THESIS

#INSTAWORTHY PRESENTATIONS OF PLACE:

A PLACE STUDY OF EXPERIENCE AMONG TEENAGERS ON INSTAGRAM

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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The present study is devoted to the exploration of place presentations and online representations of immersive place-based experiences by teenagers on Instagram. This study is curious to understand if students' from an international travel program, Rustic Pathways, presentations of place online are different or similar than descriptions of place experience offline and if these representations differ, why? The humanistic geography concept of 'place' and place attachment theory was used as a guiding framework for this study. This study employed a mixed methods approach, completing fifteen interviews with former Rustic Pathways students and textual analysis of ninety Instagram posts. The analysis applied multiple lenses of interpretation through a hermeneutic perspective as well as a critical textual analysis to understand both the constructed realities of place experience and to addresses the structures at work beyond individuals' actions within texts.

After an extensive investigation into the phenomenon of place experience and place presentations on Instagram of Rustic Pathways participants on Instagram, I illustrate the place experience reflections as communicated by Rustic Pathways interview subjects. I also explore the interview subjects' descriptions of how their identity, values, and behaviors were influenced by place. I next explore the intersection of place and identity as observed on the Instagram platform. I examine how the data introduces conflicts in the communication of identity and experience as impacted by curated and invisible narratives, the discursive expectations of Rustic

Pathways on the interview subjects and user's presentation of experience, as well as the influences of performativity on online representations of wild and exotic places. Finally, I explore the digital negotiations of place experience by examining the complexities of communicating offline experiences in an online space through identity performances.

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INTRODUCTION

Forty-eight hours after descending the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro with twenty teenage students, we sat together in a grassy field outside of a hostel in Arusha, Tanzania. Our group had just completed a seven-day climb attempting to summit Africa's highest peak. Until this moment, our group had little time to talk about our trip, as the forty-eight hours prior had been dedicated to sleeping, eating, and bathing. With well-rested minds, the students began to raise their hands one by one to comment on their adventure. Common themes within the conversation were teamwork, humility, and grit. One student said "It's not really the summit that stands out for me. It was the journey each day, hiking with our group and encouraging each other every step of the way." Another student said that he felt like he left a piece of himself on the mountain and hoped that he would never forget the views above the clouds from the mountain. The group of students seemed to agree that working together as a team was critical in our success, summit or no summit. One day later these students traveled back to their respective countries, but not before exchanging Instagram account information and the occasional email. Within a few days, a number of the students had added me as a friend on Instagram, and soon my Instagram feed was stacked with students' posts from our trip. Quickly I noticed that every student that summited the mountain posted a picture of him or herself alone on the summit in front of the snow-covered wooden "Kilimanjaro Summit" sign. Initially, (and perhaps selfishly) I wondered why the students were not posting our group summit photo. I also wondered about the hundreds of other photos that were taken on or off the trail over the seven days. Where were the photos of our climbing guides? Where were the photos of the Mars-like landscape or our stunning campsites at sunset? I felt our inspiring closing conversation about teamwork and humility had been replaced

with individual portraits against a backdrop that hardly showed the beauty of the mountain. While I admit now that I may have been initially too critical of the content of these individualized posts, I was inspired to learn more about *how* and *why* teenagers share personal experiences of meaningful places in certain ways.

A critical inquiry identified by Robert Cox and Stephen Depoe (2015) seeks to examine how humans understand "space" and "place" through discursive and symbolic forms of communication. This elemental inquiry is pushed further by asking the question: "how does a sense of one's 'self-in-place' influence one's understanding and/or behaviors in relation to such environments?" (2015, p. 16). Humans are thought to identify with place, and this identification can determine how they interpret their environment, but what happens when you add in networked, digital, and social media? Social media platforms not only include sharable location-based information but also serve as space for users to construct narratives of offline experiences of place-making. This study will seek to better understand online representations of place by teenagers within the social networks they inhabit. This study will do this by examining content on Instagram posted by participants of a student travel company, Rustic Pathway. Interviews with Rustic Pathways students will also be conducted to understand in-person descriptions of experiences as well as their digital representations of those experiences. Rustic Pathways is a global student adventure travel company that facilitates culturally immersive travel and community service programs for students aged twelve to twenty-two in twenty countries. The organization encourages participants to connect to a community and landscape through immersive travel experiences (Rustic Pathways, 2018).

From May to October 2018, I served as a communications coordinator for Rustic Pathways. My responsibilities included facilitating communication between student travelers,

parents, and program administration, collecting photos and videos for various marketing projects, and maintaining social media accounts encouraging online student engagement. I traveled with students, completing service projects, participating in adventure recreation activities, and engaging culturally immersive activities in remote communities in Tanzania. Throughout the travel programs, Rustic Pathways program staff facilitated formal discussions with the student groups. These discussions encouraged students to think critically about their experiences, how they are connecting to the communities they are visiting, and how they will share their experiences with others after leaving their program. From personal experiences, I often observed these discussions as rich spaces of transformation for students. Students were able to articulate their thoughts and emotions about their experience, how they felt strongly connected to a place, and how they would leave a part of themselves in that place while taking a part of that place with them. After the programs concluded, I was involved in initiating a Rustic Pathways social media campaign on Instagram. Through this social media campaign, Rustic Pathways encourages students to share photos from their experiences on Instagram and to tag those posts with the hashtag #sorustic. Each year at the end of the summer season, Rustic Pathways chooses from thousands of submitted #sorustic Instagram posts, and the winning student is awarded a free Rustic Pathways program of their choice.

As a communications coordinator placed on programs with students, I was able to connect in-person as well as digitally with Rustic Pathways participants. As part of my position, I was encouraged to follow students' Instagram profiles and like and comment on photos posted of their Rustic Pathways experiences, in the hopes that they would more heavily engage with digital Rustic Pathways content. Throughout my position, I began to notice that students I met and had conversations with in-person were describing their experiences and connections to the

location and communities differently than they were representing them through their Instagram photos and captions. In person, during formal and informal discussions, students were reflective of the unique but welcoming culture of the Tanzanian community they visited. Students would mention feelings of inclusivity and connectedness with the community members (elders, school teachers, masons, or host families), grateful for and humbled by the experience, and reflect on shared humanity across cultures. Within shared Instagram photos of their travel experience, I tended to see pictures of students standing alone or with small local children. Mentions of community and humility were replaced with obscure hashtags, a Swahili word, or mentions of inside jokes from their program.

While my involvement with this organization has sparked my curiosity and motivation for this study, I should acknowledge that my judgment and analysis could be influenced by pre-existing assumptions. However, I believe that my previous experience with students and this organization will benefit the interpretation required within this study. I understand that international travel experiences with Rustic Pathways can be transformative and encourage students to think critically and articulate clearly their connections with new places and communities. I would like to understand why students' descriptions of place through their Instagram posts are less narrativized and contextual then their in-person accounts. When exploring student Instagram photos with the hashtag #sorustic, a preliminary observation is that students' online descriptions of their experiences are much less articulate than in-person. In the small sample of Rustic Pathways students' Instagram posts that I hope to study, I presume that while Rustic Pathways students are using Instagram as a platform for self-expression, they might not be using the network for the sharing of representations of place or the connection they formed to place. Looking at this concept through a wider lens, are online presentations of place

different than descriptions of place experience offline? More specifically, are Rustic Pathways students disinvesting meaningful place-based experiences from their social profiles and if so, why?

