uses the feminine "Latina" as a gender-neutral term.

and U.S.-American identity. The participants must hold a position of power over the site of risk in order to "take" the risk at all.

The risk in YTAB is found both in the act of travel and in the work projects that participants undertake. The participant of YTAB is an adventuring subject who has to rely on the power of a U.S. passport to be able to traverse the international border between the United States and Mexico. This action is laden with real and perceived risks. In an email sent to participants before embarking on the STM trip, YTAB outlined the risk associated with the Zika virus in Mexico:

> In order to be informative and adhere to all [Youth Time] safety standards, here is a document from [YT] regarding the Zika Virus, we suggest you read. There is limited risk in the region we will be traveling to (there have been no reports of the virus in the Baja California portion of Mexico). We use an International Company to monitor the risk of our trips, and the safety of the areas we travel to. Should the area be deemed unsafe for any reason, we have the ability to quickly leave.

Youth Time finesses the line between real and perceived risks. The design of their program relies on some level of real risk in undertaking international travel, but they also must assure parents that their children will not be subjected to an unduly dangerous level of risk. The risk associated with travel to a less developed region is welcome and is a factor they consciously incorporate into their program in order to cultivate the liminality of the participants' experience.

Along with the Zika virus, parents' concern over the level of risk was piqued over protests occurring in the state of Oaxaca in the weeks prior to the trip. In Oaxaca, protesters were responding to a recent police crackdown during which nice teachers, who had been protesting education reforms that increased mandatory standardized testing, were killed (Goodman 2016). One of the members of the assignment team told me that in the days prior to the trip, she had been fielding calls from concerned parents over potential violence that could erupt from these protests. Despite the fact that protests in Oaxaca were unlikely to impact a STM trip occurring

over two thousand miles away, parents wanted to be assured that the risk was acknowledged and managed. Later, when I was traveling back to Baja in January of 2017, protests erupted over the Mexican government's decision to raise fuel prices by twenty percent (Goodman 2017). In the days prior to my departure, I received multiple text messages, calls, and emails from one of the organizers of YTAB warning me about the potential risks I might encounter as a result of these protests. The totality of the protests' impact on my experience was that one of the toll booths had been overtaken by protesters and I did not have to pay the fee, but it was necessary for the organizer to articulate the risks to me in order to substantiate the voluntary risks I was assuming.

Another place in which risk is found in YTAB is in the work projects. In YTAB, participants undertake community service projects that are actually difficult. Participants would physically labor mixing cement, digging holes, cutting wood, and hammering for many hours a day for the three days of work projects. As Nellie described, "doing physical labor for that many hours a day, I know was uncomfortable. Kids don't work like that at all anymore." Before beginning to work, participants were subject to a lecture by the foreman about the dangers of getting cement powder in their eyes and the need to protect them. This information was relayed by a person that YTAB brands as a "US site foreman" on the frequently asked questions section of their website. This man was a Mexican who lived and worked in the United States and obtained a type legitimacy that was legible to U.S.-American participants and their parents.

The foreman straddled two identities—the authenticity of being ethnically Mexican and the reassurance of his work experience being U.S.-American—in a way that parallels YTAB's tension between the risk that is essential for the STM and the safety that is required for parents to permit their kids to go on the trip.

Though the design of YTAB, as I have articulated thus far, unwittingly asserts whiteness as an essential component of the STM, white campers are not the only participants of YTAB.

While Braun sought to locate an "absent" black of Latina outdoor adventurer in order to argue that their absence is indicative of the fact that there is no proper place for people of color in outdoor adventure as he understands it as a culturally meaningful practice, I will argue that there is a proper place for a black or Latina participant of YTAB. Because YTAB's testing ground is a foreign context that facilitates an encounter with "the other," rather than the testing ground of unbridled nature, a black or Latina participant is absorbed into the structure of the program as an instructive position rather than a position that receives the lessons that YTAB attempts to instill.

Borderlands

Among the sea of white participants of YTAB with few exceptions, there was one group of Mexican-American campers who were led by Daniela. Daniela was on the assignment team and served as the group's translator. In fact, she was one of two members of the group—besides me—who spoke even the slightest bit of Spanish. She was from a border town in Texas and spent most of her life back and forth between Mexico and the United States. Daniela had a magnetic personality. During the trip, Daniela would strike up a conversation with anyone and hear their life story in a matter of minutes. In order to provide some understanding of Daniela's character, I will describe one moment that I keep returning to as I think about her.

One evening we drove into town to get ice cream. Daniela translated everyone's orders, even though she was not getting ice cream herself, and stayed back to talk to the shop's owners long after the rest of the group went outside to enjoy the sunny, summer day. When she told the owner that we were a Christian group working with *El Rancho de Dios*, a couple sitting nearby overheard and began to tell her their story. The man had found a collection of ceramic masks in a wash in his backyard and did not know what to do with it. A few years earlier, there was some stone in their backyard that was confiscated by the Mexican government and put in a museum without their being compensated. This led them to believe that the masks found in the same wash

would be of import. They had not yet contacted anyone about the masks because they were afraid they might be confiscated, but they were immediately convinced to share it with Daniela. After they showed Daniela a photograph of the masks on their phone, she called me over and said "Liz, have you seen anything like this in Oaxaca? Don't you study anthropology?" I told them that I could not offer any help with identifying the mask, but stayed with Daniela and listened to the couple's story.

When Daniela and I were reflecting on the conversation on the war to the car, she asked me "how were you feeling spiritually as this all was happening?" I mentioned that I was blown away by the moment because of the sheer number of variables needed to make that moment happen. To give some context for this moment, earlier in the day we took a hike as a group and ended up getting wildly lost. This caused us to arrive back at camp later than we had expected, so we abandoned our plans to continue preparation for the participants' arrival the following morning and spontaneously decided to go get ice cream instead. Then, Daniela stayed to talk to the shop owners long after we had finished ordering, this couple overheard her mention that she was with a Christian group, which was enough for the family to trust her with their discovery. It was admittedly a pretty ridiculous series of events. Daniela smiled at me and said, "it's pretty cool to see the Holy Spirit working," and then began scheming about how we could connect them with someone who would help them get compensated for such a discovery.

As a person, Daniela chose her words thoughtfully. She never exaggerated or shared something good about herself without being asked. She was the exact opposite of a hypocrite. She understood her beliefs and acted precisely in line with them. On multiple occasions, our conversations crept into the dim hours of the morning as we grappled with questions about how a STM trip should ideally be executed, our purpose in Mexico, why her group came to this trip and not the one in Northern California, the role of activism, the function of anger, the ritual of prayer,

etc. Often we disagreed sharply, but Daniela forced me to articulate my thoughts and formulate many of the questions that I attempt to address with this ethnography.