This study takes a mixed approach to data collection and analysis, blending of the hermeneutic perspective filtered with a critical analysis of Instagram posts and interviews. Instagram posts were gathered from the student-generated Rustic Pathways #sorustic Instagram campaign in combination with interviews conducted with former Rustic Pathways students. These overarching questions are sparked by my initial observations working with Rustic Pathways and these questions guide my empirical examination with naturalistic approach to inquiry. My "concern is born of accidents of current biography," (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 11) allowing me access to Rustic Pathways students in a social setting but also instilling a personal concern of wanting to learn more about this observed phenomenon.

BACKGROUND

Rustic Pathways is a global student travel company founded in 1983. The organization conducts adventure travel and community service programs for teenagers twelve to twenty-two years of age in twenty countries. The Rustic Pathways mission is to "empower students through innovative and responsible travel experiences to positively impact lives and communities around the world" (Rustic Pathways, 2018). Rustic Pathways outlines three visions they hope to instill in their students through experiential travel: (1) Travel is accepted as an essential part of every education, (2) Travel is a model of sustainable development, and (3) All people are connected by a shared humanity and all decisions are made with a global perspective (Rustic Pathways Marketing Training, 2018).

During my orientation and training with Rustic Pathways during May 2018, Rustic Pathways marketing team shared that 60% of the organization's student enrollment derives from word-of-mouth (WOM). This means that 60% of the new students that enroll in programs with the organization, learned of the organization from a former student. Former students share their experiences with their peers, who then enroll in the program. The Rustic Pathways marketing and branding strategy around WOM is well-defined with five key elements: (1) Consistently tell the Rustic Pathways story, and individual Rustic Pathways stories, across all channels, (2) Educate the audience on the value of travel and community service, (3) Always demonstrate a world-class brand image, (4) Leverage influencers and word of mouth marketing, (5) Leverage data and technology for strong digital marketing strategy (Rustic Pathways Marketing Training, 2018).

User-generated content and WOM marketing strategies

  The Rustic Pathways social platform with the most substantial following is Instagram. As of October 2018, the organization has over 22 thousand followers (Rustic Pathways Instagram, 2018). The organization identified the power of user-generated content as a tool for students to share their experiences across the platform. Constantiuides and Fountain (2008) defined user-generated content as publicly available online content posted by users and curated creatively. Researchers have studied user-generated content as a source for consumer empowerment and a tool for building a community around a brand (Halliday, 2016; Yuksel, Ballantyne, & Biggeman, 2016). Rustic Pathways initiated the #sorustic photo contest as a campaign to encourage students to share their photos on Instagram in the hopes of winning a free program. Through this photo contest campaign, Rustic Pathways is able to further their brand strategy and WOM engagement in two ways. First, Rustic Pathways has given their students a reason to share their experiences online, knowing that students have their networks of friends, family, and acquaintances following their accounts who see or engage with their photos. Followers of Rustic Pathways students may be curious about the students' experiences, the branded #sorustic hashtag, or hoping to participate in international travel themselves and seek out Rustic Pathways as their travel provider. Second, Rustic Pathways prefers to re-post user-generated content on the organization's Instagram account. They strategically take this approach for many reasons. By re-posting student photos and tagging the student photographer within the post, the students can continue to engage with the organization after their trip. Students are excited to see their photos shared with such a large audience. Friends of the featured student or students on the same program as the featured student typically also engage with the Instagram post. Next, Rustic Pathways is unable to employ professional photographers, videographers, or communication

coordinators on every program in every country. The organization struggles to produce content to showcases the narratives of all the corners of the world in which they operate. By encouraging students to post photos and enter the #sorustic photo contest, they are receiving thousands of photos from students to be used throughout the year between their busy summer season.

Instagram

As of 2018, the social media photo sharing platform Instagram, founded in 2010, has amassed more than 800 million users (Instagram, 2018). The creators of Instagram launched the mobile app with the hopes of creating a "world connected through photos" (Instagram, 2018). Facebook purchased the app in 2012, and the functionality has grown for users and businesses (Instagram, 2018). The latest functionality updates include new photo filters, mobile features for more operating systems, geotagging, video posts, tagging of other accounts within a photo, sharing of multiple images within a single post, and Instagram stories (Laestadius, 2017). Laestadius notes the uniqueness of Instagram as a platform with a highly visual culture conveying meaning through photos and added context through captions and hashtags. The mobile digital platform is capable of posting images at a low resolution to keep data storage space low with an emphasis on mobile phone photos, allowing the average user to post photos immediately, and edited with the Instagram application (2017).

Instagram Hashtags

Laestadius (2017) remarked on the unique use of hashtags on Instagram as providing more context for a photo as well as indicating a user's participation in a specific community. She identifies the shared practice of hashtag use on Instagram as community-building. This aspect of hashtag use on Instagram is of particular interest within this study as students will use the hashtag #sorustic (among others) to identify their photos as having participated in a Rustic

Pathways program, a hashtag that is unique to the organization and lacks the contextual description of the picture or event.

Researchers have explored the linguistic and pragmatic functions of hashtag use on Twitter and other social networking sites and found that hashtags often serve as inferential conversational tools rather than their default use as contextual identifiers meant to hyperlink a tweet to a larger conversation about a specific topic (Wikstrom, 2014; Pragmat, 2015).

Wikstrom explores the communicative functions of hashtags as vehicles for digital categorization and organization of content but also as creative linguistic devices on Twitter (2014). The use of hashtags on the platform is by default a categorization tool, automatically inserting a tweet containing a specific hashtag, into a timeline of other tweets containing the same hashtag. Wikstrom found that the inclusion of hashtags in tweets often have little to do with a user's desire to hyperlink a tweet, connecting it to a more extensive timeline about a general topic, but rather function as conversational or creative extensions to a tweet. Wikstrom found that these diverse linguistic functions of hashtags can be seen as both an affordance and constraint of the Twitter technology, using minimal characters to structure information, create meaning, and establish a user's inclusion within and knowledge of Twitter's unique digital language.

Pragmat (2015) argues that the hyperlinking and search functionality of hashtags remains essential on Twitter and other social networking sites, but like Wikstrom, concluded that the use of hashtags is meant to serve as inferential communication tools between audience members and a user. Hashtags can help to keep the character count low, guide the audience through an inferential process, and allow for an informal, conversational tone and style. It is essential for the sake of this study, to understand the purpose and meaning of the hashtag #sorustic as well as

other hashtags that may be used within shared Instagram posts. The hashtag #sorustic is not only used as an organizational tool on Instagram for Rustic Pathways to categorize and distinguish the shared posts of Rustic Pathways participants but also serves as a prompt created by the organization to inspire and guide the imaging of the students' experiences online.

Embodiment and Understanding of #sorustic

It is essential to understand how Rustic Pathways presents the #sorustic hashtag to their students and formulates specific expectations of #sorustic photos that could award a student with a free program. In short, Rustic Pathways does not explicitly deliver textual or digital messaging to directly inform students what does or does not constitute a #sorustic image. When asked how students come to understand the expectations of photos submitted to the #sorustic photo contest, Rustic Pathways Social Media and Influencer Marketing Manager, Liz Cortese, states: "Generally we put a lot of trust that students follow us on social to see the #sorustic contests and that the global communication coordinators + program leaders are hyping it up on the programs." (E. Cortese, personal communication, December 14, 2018). Cortese passed along examples of print, digital, and word-of-mouth messaging from Rustic Pathways that informs students of the photo contest with loose descriptions of photo sharing expectations. Students receive a pre-departure card that encourages them to connect with the Rustic community online: "Join the @rusticpathways community on social to connect with other students. Get a BTS of the Rustic experience through daily posts and IG stories and connect with other Rustic travelers through #rusticpathways and #sorustic." Another bullet point on the pre-departure card reads: "Enter our #sorustic photo contest for your chance to win a FREE trip in 2019" (Rustic Pathways Pre-Departure Poster, 2018). Word-of-mouth messaging about the meaning of #sorustic and how to

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explain it is formalized to a degree within the Rustic Pathways Program Leader Guidebook, a

training manual for Rustic Pathways program leaders.

> What To Say To Your Students:
>
> Enter the #sorustic Photo Contest
>
> We're looking for incredible images that showcase the Rustic
>
> experience. Moments that portray friendship, connection, impact,
>
> wanderlust, adventure, fun, silliness, and more. Each week we will
>
> select one winner to receive a small travel prize. At the end of the
>
> summer one grand prize winner will win a FREE 2019 Rustic trip!
>
> (Rustic Pathways Program Leader Guidebook, 2018, p. 107)

Cortese also shared several weekly #sorustic photo contest winners, re-posted by the

organization. This method of announcing weekly micro-contest winners is a strategy the

organization uses to showcase examples of #sorustic-eqse photos that have the potential to win

the grand prize. It is the organizations hope that by following the Rustic Pathways Instagram

account and seeing the weekly contest winners, students will gain a better understanding of what

a #sorustic-worthy photo might look like visually. Examples of Rustic Pathways Instagram

content is shared from Cortese below in Figures 1-5. The Instagram posts are included below

along with the caption shared by Rustic Pathways to accompany the re-posted photo. The content

of the caption included by Rustic Pathways can also serve to explain why the picture embodies

#sorustic.

Figures 1 and 2 and the accompanying captions are similar in nature in that the caption is

referring to the stunning landscape depicted within the photo. Figure 2 specifically mentions the

theme of wanderlust from the Rustic Pathways Program Leader Guidebook, which is defined as

a strong desire to travel. Both images depict two diverse yet incredible landscapes, and both captions from Rustic Pathways comment on the stunning scenery within the frame. Both winning images also feature darkened silhouettes that an audience member can assume to be Rustic Pathways students. Both locations (Mount Kilimanjaro and the Sahara Desert) are iconic destinations, equally remote and uninhabitable, and can be categorized as "adventurous." Physical man-made structures are absent from both photos. In Figure 1, it can be assumed that subjects within the frame have climbed or are climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and in Figure 2 it can be assumed that the subject is currently traveling through the Sahara Desert. It is interesting to note that Rustic Pathways has equated the photo within the Sahara Desert as inspiring wanderlust, as if to support the notion that visiting remote, sparse yet beautiful destinations can inspire wanderlust, defined as a desire to travel, as opposed to labeling images depicting other cultures and the communities as inspiring wanderlust.

Figure 1. Rustic Pathways Instagram post featuring weekly #sorustic photo contest winner

Figure 2. Rustic Pathways Instagram post featuring weekly #sorustic photo contest winner

Figures 3 and 4 both depict joyful images of students' participation with service and conservation projects. The captions from Rustic Pathways also comment on the service and conservation activities occurring within the photos, along with the fun enjoyed by the students within the images. Service and conservation work are two essential programming elements of Rustic Pathways. It makes sense that these photos have been selected as #sorustic winners, as they depict core activities that occur on a Rustic Pathways program. It is clear that these images are not overtly posed, with some students not looking directly at the camera. Themes within these images explicitly mentioned in the Rustic Pathways Program Leader Guidebook can include fun, silliness, and impact. While the word service is mentioned in Figure 3, the direct impact of this service work is depicted in the photo is left out of the caption. As an observer, I am curious to understand the rest of thenarrative. What is the service project being completed and where? Figure 4 mentions conservation and the caption includes a more detailed explanation of the work of the students within the photo.
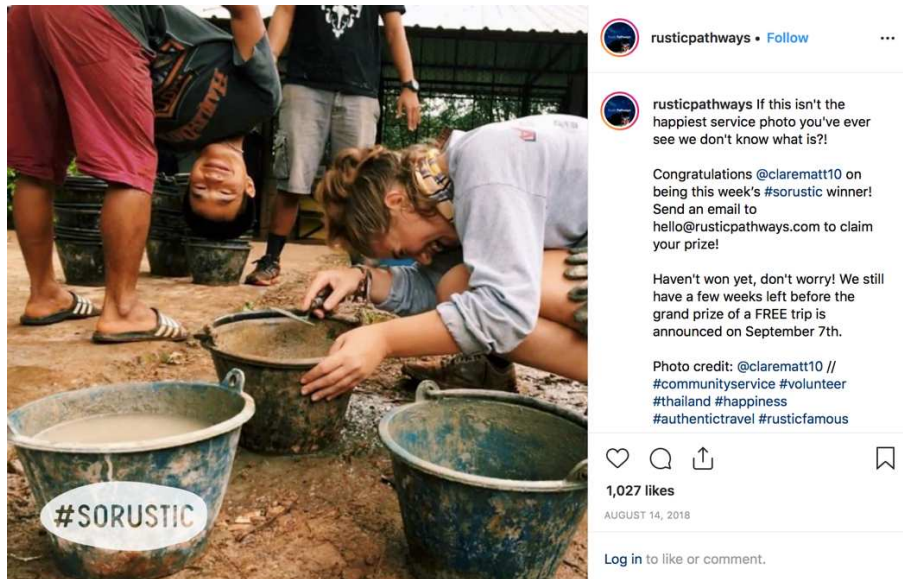
Figure 3. Rustic Pathways Instagram post featuring weekly #sorustic photo contest winner

Figure 4. Rustic Pathways Instagram post featuring weekly #sorustic photo contest winner

Figure 5 showcases several core themes from the Rustic Pathways Program Leader Guidebook including connection, friendship, impact, and fun. While the photo showcases fun, friendship, and connection, the caption mentions explicitly impact, a theme that is not represented within the picture. The bonfire can serve as a symbol of a remote location, as the students are gathered around a large fire outside as opposed to a living room or a common indoor area. It is interesting to note that this winning photo is slightly blurry, perhaps a purposeful artistic touch by the photographer, but an imperfection that Rustic Pathways has chosen to embrace in awarding the photographer with a winning photo.