A few members of the assignment team had YT groups from their homes who were to come on one of the weeks of YTAB. Daniela's group was one of them. Like Daniela, the members of her group grew up traversing between Mexico and the United States to see family or to work. Because of their familiarity with Mexico, Daniela expressed concern that her students— who had to do a substantial amount of fundraising to afford the $525 cost for the week-long trip—would not get as much out of the trip as other students because they would not be "blown away" by the poverty or culture of Mexico. Additionally, a few of them had manual labor jobs similar to the ones that were being performed as part of the work projects as their everyday jobs. The components of the trip that were designed to expand participants' worldview were just part of Daniela's group's everyday life.

Her group is illustrative of Arjun Appadurai's concept of the ethnoscape or "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live" (Appadurai 1996: 33). Appadurai articulates the fact that people are not confined to the places where they are from, but rather that their lives and imaginaries transgress national borders. He characterizes the flow of resources in a global economy in terms of five scapes: ethnoscape, technoscape, financescape, mediascape, and ideoscape. He uses the term suffix "-scape" to focus on the "fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes" (Appadurai 1996: 33). The ethnoscape disrupts notions of national people bounded by national places and instead motions toward shifting flows that are inherently unequal in the globalized world. Daniela's group continually operates within the ethnoscape. They traverse the border between the United States and Mexico on a regular basis and exist in the interstices of these two places.

Throughout the trip, I wondered what Daniela's group thought of the trip. When I interviewed a few of them, they rearticulated the same narratives that every camper did. Brian Howell argues that participants retell uniform narratives despite the location of the trip and the membership of the group because there is a prepackaged set of narratives that travels with participants to their destinations (2012). With Daniela's group, this is even more poignant because even though the trip is not designed for them, they exclusively reiterate the narratives that are intended for the white participants.

Throughout the trip, Daniela's role was to teach "cultural intelligence," or perform her Mexican-American identity, to the participants. This term suggests that culture exists as a knowable entity that can be taught in a matter of a few short sessions. Each morning, she would explain a little bit about Mexican culture or teach students how to say a phrase or two in Spanish before they began the work day. On one morning, she uncontroversially explained to the campers that Mexican people will look at them as if the participants are superior. She explained that it is not a bad thing or a good thing, just a cultural difference. Daniela spoke from this position of authority as Mexican-American, translator, and provider of cultural intelligence to make this sweeping claim about Mexicans and their attitudes toward people from the United States as if it were an objective fact, rather than a product of history. She told campers that they needed to work to "level the playing field" in their interactions with Mexicans by having the mentality of observing. However, Daniela charged the participants to observe without providing them with any tools to help them understand the construction of racial hierarchies so that their observations could do any work to "level the playing field." Later in the day, Daniela told me that one of the campers approached her after she gave this presentation with a discomfort in having had that inequality pointed out. He wanted to know why Mexicans viewed themselves as inferior and what he could do to mitigate that fact.

On the next day, Daniela mentioned to the participants that Mexicans will show gratitude to anyone who invests into the life of Mexican people. She told us that the best thing they can offer is food and that it may be rude to turn down drinking water even though it might not be potable, so she tried to teach the best way to turn something down. Then she taught the phrase *Dios le bendiga* which translates to "God bless you."

After the first week of campers left, we sat around the club room and read from the camper evaluations they had just completed. Many people's highlights were Daniela's cultural intelligence lessons. From my conversations with Daniela, I knew that the lessons she gave were a late addition to the program and she never received a clear explanation for what she was supposed to be sharing or how it should fit into the experience. The organizers of YTAB just acknowledged that she had a perspective as a Mexican-American that could be valuable to the participants if shared.

On one of the last days of camp Daniela came up to me and asked, "do you want me to blow your mind about ministry?" Daniela told me that in her ministry back home, she worked with a middle-aged white woman, Stephanie. One day, Daniela had to sit Stephanie down and explain to her that Stephanie actually has more power in their largely Hispanic community than Daniela does herself because of the way that Mexicans are taught to view white people as better than them. But because Stephanie is a white woman and not a man, she is not seen as threatening. Stephanie's whiteness is productive because she is able to employ her white privilege without any masculine competition detracting from its utility. When Daniela and Stephanie partner together in ministry, they are unstoppable because they can use the privileges, skills, and talents that come from both upbringings in order to enact change.

Daniela told me this because earlier in the week she told Roberto, our bus driver, that he should feel free to dress in casual clothing because we were hanging out and having fun. He told

her that he did not want to because he wanted to be professional. For the whole week, he showed up every day in dress pants and a button-down shirt to the soccer field. The previous day, I had spent most of the afternoon talking to him at the soccer clinic, invited him to kick the ball around, and told him that he should come in his soccer clothes for tomorrow without knowing that Daniela had previously encouraged him to dress more casually. The next day, he showed up in his shorts and a t-shirt and spent much of the day with the kids kicking the soccer ball. As she relayed the story to me, Daniela was overjoyed that this connection was made, but it made me really sad. My cultural capital as a white person was somehow more valuable than Daniela's actual higher up job and Roberto was only able to accept the permission to elide this formality when it was accompanied by the assurance from whiteness. Instead of Daniela being upset by the reality of this racial hierarchy, she was thanking me for talking with Roberto.

Daniela recognized the functionality of my whiteness because she did not and could not have it or utilize it. Campers, too, were taught to recognize their own whiteness through the disparities between themselves and the community members. They were not intended to face the discomforts of their own privilege, as the uncomfortable camper did. Instead, they were set up to realize their sutured white-evangelical identity through the seemingly coincidental—by Daniela's presentation of white racial advantages as a fact instead of as a product of history, rather than structural, disadvantages facing the local community. Thus, their white privilege becomes a tool through which, not to disestablish racial hierarchy, but instead to functionalize the local community and the people straddling both Mexican and American identities into this STM process of reproducing white-evangelical identity. Ultimately, the suturing of white and evangelical identity together is able to realize the YTAB path to salvation that is constructed such that it requires being white to walk down it.

Chapter 3: Teaching Christianese

On the second full day that the staff was at camp, we huddled in Jim's room on the edge of the property for our first orientation meeting. We spent the previous day getting to know each other, getting to know the ranch and the people who staff it, driving around the region to the various work sites, and cleaning up the cabins in preparation for the incoming campers. If the first day consisted of physical preparation, the second day was about mental preparation. John was giving us an overview of the arc of the week and elucidating the intentionality behind each aspect of the camp. The first piece of advice John offered was "watch out for your Christianese."