Figure 5. Rustic Pathways Instagram post featuring weekly #sorustic photo contest winner

The examples of weekly winning #sorustic images can serve as varying illustrations of what Rustic Pathways believes define #sorustic imagery and experience. However, an essential element missing from each winning photo is the narrative of the image producer. While the image is shared, the caption, hashtag, and geotag curated by the image producer is left out and replaced by a caption written by Rustic Pathways. While the shared "winning" visuals might influence the type of photos students choose to share, the accompanying narrative dictated by the

students is still an essential element to be considered in the sharing of their experience through their Instagram account. By serving as the authority in choosing and awarding a weekly #sorustic photo over the curse of the summer-long #sorustic photo contest, Rustic Pathways is shaping and influencing the visual meaning of #sorustic amongst the organization's students. While students have the creative agency to share any image or experience from their travel program, the sharing of a photo that embodies the meaning of #sorustic in the eyes of the organization has become a discursive practice influenced by the governing power of the Rustic Pathways organization.

This discursive aspect of the photo contest can be understood theoretically through Michel Foucault's study of discourse as a system of representation (Hall, 2001). Foucault moved away from language and the linguistic conceptualization of discourse to understand discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about --a way of representing the knowledge about -- a particular topic." (Hall, 2001, p. 72) Foucault believed that discursive rules could construct the meaning we make of a topic. In the case of Rustic Pathways, the meaning students make of #sorustic, influenced and ascribed by Rustic Pathways, who venture to "organize conduct, understanding, practice, and belief" (Hall, 2001, p. 78) of the visual representations of Rustic Pathways students' experiences. Rustic Pathways discursive influence upon student's Instagram representations using the #sorustic will be considered when seeking to understand students' presentations of place and representations of travel experiences in the online environment within this study.

Instagram Geotagging

Mankikonda, Hu, and Kambhampati (2014) found that Instagram users are 31 times more likely to include a geotag in an Instagram post than a tweet. Schwartz and Halegoua (2015) see the significance of geotagged social media posts as slices of data that can reveal larger fragments

of ontological narratives of place and the users' relationship to it. The researchers explore how individuals digitally associate offline locations with their online identities. The study of the technological association with place or lack thereof by the use of an Instagram geotag in this study, will help in understanding the fluidity of digital place as well as presentations of identity on the social platform. The work of these researchers will be revisited when discussing the user motivations for geotags and the representation of self and social presentations of connections to place.

Instagram and Teenagers

Jang, Han, Shih, and Lee (2015) conducted a study of 27,000 teenagers and adult Instagram users and found two significant trends that distinguish the two groups and how they utilize the functionality of the platform. First, the researchers found differences in engagement between teenagers and adults. Teenagers tend to have higher levels of engagement through the number of likes and comments their photos receive. They also use more hashtags within their captions than adult users. However, a surprising finding for the researchers was that teenagers post less than adult users. This finding contradicts the other engagement statistics compared to adults. The researchers suspect that teenagers like, comment, and hashtag more often than adults because teenagers want their photos to be more exposed to others. A teenager may like and comment on many different images of profiles they follow, in the hopes that those followers will reciprocate with comments and likes. The use of hashtags also makes a post discoverable in the Explore feature of the application. The researchers studied the content of teen vs. adult Instagram posts using hashtags as contextual descriptors of the photos. They found that more than half of teenage pictures from the sample identified as "mood/emotion" or "like/follow." Themes of "mood/emotion" and "like/follow" rarely dealt with the context of the photo but rather a

description of the users' emotional state or desire to have more followers or engagement on their photos.

The content of adult user posts was found to showcase "locations," "arts/photos/design," "nature," and "social/people." The researchers suspect the limited scope of the content of the teen photos could also be due to the financial and mobile dependence on parents for experiences outside of their normal daily lives. In addition to differences in engagement and content between teens and adults, the researchers found differences in self-representation between the two groups on the platform. Teenagers posted more photos of themselves and selfies than adults. The researchers believe that teenagers use Instagram as a platform for self-expression and self-promotion, but also as a means for gaining likes, followers, and comments to validate their self-worth and popularity (2015).

Manovich (2017), refers to teenagers as the mobile generation, and in direct relation to their use of Instagram, an "Instagram Class" (p. 262), distinguishable by their cultivated ability to create visually sophisticated Instagram feeds. She notes that teenagers on Instagram, more than any other demographic, understand the rules of Instagram. Teenagers understand the strategies of content creation that lend to the production of aesthetically beautiful images, styles, and experiences, and higher rates of user engagement on the digital platform. It should be acknowledged that the Instagram posts examined within this study, along with the interview participants are teenagers existing within the "Instagram Class." They are savvy users of the platform and accustomed to curating a narrative of their life experiences through Instagram posts. The participant interview questions hope to allow students to elaborate on the curation (or lack thereof) of their personal #sorustic Instagram post.

Performance of the Self and Performativity

Findings of self-expression and self-promotion from Jang et al. (2015) lead to a more in-depth exploration of performance of the self. Performance has been articulated in differing ways by both Goffman (1955) and Butler (1998) and has been explored extensively in social media literature through the sharing of self through narratives through photos, profiles, and posts (Boyd, 2008; Van House, 2008; Larsen, 2005; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015).

Goffman (1955) initially explored the concept of performance of the self in the shaping of identity. He understood performance as a relationship between the world and an existing conscious self, recognizing that one is continually taking into consideration how oneself is presented to the world and how the world perceives oneself. The relationship is continuously managed as a balance between self-conceptualization, interactions with other actors, and controlling and considering one's impression on an audience. Goffman's performance of the self is calculated and strategic. Butler (1998) also developed formative research around performance and identity. Butler understands performance as an ongoing enactment of self that does not recognize the interference of an outside audience by the actor. This theorizing of performance (through performativity) is enacting oneself without awareness of other social actors or an audience.

> If a word in this sense might be said to "do" a thing, then it appears
> that the word not only signifies a thing but that this signification will
> also be an enactment of the thing. It seems here that the meaning of a
> performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of
> signifying and enacting. (1998, p. 44)

Butler terms this performative, as a "stylized repetition of acts" (1988, p. 519) influenced by and embedded through dominant discourses. From a primarily feminist theoretical perspective studying the construction of gender, Butler argues that power relations are inherently at play with the development of dominant discourses. These discourses gain power through continued citation and repetition of previous ritualized authoritative discussion. "The one who speaks the performative effectively is understood to operate according to uncontested power" (Butler, 1998, p. 49). Butler understands performativity as the way in which words enact reality and uses the term citational practices. Citational practices draw from authoritative discourse and knowledge, disciplining individuals' performances. Performativity is a way for individuals to behave, echoing institutionalized societal constructs.

Butler acknowledges the creative elements of performance of the self and bridges the to two identity conceptualizations together by recognizing that identity can be both a dramatic performance and a social reproduction born of pressures of authoritative discourse. Butler In using her notion of gender as an example, she states: "Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential.' (Butler, 1988, p.521-522). Butler bridges performance of the self and performativity in noting that self-representations are never fully independent of historical and cultural impediments, but that the specific performance of identity can be non-referential and dramatic. Theorists and researchers follow suit from Butler's theoretical touchpoint on the confluence of identity theories, particularly in the digital space as will be explored in the next section.