Throughout his presentation, he continuously referred back to his concern about inaccessible language and the steps that he took to address this problem in YTAB's design. However, John needed buy-in from this group of interns and staff members implicated in both Christian culture and Youth Time culture of which language is a large part. As John explained:

> *When you use phrases like 'scripture, the Lord, my walk with Jesus, devo time,' it can be alienating to kids. Instead of saying 'devo time' I want you to take the time to say devotional time and explain that this is the time of day that Christians set aside to devote some of their time to spend with Jesus. We want to put the cookies on the bottom shelf. We want kids to leave this place with all the good stuff of what it means to be a Christian.*

John recognizes that Christians perform their identity in part through "Christian lingo." As with any social group, members utilize language that is specific to their group as they become more entrenched in it in order to build connection and affirm their membership in that group. John warns his staff against using these words that are read as heavily religious and thus alienating to burgeoning Christians and steers them toward language that could be interpreted with a more secular bent. While John understands the value of slang in solidifying a connection within its membership and in acting as a shorthand to communicate a large volume of information within a

short phrase, through the program he has built, he wants to explode the boundaries of this group

and invite a wave of newly initiated Christians into its full participation.

John is tapping into an important component of Christian and Youth Time culture: that

there is a specific language tied to them and that this language is productive. This is so central to

understanding short-term missions and the larger Christian culture that accompanies it that the

most comprehensive study on STM, *Short-Term Mission* by Brian Howell, is dedicated to

unpacking the narratives around STM. Howell argues that "we produce narratives—framing

discourses—that profoundly shape the experiences of these travels. These narratives have a

history and social context that we should understand if we are to understand how individuals

encounter themselves and others through STM" (Howell 2012: 9). Howell argues that the

narratives that are produced before the trip begins profoundly shape the way that the trip is

framed after it has been completed. In detailing his decision to focus on narratives rather than

any other aspect of the STM experience, Howell draws from his personal experience as an

evangelical and his position as a scholar of evangelicalism to point out "the importance and

particularity of narratives of faith" and to note that "the ways Protestants generally, and

evangelicals in particular, think about and use language has become a central concern among

anthropologists of Christianity" (Howell 2012: 30).

Howell also points to the work of Susan Friend Harding—a cultural anthropologist at the

University of California, Santa Cruz—who studied the language utilized by Jerry Falwell and his

contemporaries in *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, as an inspiration for his decision to focus on

narrative. Harding specializes in the fundamentalist movement in the United States and

"undertakes a study of the language by which many fundamentalist Protestants and their allies

transformed themselves during the 1980s from a marginal, antiworldly, separatist people into a

visible and vocal public force" (Harding 2000: ix). The linguistic focus of these two

ethnographies of Christian culture suggests that—more than a typical subculture—rhetorical production is essential to understanding this group.

In following these scholars' focus on language and its importance for YTAB that I observed during my fieldwork, this chapter will analyze the way in which a particular Christian discourse is created and utilized. First, I will consider of the construction of the nightly talks, with its varied components, that attempt to teach campers about how to be a Christian. Then, I will describe the process of the camp speaker eliciting my testimony from me. Finally, I will give an example of what YTAB presents as the exemplary testimony to which participants should aspire as they create and share their own.

Formal Presentation of a Christian Life

Above all else, YTAB seeks to instill in campers five core practices that make up what it means to be a Christian. These five practices correspond to the nightly talks given by the camp speaker, Nellie. Nellie is one of the younger staff members on the trip, and this is her first time as a camp speaker. She speaks with a Southern warmth, but her warmth does not yield to her unwavering honesty. Usually, her role at Youth Time camps is to facilitate the implementation of "fun culture" because she has the kind of humor that would easily land her on Saturday Night Live if she were working toward success in that world. But Nellie is working in the Youth Time world, so securing this spot as a camp speaker is an important step for her as she moves forward. At Youth Time camps, everything revolves around the talks given by the camp speaker. This is the moment in which spiritual lessons are explicitly taught. At outreach camp, which is Youth Time's flagship camping experience, there is an intentional inverse relationship between the intensity of the secular, fun programming and the intensity of the talks. On the first day of camp, the talk is a short introduction to the speaker and an introduction to Jesus while the rest of the day is saturated in scheduled fun. Near the end of camp, the speaker introduces the concept of

the brutal death of Jesus on the cross, so there is very little secular programming so as to not interfere with the mood that this revelation constructs. This also ensures that campers have sufficient time to reflect on this information and leaders are able meet with each camper individually to guide this reflection. While this inverse relationship does not appear at YTAB's STM and discipleship camp because the secular programming of outreach camp is replaced by work projects, the club talk is still the most important component of the day.

In order to demonstrate YTAB's attempt to communicate the core practices through the club talks, I will walk through one talk that is representative of the formula used throughout the week. This particular talk was given on the first night of camp and was centered around the Bible. Nellie attempted to demonstrate the impact that the practice of reading the Bible had on her relationship with God. She focused on the way that reading the Bible taught her about the character of God and ensured her that God is reliable. To communicate this sentiment, she weaved together her life experience and a Bible story, which was complemented by the testimony of one of the interns and a series of discussion questions for the campers to answer.

Nellie began her preparation for this talk well before she was slated to give it. She spent months writing and rewriting her talks with input from mentors and the leadership of YTAB who offered her advice and guidance. On the day of the talk, she began her day at the work sites like everybody else. However, at some point during the work day, she signaled to one of the people with vehicles that she wanted to go back to camp in order to prepare for her talk. Once back at camp, she showered and changed from work clothes into a clean outfit. Then, she spent a few hours reviewing her notes and praying that God would use the right words to communicate His message through her.[11] During this time, she called upon the Holy Spirit so that He would be

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[11] I have capitalized God and all pronouns referring to Him because this is common practice in Christian writing.

embodied within her while she delivered the talk. Once everyone returned from the work day and gathered to hear her speak, a staffer prayed for her and asked that "God will speak through her" and that in the midst of her talk there would be "less of Nellie and more of God." Finally after all this preparation, she delivered her message. It is notable that none of this meticulous preparation is visible to the campers. While obviously the campers were not privy to the steps Nellie took months in advance to prepare her talks, they did not know of her preparations on the day of her talk. Nellie slipped away from the work site in such a way that many campers likely did not notice her exit. There was a stake in making her talks appear effortless. Her preparations were rendered invisible and campers were presented with a calculatedly casual performance.

Nellie's talk was directed at the moment in which a burgeoning Christian has lost the "feeling" of God. In Youth Time, this is often referred to as the "camp high" that dissipates upon returning home from the intensity of outreach camp. Her target was apt for discipleship camp because these campers would have attended outreach camp and may have experienced the "low" that accompanies its end. Nellie offered the Bible as a way to "get to know God" to ameliorate the superficial relationship with God that is experienced at outreach camp and replace this superficiality with a deep relationship rooted in the knowledge that comes with reading the Bible.