Social Media and Photos

While Goffman and Butler conceptualize performance of identity differently, digital representations of self via online environments may demonstrate how these virtual platforms can encourage a blending of these concepts (Boyd, 2008; Van House, 2009; Larsen, 2005). Boyd (2008) studied the adoption of social media by teenagers as platforms to manage identities and connect with peers. These networked spaces can have profound impacts on the process of self-presentation. Boyd leans heavily on Goffman's (1955) "impression management" (Boyd, 2008, p.119). Boyd believes that online social networks complicate impression management, as the platforms provide little direct social feedback with ever-evolving functionality elements. Boyd states the ease of communication outside of mediated environments. These personal encounters within physical spaces make impression management easier to navigate due to the ease of interpreting in-person verbal and non-verbal communication cues. Boyd details the way Goffman understands impression management: individuals ritually manage impressions during physical, social interactions. In person, individuals can "negotiate, express, and adjust the signals they explicitly give and those they implicitly give off" (2008, p. 121). While through mediated environments, individuals must "write themselves into being" (p.121).

Boyd (2008) identifies ways in which teens create and maintain their social media profiles while navigating impression management across their networked platform. Boyd recognizes the many scholarly approaches to identity but considered the performance of self at its core in recognizing online representations as "digital bodies...both uniquely identifying a person and are the product of self-reflexive identify production" (2008, p.125). Boyd notes that virtual, social network sites are highly reflective of teens unmediated offline lives. However, Boyd does make distinctions in the mediated versus non-mediated environments for teens in that

their self-presentations online are unmonitored by a feedback loop from in-person peers. Teens must navigate the mediated world by virtual identity refinement, relying on situating and resituating their virtual expressions, considering the context, space, and presumed networked audience.

The integration of both kinds of performance from Van House (2009) and Larsen (2005) can be related to this proposed study in recognizing the act of photo sharing as being performed and performative through posting images and captions on Instagram through the #sorustic hashtag. Concerning the sharing of mobile photos, Van House (2009) sought to understand how Butler and Goffman's concepts of performance and self-presentation, studied in unison, enact identity through images. Van House terms this sharing of photos as collocated photos or co-present viewing of photos. Collocated photos are "a dynamic, improvisational construction of a contingent, situated interaction between storyteller and audience" (2009, p. 1074). Through Goffman's perspective, Van House found that individuals shared photos to an audience and managed impressions from the audience by editing and curating the images and narratives around them. Through Butler's perspective, the subject of the photos (or poster of the photos) is enacting the activities within the photos, as well as authorizing the production of the images, and the sharing of the narratives. Larsen (2005) also uses performance and performativity to understand tourist photography. Larsen recognizes the creative performance through Goffman's lens in tourist photography as tourists "perform places sensuously, mentally, and imaginatively" (p. 420). Larsen recommends that performativity must also be considered simultaneously, as tourists' photography is a "discursive practice," choreographed and scripted (p. 420). Larsen blends both conceptualizations of performance: "Photographing is about producing rather than

consuming geographies and identities. Tourist places are produced places, and tourists are co-producers of such places" (p. 422).

Boyd (2008), Van house (2009), and Larsen (2005) all sought to understand performance within a mediated environment. Tensions between mediated and unmediated environments do arise when exploring performance, identity, and place. Jurgenson (2011) introduces the concept of digital dualism as a term defining the real and virtual as separate. However, Jergenson disagrees with this dualistic perspective, believing that the two spaces (the real and the virtual) are becoming increasingly interwoven. "A Haraway-like cyborg self-comprised of a physical body as well as our digital Profile, acting in constant dialogue" (2011, p. 2). This rejection of digital dualism in the conceptualization of identity and place will be explored again within this study.

The understanding of place

The understanding of space and place begins with the assumption that through human interaction and communication, both community and environmental spaces are converted into significant and meaningful places over time (Thompson & Cantrill, 2013). "Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" (Tuan, 1977, p. 136).

The study of place is an important section of media communications research today as conversations and questions are posed around globalization, modernity, and the digital age of society. The meaning of place and space could be at a fundamental crossroads as hypermobility increases and new terms like "digital nomad" and "van life" join the vernacular to define evolving place-based conceptualizations in popular culture. In understanding the traditional theoretical frameworks of place, this paper turns to Relph's (1978) phenomenological geographical study of place. Both Relph and geographer Yi-fu Tuan (1978) initiated the

exploration for a more humanistic definition of place to expand on the concept typically rooted in the field of geography (Seamon & Sowers, 2008). Relph focused on understanding the nature of place and the role it plays in human experience. Relph identified three components of place: physical setting; its activities, situations, and events; and finally, the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a place through experience. "Places are constructed in our memories and affection through repeated encounters and complex associations. Place experiences are necessarily time-deepened and memory-qualified" (Relph, 1978, p. 26-27).

Although Relph's work is rooted in a geography discipline, researchers from the field of psychology also identified three concepts to define place that similarly involves the intersection of behavioral and psychological processes with physical attributes of place (Canter, 2000). While both Canter and Relph believe that meanings places hold for individuals are critical for the understanding of place, the required physical settings of place identified by both researchers are of concern within this study. Can virtual spaces reflect the components of place as strongly as geographic representations of place? Cantrill (2004) argues that, in considering the meaning individuals attribute to place as an essential quality, individuals can generate and sustain this meaning by direct physical contact with an environment or through mediated or interpersonal representations of an environment.

A different academic conceptualization of place is from social science researcher, Agnew (1987), who believes that place consists of *locale*, *location*, and *sense of place*. Locale is defined as the setting where social relations take place. Location is the physical area in which social relations occur as defined by conventional social and economic processes. Finally, sense of place is the feeling experienced within a location. Agnew believes all three elements of place should be

considered to understand how places become meaningful to individuals and within social contexts.

There is a growing body of research considering the in-between interpretation of place. While some researchers deny that place can be fully expressed within a virtual space (Gieryn, 2000), others reject the digital dualistic (Jurgenson, 2011) conceptualization of place (Cantrill, 2004; Tuan, 1977; Adams and Gynnild, 2013). These researchers seek to understand place as a blending on the real and virtual and encourage considering this blending of the two as a different experience in itself.

One facet of place that helps to support the idea that a person's permanent position within a fixed physical environment is not a necessity in defining place is that places are not always static. New places can be produced or reproduced, and places do not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone (Cantrill, 2004). Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) declares that personally meaningful places are not always visible for the connected person or others. "Places can be made meaningful by visual prominence, or the evocative power of art, architecture, ceremonials, and rite. Human places become vividly real through dramatization" (p. 178). This idea should be considered in the presentation or construction and sharing of place through digital platforms. This amorphous quality of place can be applied to the examination of non-traditional places such as online digital spaces. While these spaces lack many geographic conditions of place, some researchers argue that they are still composed of all of the elements that make up a place.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

Within the hermeneutic perspective, explored in depth within the methods section, researchers establish a "forestructure of understanding" that serves as the conceptual framework about how to approach or understand the phenomenon being studied (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 38). This conceptual framework attempts to live in the middle of two opposing poles. One pole within social science researcher adheres to frameworks is born from existing literature and previous studies, while the opposing pole is open to the unexpected outcomes within the current research boundaries without the influence of prior conceptions. Hermeneutics exists in the middle of this spectrum as a forestructure of understanding is developed by reviewing the literature around the phenomenon, taking advantage of the insights gathered from previous research, but remaining open to unexpected outcomes and unique specific occurrences of the phenomenon or subjects being studied. "Overall, the goal of the forestructure of understanding is to serve an enabling role, nor a limiting one; it functions as a guide rather than a boundary to understanding." (2002, p. 39) Place attachment theory and the pre-existing literature around place attachment will serve as the conceptual framework within this study and contribute to the forestructure of understanding.

Place Attachment Theory

Place attachment theory is the concept that individuals form bonds between individuals and their socio-physical environment through cognitive, affective, and behavioral ties (Altman & Low, 1992). Place attachments involve a unity of two processes within a physical context: social processes and psychological processes (Brown, Altman, & Werner, 2012). Social processes are embedded in place in various ways through identity reflection, continuity, security, and

restoration. The physical environment can contribute to place attachment, but it's the social and personal processes within that environment that can lead to positive bonds with a place. One can observe processes of place attachments in the experiences of Rustic Pathways participants. On Rustic Pathways programs, participants are engaging with beautiful and remote natural environments, often vastly different than their home country, state, or city. Students are participating in these new places with fellow students, Rustic Pathways staff, and local community members. Experiences are curated to place participants outside of their comfort zones, challenging students to grow as individuals. With this in mind, experiences are also developed to create a safe and enjoyable experience for the students, with the hopes of students forming strong to Rustic Pathways program locations.

Place Processes

To understand how place attachments form and grow, one must understand the interworking elements of place. Seamon (2008) argues that place can be interpreted through six dynamic processes: *place interaction, place identity, place release, place realization, place creation,* and *place intensification*. These elements work together or independently to help define what places are and how they work for individuals that find a place meaningful. *Place Interaction* is the way in which individuals actively engage with a place. It is also understood as the everyday happenings in a place. Place interaction is social and individual actions come together spatially and are grounded in a place. *Place identity* is the phenomenon by which individuals associate themselves with a place and recognize a place as integral to their identity and self-worth. *Place release* is experienced by the "environmental serendipity" (p. 17) of unexpected encounters and events within a place. "Through unexpected encounters, situations, and surprises relating to place, people are 'released' more deeply into themselves" (p. 17). *Place realization* is the connected environmental and human components of a place. A place is realized

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as a unique character animated and made distinct by specific physical landscapes in combination with human activity.

Place attachment will be used as the conceptual framework to approach this study in understanding the presentations of place attachments of Rustic Pathway students. The analysis of Instagram photos and student interviews will loosely use the four places processes listed above to identify place attachments. Seamon (2008) suggests that these elements of attachment are interplaying and ever shifting and that these constructive modes of place result in a spectrum of emotional experience and meaning of place ranging from "appreciation, pleasure, and fondness to concern, respect, responsibility, and deep love of place" (p. 20).

As mentioned in the previous section, the literature on place reminds us that in defining place, places are not always static (Cantrill, 2004), nor are place attachments (Seamon, 2008), but can we go as far as to say that places can be virtual? Lindsay (2011) studied place-making through the creation of the virtual world, *Second Life.* The researcher studied the construction of the world from a geographic perspective but also sought to understand how the concepts of identity, social organization, and sexuality were found to exist within this online place. The virtual world explored within this study is defined as an online environment housed on Internet servers built by corporate programmers or users themselves. "What makes virtual worlds so revolutionary is that they are new kinds of places" (Boellstorf, 2008, p. 91). Lindsay (2011) identified three distinctions that uniquely separate virtual worlds from worlds constructed in video games or networks established via social media platforms. First, is the creation of an avatar digitally representing oneself within the online space. Second, avatars can engage through a highly interactive design interface. Third, users purchase virtual currency using real currency to buy things within the virtual world from avatars. Virtual worlds are "inhumane digital spaces . . .

rendered into places that have meaning and the virtual world users become inhabitants, owners, citizens, developing a very real sense of belonging" (Dodge 1998, p. 2). Lindsay's (2011) study uncovered how an online environment constructed and experienced by users through the direction of avatars could transform into a "real" virtual place consisting of all the elements of place including representation of the self, social engagement, and organization, and virtual geographic organization.

Beyond constructing a new reality through a virtual world, can experiences of place and place attachments with physical locations be meaningfully communicated online through interactive virtual spaces like social networks? The following literature explores a less understood communicative dimension of place as it is represented within online spaces. The studies outlined explore how digital technologies interface with attachments to physical places.

The literature uncovered a few different dimensions of digital connections to place. One aspect of the literature examined studies that seek to understand how audiences perceive and identify with place from online digital environments. This dimension reveals ideas of a new hybrid experience within online environments (Adams and Gynnild, 2013).

The hybrid representations of place

There is a debate among researchers about the use of digital media in allowing users to develop and maintain attachments to places that may be near or far from them geographically (Gustafson, 2013, Gieryn, 2000, Cheng, 2005). As mentioned in a previous section, using digital technologies to attach to virtual representations of place has been contentious among researchers who hesitate to name them places and treat them as such (Gieryn, 2000). Gieryn takes the position that place is not found online. Gieryn presents a method of placemaking that aligns well with the formation of place attachments. Gieryn values a sense of place as a necessity for a place

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to exist in the minds of individuals. He states that places are made when "people extract from continuous and abstract space a bounded, identified, meaningful, named, and significant place" (2000, p. 471). While Gieryn does not agree that place can exist in the digital world, I argue that his method of placemaking is contradictory to the spaces in which he believes places can be found. An individual's ability to place make through an extracted sense of place should allow for the communication of that meaningful place through digital media. Gieryn's article on the sociology of place was published in 2000, well before the functionality of digital media evolved into what it is today. For the sake of this study, and the exploration of the forthcoming literature, the tension of the real versus the digital concerning place can be considered through Jurgenson's (2011) denouncement of digital dualism. Through the widespread diffusion of social media and its use to convey the self and experiences of the self in place, (experiences including but not limited to local, mobile, or geographically near or far), the understanding of place and place attachments should be considered as a blending of "reality that is both technological and organic, both digital and physical, all at once" (p. 2).

Other researchers support this blending of offline and online places. Adams and Gynnild (2013) used a qualitative approach examining focus groups absorption of online environmental messages. Their study wanted to understand the online experience of place, and if online experiences can effectively "replicate, complement, anticipate, and substitute for more 'traditional' place experiences" (p. 115). The study drew from four focus groups (Americans, Norwegians, journalism students, and petroleum students) as the groups viewed online environmental messages via videos and an interactive online tool. The researchers conceptualized place as taking four general forms and something more than one specific location. First, place can be found as a dimension of the audience. Audience members reside in

various geographic areas. Audience members also hold different levels of understanding of environmental issues about their own and others' geographic locations. Second, the study also found place to be a dimension of the text, as online depictions of environmental topics could exist in more general or more specific locations, resonating more or less with an audience. Third, the researchers saw place as an aspect of interactive digital construct. Communication technologies can allow users to define their location within that online technology, similar to a tool like location services on an iPhone, however, the researchers name this new digital identification of place as a "hybrid experience" (p. 116). This is a hybrid experience because it is often distinguishable and not wholly representative of the physical geographic location of an audience member. Finally, place can be found as a figurative understanding of users' symbolic representations within a social network, as online messages containing place could feel "near" or "far" (p. 116) based on the proximity of the message within one's virtual social space.