Her talk began with a story from her life that relates to the distance from God she sometimes felt. She told a story about her relationship with her best friend, Amanda (who was also on the trip as one of the a-team). When she and Amanda were living together, the relationship became strained during a time when Nellie struggled with depression and was unable to be an attentive friend. Amanda would continuously check in with Nellie, but she did not have the capacity to reciprocate this emotional labor. Their relationship was further strained when Nellie got a new job and moved up the coast. Once Nellie realized that her relationship was

in a bad place, she made an effort to remedy the situation by returning to her relationship with Amanda. She uses this as a metaphor for the way that God cares for his children and seeks them out.

Then, she reads The Parable of the Prodigal Son from the Gospel of Luke to further illustrate this point. First, she does the "unpacking Christian lingo" that John encouraged and explains that Jesus often uses simple stories called parables as a way to teach spiritual or moral lessons, then she reads it. As she reads, she stops periodically to call attention to an extraordinary moment in the text or hypothesizes about what a character might be thinking or feeling. In this way, she gives life to a text that may otherwise seem inaccessible to campers. While I am unable to replicate here this strategy, I am able to present the text that she reads from:

> **11** Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. **13** "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. **17** "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.**19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' **20** So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. **21** "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' **22** "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. **25** "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' **28** "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' **31** "'My son,' the father said,

'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. (Luke 15:11-32 NIV)[12]

From this story, Nellie is able to present one aspect of the character of God and how campers should approach Him. This parable portrays Him as a forgiving God who will welcome His children home even when they stray from His teachings. This emphasizes what God will do for the campers rather than what the campers may have to do for God. It is an inviting start to a week that will eventually delve into topics that require more effort from the students.

In retelling this story, she places her own story within the parable of the prodigal son. She compares herself to the prodigal son and Amanda to the father. In this way, she is able to concretize the story in her own life. She uses both stories to illustrate the way in which she discovered God's trustworthiness by constantly going away and coming back.

Following the talk, each group gathers for "cabin time," which is a time of reflection where the leader asks a series of questions that were designed by the camp speaker to reinforce the points that were driven through the talk. When I was a participant in these types of programs, cabin times were always my favorite part because of the intimacy that was created through these moments of sharing. On the night of Nellie's first talk, the campers returned to their cabins to discuss these questions:

1. Why are you here? What made you want to come on this trip?
2. Where are you with Jesus right now?
3. Which brother do you relate to in the story? Why?

Because this is the first night of the program, these first two questions sought to establish cabin time as an open space where campers could talk about themselves and their relationship with

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[12] I have used the New International Version of the Bible which is the most commonly used version in Youth Time. It is also common to encounter The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. The bolded numbers correspond to numbered verses within each chapter.

Jesus. As explained in this last chapter, part of the design of YTAB was to push campers outside of their comfort zones into a liminal and productive space. When I asked her about the comfort zone that she sees campers inhabiting, she posited that "a lot of them don't know how to articulate their feelings. And they get uncomfortable talking about Jesus with other people. Especially the super new believers. I think that's hard for them." In designing these two questions, Nellie sought to breach that uncomfortability. These first two questions offered campers an opportunity to begin that practice within the safety of their small groups so that they might be more comfortable expanding the practice of "talking about Jesus with other people" beyond the confines of their cabin groups.

The third question seeks to locate the student within the Biblical story that Nellie presented during her talk. While there is a difference between the fundamentalism of Jerry Falwell and the evangelicalism of YTAB, Harding's analysis can help to understand the productivity of language and narrative within YTAB. Harding describes a moment in which she is meeting with one of Falwell's contemporaries named Reverend Campbell. In the meeting, she was struck by Campbell's ability to weave his life's narrative, Bible stories, and his effort to convert Harding into one narrative. The meeting was scheduled as an interview, but Harding barely spoke and was subjected to his proselytizing for hours. She describes this interaction:

> If I had any doubt about where I belonged in Campbell's talk, this story dispelled it. God spoke to him under his car that afternoon just as Campbell was speaking to me in his office. I am the listener; he is the speaker; that which transpires in his narrated dialogues shall somehow transpire between us. Campbell also introduced and located me within another parallel level of dialogic structure, between God and biblical figures. I must listen to Campbell as long ago Moses, and much later Campbell, listened to God. Clues such as these inform or, rather, persuade the listen that the witness's words, though they appear to be about the witness and about the other characters on the narrative surface, are on a deep level about the listener: you, too, are a character in these stories; these stories are about you. (2000: 44)

Campbell replaces himself with Harding as he retells the story of his own conversion in an effort to ready Harding for her inevitable conversion. Additionally, the distance between Bible stories and Campbell's and Harding's lives is collapsed in such a way that the stories speak directly to their lived realities. This is the relationship between the campers and the Bible that Nellie's third questions sought to invoke. The question asks the campers to locate themselves within this story and identify themselves as either the loyal son who follows the rules or the prodigal son who breaks the rules but eventually comes home. Then, the campers would see themselves in relation to God as the characters in Bible stories are.

Another way that Nellie sought to connect campers to the practices that she presented was through shared testimony. A testimony is the story of someone's life as it relates to God. Often at Christian camps and other evangelical events, people share their testimonies in an effort to demonstrate the transformative power of God. At some point in the day, either during a meal or right before Nellie's talk, an intern would share their testimony in order to demonstrate the way in which the practice of the day has a role in their life. When Wesley, the medic intern, gave his testimony right before Nellie's bible talk, he talked about how he identified with the older brother because he always followed the rules. For Wesley, it was frustrating that God had the same relationship with his peers—who continually broke the rules—that he had with Wesley— who never slipped up. Once his relationship with God matured, he began to appreciate the way that God's love was not contingent on behavior. When the interns and staff gathered at the end of the night to reflect on the day, Wesley and Nellie remarked about the serendipity that Wesley chose to use that particular parable to demonstrate his point. Nellie and Wesley had not discussed this beforehand which demonstrates that there are a few biblical stories which get recycled while there are many which are never broached in a youth ministry setting. Even though Nellie and Wesley had not discussed the use of this parable to demonstrate Wesley's story, Nellie did have

a role in the outcome of Wesley's testimony. In order to show the way that Nellie sought to elicit a particular narrative from the raw material of each intern's life, I will describe the process of Nellie producing my testimony.