By examining the focus group members' feedback concerning the online videos and an interactive tool within the study, the researchers found that audience members responded by interpreting messages more effectively when the messages were tailored to the physical geographic location where the audience members firmly identify themselves. Also, researchers found the users place proximity within a social network to be of particular interest, as the importance of this virtual space emerged in the findings as a new place altogether. Researchers found that these social network spaces are like places in that they are made up of their social norms, ideologies, and customs. Skop and Adams (2009) built on this idea, arguing that the hybrid experience is unique in that it is not a simple replication of a physical place within a mediated environment, but a community in its own right that can serve to "provide a sense of

togetherness, engagement in cultural traditions and exchange of in-group information--in short, a sense of place" (p. 132).

Another dimension of the literature explores how individuals communicate their unique connections to place through online digital environments. Within this dimension, the use of narratives in combination with identity is presented as a significant theme individuals utilize together to express place attachments. The hybrid experience of place will also reveal itself as a space for representation of identity online.

Narrative, place, and identity

Champ, Williams, and Lundy (2013) examined the representation of place and meaning attributed to place by users through the digital communication of wilderness experiences. The researchers explored the performance of self and experience posted online, sorting through 300 instances of online communication related to users' wilderness experiences. These wilderness trip reports were personal accounts of trips within wilderness areas in Colorado.

The researchers use the place attachment process of place identity as a way for users to relate to and connect with place through narrative. In the maintenance of oneself, one must be able to produce a coherent narrative to communicate that relationship. Champ et al. found that online websites can serve as a social microclimate which allows users to construct their self-identity through a narrative, while also attaching their unique meaning to place. The researchers found that a meaningful reflection by a user and its acceptance by a digital audience can serve to add worth to an individual's value of a wilderness experience.

The hybrid experience is recognized again in Champ et al.'s discussion as the study recommends a harmonious blending of the discourse between real and virtual space can be beneficial for the transmission of experiences of place attachments. Users are given a voice for

their experience of place and a receptive audience who not only validate that experience but also encourage the sharing of more context and finer details of an experience.

Adams and Gynnild's (2013) findings on place as a blended dimension of place somewhere between physical and digital can be extended to Schwartz and Halegoua's (2015) research on the *spatial self*. Schwartz and Halegoua examined the intersection of location-based social media platforms, self-identity, and place. The researchers cite Butler and Goffman's theories regarding self-presentation and performativity and the way in which these concepts of identity have been explored in regard to social networking. However, Schwartz and Halegoua make a distinction that little research has sought to connect the dots between place, place attachments, and identity through the examination of social media use. The researchers seek to understand the performance of identity through the harnessing of place within a social network. They define the *spatial self* as "the variety of instances (both online and offline) where individuals document, archive, and display their experience and/or mobility within space and place to represent or perform aspects of their identity to others" (2015, p. 1647).

While the spatial self is mostly dictated by the visitation and online identification of physical places (as opposed to the consumption of online messages and images regarding place), the spatial self is more of a socially constructed representation within a social network platform. Users creating their spatial selves can include or omit the sharing of specific locations they visit within the social network, based on which physical places they value and understand others may appreciate as well, managing the impression they predict others may have of their experiences.

This study is useful as it adds to the literature around online places and the meaning individuals find and then communicate in those places. The researcher's study of place is operationalized on a smaller scale as singular representations (specific locations: i.e., mall, park,

baseball stadium, etc.) as opposed to traditional connections to place that could be defined as a town, city, or region. The researchers acknowledge that the digital fragments of place-based identification can add up to a complete ontological representation of place for an individual. This presentation of place blends an individual's' connectedness to physical spaces with the socially constructed representations of a place on a digital platform. By studying geolocated posts, tweets, Instagrams, and check-ins across social networks, Schwartz and Halegoua (2015) encourage future research to uncover how an individual's digital narrative can lend itself to an experience of place. The researchers use the example of geotags as a digital representation of place that might not always accurately represent reality, blurring the lines of online and offline place while also uniquely curating place and identity performance.

Social media, location-based technologies, and identity have also been explored in the context of place by Sutko and De Souza e Silva (2011). They introduce the "presentation of place" (p. 908) through the use of location-based technologies and the maintenance and performance of self. The researchers studied locative mobile social networks like *Foursquare, CitySense, Loopt, and Whrrl* that allow a user to make their location known to other users while also seeing the locations of others. They were curious to understand how location-based technologies might impact communication and coordination in public spaces, as well as how might these technologies influence social norms and theories of sociability within these spaces? One such social theory explored by the researchers was Goffman's presentation of self. Elements of Goffman's presentation of the self echoed within their concept of the *presentation of place* by users across these location-based social networks.

> The presentation of place (through the interface) performs important
>
> coordinative functions for the user, so different presentations of *place* and the

people within that place, afford different relationships between the user and

the place and between the user and others. (Sutko and De Souza e Silva,

2011, p. 815)

Users were conscious of their self-representations of places visited and identified through the

location-based services, and other users would interpret their representations. Adams and

Gynnild (2013) second and third forms of place can be used to interpret Sutko and De Souza e

Silva's (2011) findings as understanding users' identification with place as an interactive digital

construct and situating the user in proximity of other users within a social network. The

researchers uncovered tensions between users of location-based social networks, as users seek

out these networks for different reasons spanning from intimacy and familiarity with places and

users to foreign relationships with place and anonymity with other users. The researchers also

found a tension between user and place, as many users do not use the networks for the purpose of

increased spatial awareness of navigation, but as a medium of presentation of place to other users

(2011).

The examination of individuals utilization of location-based services on digital platforms

can present confounding data for researchers who might struggle to interpret the exact

experiences with specific places when presented with inexact tagging by users. On Instagram, a

number of geotagging options may appear for one location. Geotags can be specific (ie: the name

of a restaurant) or more general (ie. an entire country). A user could mistakenly tag a location

with an inexact geotag due to a lack of knowledge of where they are in an area. A user may also

consider all of the geotagging options and select a tag that they feel their audience will value

most, regardless of if the tag is the most exact identifier of their specific location. A user may

also select a tag that they personally feel was most representative of their experience or their

identity. The presence and fluidity geotagging within online representations of the self and experience can create a paradoxical tension within a user's connection to place, a tension between inexact relationships to exact place. This study hopes to explore that fluid connection to place in the digital environment.

Thinking Beyond Hybrid Experience of Place: Onlife

A final conceptualization of the digital experience and representation of place will be explored through Luciano Floridi's onlife manifesto (2014). Floridi pushes back against the idea of the hybrid experience. The hybrid experience assumes that an individual's conversations, actions, and experiences in physical settings congruently blend with their virtual representations, presentations, and experiences. This hybrid place created in the middle does not weigh one experience (the real vs. the virtual) over the other in power or importance to an individual but understands the offline and online worlds working together through negotiation to ascribe a unified meaning to an individual's experience. Floridi argues against the hybrid experience, saying: "We are neither online nor offline, but onlife." He recognizes the transformative power of information and communication technologies, affecting individuals' sense of self, experiences, thoughts, and representations of those experiences. Floridi sees the onlife experiences manufactured by communication technologies as not respecting the boundaries between offline and online environments.