Producing Testimony

During the preparation period at camp, I was asked to speak a little bit about my project and why I chose the topic to the rest of the staff. That morning, I was so nervous about presenting myself to this group that I unwittingly woke up before sunrise. When I was unable to fall back asleep, I spent the next few hours planning out the particular aspects of my life's story that when weaved together could be understood as leading to my decision to undertake the project. First I situated myself within their world and talked about my experience growing up in the church, my experience in missions, and the reasons I was drawn to Youth Time as a middle and high schooler. Then, I described moments of tragedy in order to explain away the distance I had created from that world by talking about my parents' divorce and the death of a dear friend in my last year of high school that led me to seek a place far from Arizona as I was choosing a school. Next, I talked about the way that Bard had caused me to ask questions that had unsettled some of the foundational understandings of the world I previously held, and finally I talked about how I saw my project as a way to fold my bifurcated experiences of the world into each other and put them into conversation with each other. As I was constructing the narrative, it was not so schematic as this, but I was pointedly aware of who my audience was while I was preparing to share my story. I anticipated what critiques could be levied against me and put together a story— while wholly true—that addressed those anticipated critiques and left other aspects of my life's story unaddressed. As someone who had been raised in this environment, I was careful to only share aspects of my story that could be understood in the language of Christianese.

At that point, I thought that was the limit to the testimony I was required to tell. Even though each intern was required to give their testimony, I had made an agreement with John that my position at the camp was going to be separate from the interns in light of my project and my desire to maintain ethical anthropological boundaries. Despite this conversation, I was grouped in with the interns in logistical communications, and so when Nellie had Skype conversations with each intern before the trip to hear about their life so that she could start to think about which intern's story she could pair with each of the five themes, I also had a conversation with her. I told her that I did not think it would make sense for me to share my testimony, but I would come to find out later that during this conversation Nellie was convinced that I would. For Nellie, it was a matter of convincing me to agree.

Upon arriving at the camp, she met with each of the interns again to talk through where she had placed them. I was in the club room helping the music intern practice the songs for the week when Nellie pulled me out to talk with her about my testimony. The distinction between my role and the role of an intern had already started to collapse because I was living with the interns and helped with the same tasks that the they did, so I was enveloped into that position. When I met with Nellie that day, I was initially hesitant to offer my story as part of their program. As the conversation progressed, I was convinced. Nellie's initial Skype conversation was to get a general idea about the course of our lives, but this meeting was meant to establish how we would frame our story.

One of my hesitations in sharing my testimony was with the concept of a testimony itself. I had sat through countless testimonies of people sharing the absolute darkest moments of their lives with a room full of strangers in an attempt to manipulate them into believing in the power of God to perform miracles. I had always been uncomfortable with this kind of contrived vulnerability and didn't want to perform in this way. Nellie agreed with me. She made a joke

about how Youth Time loves stories of kids who come to Jesus when they are passed out in bathroom stalls, but that that is not the kind of testimony she wanted us to be sharing. She offered a different formula. Rather than sharing a series of dark moments, she wanted people to choose one significant moment in their lives and build their testimony around that. As I saw later in the week, one girl chose her relationship with her phone to demonstrate being distracted from God. One boy chose to talk about his mother dying when he was in high school to demonstrate the moment in which his faith had to be real and not performative, and another boy talked about how he always enjoyed arguing with Christians until he went to church and felt God's presence and became one of them.

In order for Nellie to draw out my story, she began by asking if I would share when I became a Christian, how I see mission playing a role in my life, and what experiences most shaped me. She brought up the concept of the great commission to explain what she was talking about. For Nellie, the great commission communicates to Christians that they need to tell people about Jesus, but also that they are uniquely created to play a role in the world. Each person has an individual role that they fill and missions are everywhere: "just go—serve whoever is next to you." She described the way in which God inscribes in each person a sense of what he wants us to do: "pay attention to the things that get you excited or that you're passionate about because these are the things that the Lord is laying on your heart. Just go." I began to tell her about the way in which my life was set up—that I didn't go to church, that there wasn't a Youth Time in my area, and that I didn't know exactly what I believed, so I did not know if I could represent how to be a Christian. In response, she described one's walk with Jesus as a dance—an ebb and flow and that it was fine to have moments when you were less sure than others. For Nellie, it was inevitable that I would step into belief, but that it was only a matter of time before I fully inhabited this space.

Nellie was very excited and ready to have me share, but I did not want to be deceptive in dictating how people should perform their Christianity. I told her that since I grew up in a Christian home, I never really knew when I accepted Christ. That I kept trying to get my "ticket" to heaven punched and I never knew if it worked. We talked about the very few Christians who attend my school and the even fewer who participate in what little Christian community exists. I told her that most of my friends weren't actually Christians, and many of them didn't know a single Christian growing up. After this conversation, Nellie told me that she wanted me to speak on the "others" night. This was about how being a Christian is supposed to impact how you treat the people in your life. Then we settled on the moment I would feel comfortable sharing with the group. A few weeks prior to this trip was the Orlando shooting. Many of my friends are queer and trans and were feeling deeply impacted by the attack. In an effort to support my loved ones on that night, I opened up my living room, lit some candles and held space as people began to process what had happened. It was a natural impulse for me and for Nellie, it read as communion. Throughout this conversation, Nellie imbued my impulse to be a good social being as necessarily linked to a belief in God. In her retelling my story so that I could retell it to the group, I was led to ascribe moments in which God had used me so that the campers would believe that God would use them.

The Ideal Testimony

The importance of each person's testimony was reinforced repetitively throughout the week. When one of the organizers introduced Mark, the director of *El Rancho de Dios*, he told the camp that "your story is the most powerful thing each of you have," and encouraged them to share it widely. Mark's story is one he had shared widely. As well as being the director of the ranch, Mark is the reason it was created. A large portion of his time is devoted to travelling throughout the world, telling his story, in order to elicit support for his ministry. His story was

both unsettling and deeply moving. It was almost comically tragic in the way that each time it

seemed to be settling into normalcy, another tragedy struck. He almost died every year for the

first 5 years of his life, he eventually went 80% deaf, and has endured an inordinate amount of

hardship, but the story he was really trying was one about his parents and especially his father's

obedience to God:

> *Mark's family was originally from North Carolina. His dad was a successful business owner and they were a good, Christian family. One summer, a group of pastors asked his dad, because he had the nicest car in town, to drive them down to a pastor's conference even though he wasn't a pastor. Their family was moderately religious—went to church on Sunday and prayed over dinner—but did not filter every family decision through this aspect of their lives.*
>
> *At the conference, he witnessed a man with no legs or arms playing an organ and singing a song, "Jesus use me." He felt convicted because he was a man who had everything, yet he still wasn't being used by Jesus. When he returned home, he told his family that he was beginning to look for a sign for what God wanted him to do. Later, he was on a short-term mission trip in Mexico when a deaf boy came up to him and offered to clean his shoes. Because his son Mark was also deaf, he recognized the plight of this boy and decided to dedicate his life to help the deaf children of Mexico. He sold his family business, the house, all their belongings, bought a bus and moved to Mexico.*
>
> *For a while, they lived in a moderately large city in Baja while they sought out a piece of land in a more rural area. Eventually, they bought a large plot of land where they would begin to establish the school. At first, the family slept in an open-air bunk where their morning routine began with a herd of cows wandering through their "dining room." With the help of a few short-term mission trips from US churches, the family was finally able to construct a beautiful two story house. On the top floor, there was a room for the girl students and a room for the boy students connected by a bathroom, and on the bottom floor, there was a kitchen, dining room, classroom, and the master bedroom. They delighted in their realized dream for a mere two weeks before the house was completely burned down in an accident. Devastated, the family went to stay at the home of another missionary family in Baja. When they arrived, they said, "we have nothing. The house burned down. We lost everything." The family took them in and responded, "no, you have everything. You have Jesus."*
>
> *Looking back on this event, Mark sees that the plan they had for the school was too small—they were fine with one house with all the facilities in one room. But when the house was burned down, it opened the opportunity for God to reveal his bigger plan—a sprawling school that services hundreds of kids each year.*[13]

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[13] I was unable to get a recording of Luke sharing his testimony, so I have assembled this story from notes, conversations with other staff members who witnessed his testimony, and various online sources that detail a portion of this story.

Mark's father was resolved to stay in Mexico even after the house burned down. For Mark, this was a testament to his father's unwavering faith in God. As with building any testimony, Mark strung together a few disparate events from his life and attributed the progression to the work of God. To conclude, he read from Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" He used this verse to talk about how God had a hope and future in heaven for the deaf children of Mexico. He mentioned that the catalyst for his father coming to Mexico was a little deaf boy who came to shine his father's shoes and Mark said "this little boy was born to cross paths with some tall gringo who was trying to figure out what God wanted to do with his life."

Mark was able to functionalize this little boy's life in the one interaction he had with his father. Mark's dad's experience is filtered through the ultimate goal of creating Christians. In following this logic, it is only possible that this boy's life purpose was to have that interaction with Mark's father.

The following chapter presents the next chapter of Mark's story as it unfolds. It explores how Mark and the organizers of YTAB are able to mobilize an emergency situation in order to realize their goal of helping participants "follow Jesus for life."

Chapter 4: Social Drama

It was the second to last work day of the last week of camp. During this week, we ran a three-day soccer camp for the local children, what Youth Time Adventures referred to as the *niños*. Professional soccer players from Tijuana came down to help facilitate the camp, and the campers partnered up with each age group to guide them through the activities. Once our bureaucratic duties of starting the day had been completed, Morgan, Alex, and I began chatting as we watched over the group. Morgan and Alex are both on Youth Time staff and met each other while working for Youth Time International at a military base in Germany. Alex was the area director and Morgan was a member of student staff, so she worked under Alex. They frequently recalled their time in Germany to offer comparisons to our time in Baja.

As we watched from the outskirts of the soccer field, our conversation shifted from general musings about the progression of camp, to the upcoming presidential election, to the polemical topic of abortion. By then, I had an idea of who was willing and excited to have these conversations and who was not. Alex and Morgan were willing. Alex would outline his understanding that abortion is the murder of an innocent life, I would respond with the imperative for women's health, Morgan would argue that the sin of a mother should not determine the life of a child, and the morning passed in this back and forth while intermittently chasing down runaway soccer balls and attempting to stay hydrated. As the sun settled into noon, the campers were scrimmaging with the *niños*; the coaches were chatting with some of the campers who opted out of soccer; and Morgan, Alex, and I decided to head inside to prepare sandwiches for lunch joined by Nellie, the camp speaker, and Thomas, one of the leaders from Southeast Texas.

The cool air of the tiled church was a welcome relief from the dry, scathing heat of the Mexican summer. We began chatting about the week and as our assembly line settles in, the other staff members poked fun at how I, the only vegetarian, had to handle the sliced ham. As the ethnographer from a school nobody has heard of, these remarks are frequent. Eventually our conversation returned to its previous tenor, and Alex asked me about my stance on a debate we had all had many times—the relationship between the church in the United States and homosexuality. He told me that he thought he knew how I would respond, revealing that as I was reading him and Morgan, he was reading me. Although I had had independent conversations with both Thomas and Nellie about Black Lives Matter and racism in the United States which gave me a sense of their positionality, I did not want to further mark myself as an outsider by revealing myself as a staunch supporter of gay rights. Instead, I resolved to ask questions of Alex in an attempt to move the focus away from me. Alex was beginning to tell me about his church's relationship with a "pray away the gay" therapy program, but before he situated this point within his larger argument, he received a radio call that left him sprinting down the road.

This was the first and only time I saw the radios being used, so I knew something bad had happened. Alex left without any inclination of what had occurred except for the cloud of dust that he kicked up as he pummeled down the dirt road. With no more debate to be had and a clear shift in our mood, we finished assembling the sandwiches and carried the full crates of lunches back over to the soccer fields.

It is helpful to understand the following event as it unfolded through the framework of the social drama. Victor Turner defines the social drama as "a sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive, or agonistic type" (Turner 1987: 33). There are four stages that make up the social drama: breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration. Set against a backdrop of social norms that govern a group, the social drama begins when one of these rules is broken. Then,

members of the group take sides and are coaxed toward one side or another. Next, repairs or made— either formally or informally. Finally, the group returns to normal or dissipates if the attempted repairs are ineffective. While the following event does not adhere to these stages exactly, the social drama is still a productive framework to utilize especially as it elucidates the way that the social drama relies on and elicits narrative. In the third phase of redress, "one becomes aware that a narrative is being slowly constructed" (Turner 1987: 38). Here, narrative is functionally linked to the process of bringing together the society that has been fractured. Later, the entire social drama will itself become a narrative "until what began as an empirical social drama may continue both as an entertainment and a metasocial commentary on the lives and times of the given community" (Turner 1987: 39). As I utilize the social drama framework, rather than serving as a source of entertainment, the social drama becomes a productive tool to elicit support both personally and financially.

After the lunches were served and Ben, another intern, had initiated his bible lesson comparing the heroism of soccer stars to that of Jesus, Morgan pulled me aside and said "hey Liz, there has been a fire at the ranch. It's bad. We don't know how bad, but we aren't telling campers until the day is over." My mind filled with images of a flattened, charred piece of land destroyed by flames. I imagined the flat emptiness that would occupy the place that had become our home in the previous weeks and the home for so many kids in a country that has little publicly funded support for students with exceptionalities. I thought about the fieldnotes I had meticulously crafted in the past few weeks carefully tucked under my pillow. And my mind began to fill with worried thoughts about the immediate future of all the campers and their corporeal needs as we were a group of seventy that had suddenly lost our accommodation and the ability to make meals.

This is the moment in which the social drama begins. While Turner theorizes the social drama as an interpersonal conflict between warring factions within a larger social group, I will apply this framework to this emergency situation with the recognition that it is not a perfect fit. However, the upheaval that Turner observes following the breach of a social norm is shared during this moment of crisis, and the ensuing efforts to ameliorate and make use of this moment are elucidated by the latter steps of the social drama.

At first, the campers had no idea what had happened. For the rest of the day, they laughed and played as they had done all week. One camper was so immersed in the game that he had the audacity to dive head first for a ball, busting up his chin. But the staff was preoccupied by the need to worry about the ranch. At the end of the day as we were tearing the camp down, there was a clear discrepancy between the attitudes of the two groups. The campers were lighthearted and chatty, while the staff was all business and became easily frustrated by the campers' lingering.

The staff then gathered by the church while the full bus waited to leave. We sat in a circle while Amanda, one of the a-team, finally announced to the staff what was happening, "I'm sure most of you know this by now, but there was a fire at the ranch. It was contained mostly in the back of camp." As she began to describe the damage the other girl interns and I looked at each other convinced that our residence had been hit, "the auto shop is gone, the sign making shop is gone, but we have been told that our housing is safe. We won't be able to stay there tonight and we are working on getting other accommodations set, but it looks like we will be able to stay at [*La Casa de Esperanza*] because they had one of their groups cancel, something that hasn't happened all summer. I know this is a lot. Do you guys want to pray?" We grabbed hands and people took turns thanking God for keeping so much of the ranch safe, asking Him to watch over the logistics for the day, and praying for the recovery of the ranch. After praying, Morgan turned

to me and said, "we are getting rescued by an orphanage even though we are supposed to be helping them."

In this moment, the incredibly trying situation was utilized as a way to reassert the values of Youth Time. With her decision to lead the group in prayer, Amanda took a concrete step to normalize the situation, reinforce her belief in the power of God to take care of the situation, and redirect the rest of the group to filter their experiences of the rest of the day through this lens. This is her attempt at initiating the phase of redress.

Additionally, in the chaos of moving forward, the crisis served as an opportunity to shore up the hierarchy of YTAB and offer the leadership a chance to demonstrate their capacity to lead. As much as John liked to envision a flattened hierarchy in YTAB, during this intense interaction there was a strict adhesion to the hierarchy even as it was falling apart. Alex, as the camp director who was the acting head of the program even if John's presence sometimes obfuscated this role, was tasked with announcing to the camp what had happened. Even though he was forty-five minutes away assessing the damage of the ranch, the rest of us waited—with the campers waiting in the bus—until he was able to return from the ranch to make this announcement only to have us drive back to the ranch to gather our luggage. Alex capitalized on this tumultuous moment to reify his position as the person in charge. This exhibits the moment of crisis in which Alex tried to cajole campers into viewing him as the principal leader within the leadership.

Once Alex made the announcement to the campers, the bus took off toward the ranch and the staff members followed in cars. During the car ride, Daniela and I began to come up with the "silver linings" of the fire. In this moment, we made a deliberate attempt to take this negative event and ascribe positive value to it moving forward. Before the embers had finished burning, we were actively shaping the way in which we would relay this narrative in order to make it

productive rather than allowing it to be the random, tragic act it was. This aptly exhibits the third phase: the moment of redress. The narrative that we were constructing sought to mitigate the uncertainties that were erupting around us. Instead, we attempted to bring the members in our car into this healing practice of thinking through the good that could come out of this tumultuous event. For Daniela, the day's fire was the beginning of a new phase of the ranch. She reminded me of Mark's testimony, the story of his life that he shared with the campers. His testimony was a string of tragedies that he was later able to view as moments in which God's vision was revealed. We were unable to see the vision in this moment, but the silver lining was that one was forthcoming. For me, a silver lining was that Mark had another chapter to his testimony. With a similar ethos to the way in which Daniela and I articulated the silver linings, I could imagine Mark reworking this painful experience into a useful narrative—one that he uses to elicit financial support for his ministry. We continued to share these silver linings back and forth throughout the car ride until we arrived back at the ranch.

The ranch we were used to seeing was situated in a valley with brown and green brush framing the property. As we came upon it for the first time after the fire, the colorful frame was replaced by a dramatic charred outline that clearly displayed what had just occurred. Those who worked at the ranch greeted us with weary eyes and showed us the extent of the damage. While the fire destroyed a motor home, trailer, a business building, an auto shop, and the electrical box, the main academic buildings and residences remained intact. Embers from the fire jumped from the tops of palm trees and created disparate spot fires around the property which made it difficult to maintain. Unfortunately, the main water tank was completely burned and the temperature was so high that the underground plastic piping completely melted. This was the most devastating aspect of the damage and prohibited our group's return. As we hurried to collect our belongings, the barbecued earth radiated heat in an echo of what had just occurred. There were empty

discarded water jugs littered around the property and some areas were still smoking. When the

other girl interns and I reached our residence, we went to the backyard to find the clothespins

from our laundry line singed, a mere ten meters from our beds.

"*El Rancho de Dios*," photograph by Eddie Everett

Once the staff had retrieved our luggage and secured it in the van headed to DoFo, we ran

to help the campers gather theirs. We were met by a family from Alabama who runs a ministry in

Baja and came to help move our campers out of the residences. As the day came to a close, these

were the stories that crystallized into the prevailing narrative. Instead of focusing on trying to

find a blame for the fire, which it turned out there was, the focus was on the network of people

that sprang into action in order to help our group and the ranch. There was the Alabama family, the orphanage who opened their doors to us, and a local church who had volunteered to make us—a group of seventy people—burritos for dinner that night. And that was just the help that emerged for our group. The story that was most powerful for Mark and the others who work at the ranch was the fact that while we were away at our work sites, there was an overwhelming number of people who came together to save the school. We were told that every water tanker in the region traveled to fight the flames once they received word that the school was burning. Hundreds of community members came with buckets full of water, crates of drinking water, etc—anything they had that could help quell the flames or restore the spirits of those who work and live at the school. Mark noted that even the wealthy winery owners from the area dropped their daily tasks and came to fight the flames. They didn't send their employees, they came themselves.

At the end of this social drama, deliberate measures are taken to focus the event on how fortunate the ranch was. It is viewed as an index of the effort that they have put into the relationships with these communities in the area rather than an unfortunate accident. This is the last step of Turner's social drama; the drama becomes a narrative in itself. It stands beyond the moment of occurrence and is employed to ameliorate the situation that caused it. It moves from being a moment of turmoil to a productive narrative that is weaved into Mark's already dynamic narrative spanning half a century. This moment was not part of YTAB's curriculum. They could not have planned for this near tragedy to occur. However, they constructed a narrative producing machine in such a way that whatever happens—good or bad—can be utilized to point back to their goal of demonstrating the supremacy of the evangelical Christian tradition.

As we pulled out of the ranch on our way to DoFo, Mark was outside the chapel, drenched in sweat from his long day of close proximity to the fire, yelling on the phone to a loved one back in California "God is good. It could have been a lot worse."

Conclusion: How to "do good," revisited

In one of Daniela and my late night conversations, we discussed my belief that the state should do more to provide social services. As often was the case, we disagreed. As I was rehearsing the perfect response to one of her rebuttals, she quietly shifted the conversation to an entirely new plane with her utterance that, "My life doesn't matter to me. I'm just a vessel." This moment was one of many times during my fieldwork that I was left utterly speechless. I had no place to take the conversation. With a simple turn of phrase and without necessarily intending to do so, she undermined the crux of my political and moral philosophy, which is that the sanctity of life compels us to advocate for improved material conditions and increased quality of life for all human beings. Her view that her life was more of a pawn for God to use rather a possession for her to cherish and protect was simply incompatible with the nature of the arguments I was making, but her understanding can help to explain why the shift from "care for the poor" to "follow Jesus for life" was not as dramatic of a leap for the other staff to understand as it was for me.

For Daniela, her life on earth is just a blip on the vast timeline of eternal life, so she does not put any effort toward attempting to improve earthly conditions. Instead, she works toward ensuring that everyone she meets will join her in eternity, rather that eternally burning in hell. It's not metaphoric. Daniela doesn't do metaphor. She truly believes that her singular purpose is to create Christians out of nonbelievers, and every decision she makes points back toward that goal.

From the beginning of this ethnography, my intent was not to critique the practice of STM, but rather to understand it. As someone who was profoundly shaped by the industry of youth ministry and then rattled by the disorientation that resulted from leaving it, I wanted to

take an opportunity to truly understand the contours of this phenomenon, who shaped it, and why it operated the way that it did. Along the way, I have revealed some fairly ugly truths about the way that youth ministry and STM function. It would have been disingenuous for me to have pushed these discoveries to the side, but I also wrote with a keen awareness that my informants—people I care about and made real connections with—would eventually be reading the finished product. I was aware that in my presentation of this ethnography, the efforts that YTAB takes to create lifelong Christians out of participants could be read as insidious, and possibly even manipulative. I showed that each turn of the program, positive or negative, is directed back toward its paramount goal, and that participants' genuine desire to ameliorate suffering and serve others is coopted by the organizers' urgent agenda to produce eternal Christian subjects.

But, what would you do if you held the singular path to salvation?

One of the surest conclusions I have drawn from this ethnography, without being overly simplistic, is the fact that my informants are motivated by their desire to create Christians above all else. And within their imaginary, this is the most altruistic path that they can take. In the nine months since I ended my fieldwork, I have observed that this goal does not only define their approach to STM, but also that it shapes many of the decisions that they make on a daily basis. Last fall, Morgan took a job as an English teacher at a local high school, not necessarily because she wanted to teach, but so she could develop relationships with students in order to build up her Youth Time club. Nellie ended up leaving Youth Time entirely, partially because she did not think that it was effectively creating Christians in her area. These are big life decisions that are almost exclusively filtered through the desire to guide youth toward the path to salvation.

This aside is not meant to excuse the problematic mechanisms through which STM trips often seek to achieve their goals. As much as I did not set out to critique the practice, I also did

not set out seeking to commend it. But as an anthropologist hoping to provide insight into this practice, I am compelled to emphasize the gravity with which organizers' undertake the mission of creating Christians, and unpack their understanding of the severe implications of their potential failure. It is not just that they would have personally failed at creating another Christian, but that the person whom they failed to convert would be subject to eternal damnation.

This may explain some of the urgency that is felt about the need to point participants "to follow Jesus for life," but it does not justify the lack of care that is put into thinking about the impacts of the trips beyond the participants. One of the distinguishing factors between the STM and human rights frameworks, in my view, is that the human rights framework is almost detrimentally self-conscious. It constantly interrogates the ways in which the many factors shaping identity—including racial and economic inequalities, gender inequalities, power differentials, etc.—complicate the issues the discipline is working with. When the idealized human rights framework seeks to intervene in any sphere with the aim of doing good, it does so with a conscious understanding of all of those complex factors. Within the world of human rights, it is not enough to have good intentions; it is about achieving justice.

Conversely, the STM framework allows for reductive conclusions to be drawn about distinct places, which ultimately prevents effective solutions from being brought forth. More damaging is the attitude of some practitioners of STM toward the level of care that would actually be required of them to enact substantial change in the world beyond the religious lives of their participants. On multiple occasions, I heard my informants rely on the belief that "Whatever efforts we put forth, God will do what He will."

This haphazardness is unacceptable for the communities where STM trips travel, but also—which may be more compelling for organizers of STM—it is disingenuous toward the participants of STM. STM mobilizes the anguish that young people feel about the conditions of

the world in order to realize a curricular goal to create Christians. The practitioners of STM do not take the care to assess the nuanced conditions of the places to which they travel, thus minimizing the possibility for their trip to positively impact the communities they are working within. The human rights framework and the STM framework may not necessarily be incompatible if practitioners of STM do the work to reorient their focus to truly being able to accommodate both their goal of creating lifelong Christians and participants' goal of being empowered to respond to global inequality and suffering.

I keep returning to the organizers' use of participants' conviction because that young participant was me. As a young person, I was craving a way to respond to the conditions of the world, and STM was the only response offered to me. The whole package of youth ministry was sold to me as an outlet, as a way of achieving something that felt morally imperative, but I now believe that it was false advertising. Not in the way that the advertiser sought to sell something that was actually cheap for an inflated price, because in the eyes of the advertiser there literally is no greater gift than that of a Christian life, but in the way that the advertiser sold me something that they thought I wanted rather than something that I sought out.

As it currently exists, the STM framework overshadows the way that the violence, poverty, and suffering that the participants seek to ameliorate are in many ways produced by the global inequalities that these students benefit from. By obscuring that reality, STM actually ensures that students will not participate in activities or lifestyles that would produce real, systematic, or sustainable change. The solutions that STM presents allow for the process of STM being a gainful experience, while real solutions would actually force them to give something up.

My hope is that, like me, people who seek out STM as an avenue to understand and respond to global inequality will somehow find the critical knowledge, tools, and framework to

actively engage in the real processes of social changemaking, whether or not STM makes good

on their promise to offer it to them.

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