Rather than a negotiation between the two environments, there is a war as an individual feel pressure from the digital gaze. The digital gaze introduces a tension that causes individuals to present themselves as others see them. Floridi says the question shifts from "who am I to you?" to "who am I online?" (2014, p. 73). The digital gaze influences the onlife experience by causing an individual to be continually seeing themselves and their experiences through a third-

person lens, limited by a digital medium. The more powerful the digital medium, the more pervasive and mesmerizing the digital gaze becomes. An individual can become controlled by their perception of themselves as ascribed by others within the digital environment.

Onlife experience is a possessor of power, the power to adjust and modify self, experience, and experience in place, taking the experience in reality and manipulating and controlling it in the virtual. While individuals exhibit power expressions of onlife experience, they also experience powerful social pressures resulting in representations of experience and place in onlife that might be far from physical experience or offline self. This relates to place as it inspires the questions: which matters more to an individual influenced by online representations of self and experience: the production and distribution of a photo of place in the digital space, or the experience of the place itself? These critical questions can aid in the analysis of Instagram posts and interview content as I seek to understand if the online experience is an accurate and meaningful representation of offline self or if the offline experience becomes material for which students build their online selves.

It is evident through the exploration of the literature around place and place attachment that a few distinct themes emerge, including and the hybrid experience of place; the utility of constructing and communicating narratives within the hybrid experience of place; and the representation and maintenance of elements of one's identity that is interwoven with place.

Many researchers explored above recognize the utility of narrative within the discursive construction of place. Influenced by their self-concept, individuals seek to build a digital narrative online, a narrative that attempts to identify place and the significance of place for them personally or within their social network online. In some instances, the use of narrative was a positive tool for constructing a concise, articulate, and descriptive narrative of a wilderness

experience in a wilderness setting (Champ et al., 2013). Online audience members engaged in this narrative by asking meaningful questions, seeking to learn more about the experience and the place visited. It can be surmised that this use of narrative in the digital communication of place is beneficial in creating a stronger sense of place for audience members who have never visited the physical geographic location described. It is the hope that these audience members might visit this place one day and will be more engaged with conversations or environmental issues around these places.

Other uses of narrative online through the photo-sharing platform Instagram and other location-based platforms were found to sometimes be less representative of exact geographic places but equally representative of place attachments or what a user may value most in communicating place (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015). Users were generating narratives on these platforms that appeared to be fragmented and not representative of the places within which the users existed. These digital spaces allow users to pick and choose which places are meaningful enough to share within a social network. For Schwartz and Halegoua, while not an accurate reflection of peoples' every movement through space, the researchers recommended that this fragmented narrative of location-based identification be used as a tool to study the movements of people through spaces that were most significant for them socially.

A hybrid experience is identified within a number of the studies mentioned above. These hybrid experiences incorporate ideologies and norms that exist in reality and blend them with new digital ontologies and social community relationships. From using location-based social platforms (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015) to understanding how online audience members use a location-based tool (Adams & Gynnild, 2013), it can be assumed that the way place and place attachments are communicated, understood, and meaningful online follow a different set of rules.

These rules allow for individuals to construct and manage their understanding of place while considering their audiences in the sharing of these constructions. These constructions may or may not reflect real geographic places but can be just as meaningful for individuals' place attachments and presentations of self. Through the construction of unique narratives and understanding the hybrid experience of place, the studies have shown that individuals are performing place and self simultaneously. Finally, Floridi's onlife manifesto acknowledges the power of online presentation and the social pressures to create an online self that considers the impression of the audience as most influential in the production of experience for the sole purpose of its existence in the online space.

Research Questions

Based upon the preceding discussion, I propose the following research questions:

RQ1: How are Rustic Pathways participants describing their experience of place in interviews?

> RQ1a: How are Rustic Pathways participants communicating elements of their identity during interviews?

RQ2: How are Rustic Pathways participants whose posts I observed representing their experience of place via their Instagram posts?

> RQ2a: How are Rustic Pathways participants whose posts I observed, communicating elements of their identity via their Instagram posts?

RQ3: If differences/similarities are discovered of representations of place experience through interpersonal communication versus online presentations, why are teenagers representing different/similar experiences?

RQ4: Based upon the presentations of place experience, what can we say about how interpersonal versus online communication plays a role in the communication of place experience and identity for Rustic Pathways participants?

METHODS

This study is a constructivist qualitative investigation into individuals' online representations of place concerning their social networks. The research is grounded in the hermeneutic paradigm commonly applied to the study of place-based experiences (Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998) filtered with a critical discourse perspective (Fairclough, 2003). The study will use interviews and Instagram post examination to understand how Rustic Pathways students describe and portray their experiences and connections with place.

A qualitative approach to inquiry was chosen as it allows the researcher to reflect on the data through an interpretive lens that recognizes the personal, cultural, and social experiences of the researcher and the subject (Creswell, 2007). This qualitative approach encourages the investigator to be an instrument of inquiry and finds usefulness in the study of "situated, emergent, and reflective human phenomena" (Lindolf, 1994, p. 22). In the study of place attachment, researchers note the overwhelming quantitative literature seeking to understand the strength of place attachments but recognize that the field could benefit from a deeper exploration of the diverse qualities of experiences through qualitative methods (Van Auken, Frisvall, & Stewart, 2010; Brown, Altman, & Werner, 2012; Stedman, Amsden, Beckley, & Tidball, 2013). The hermeneutic paradigm encourages an interpretive approach to capture the lived and dynamic experiences that result in meaningful connections to place. Researchers have found interviews as an effective means for capturing emergent relationships with place (Patterson et al., 1998; Patterson & Williams, 2002). Researchers also recommend the rarely practiced analysis of studying participant photography to interpret reflections of place (Brown, Altman, & Werner, 2012; Amsden, Beckley, & Tidball, 2013). Researchers Aukon et al. (2010) state that the study

of photos in connection to place: "can provide tangible stimuli for more effectively tapping into subjects' tacit, unconscious, consumption of representations, images, and metaphors" (p. 114). This study hopes to employ both methods to advance the understanding of these attachments.

A constructivist interpretation is essential as it it allows for flexible analysis of data. Constructivist ontologies are relative to the individual or group holding the mental or social construction of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The constructivist paradigm recognizes that social realities can be multiple, diverse, apprehendable, and conflicting across constructors. The methodology relies heavily on the interaction of the researchers and subject working together to elicit and refine a construction (Charmaz, 2006). The aim of this type of inquiry is towards building consensus between subject and researcher on constructions of reality, or if an agreement is not reached, the researcher can recognize the multiple realities that can exist, and the factors that contribute to those perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Creswell (2007) summarized the role of the researcher within the constructivist paradigm by recognizing the influence of their lived experiences: "The researcher...brings questions to the data, and advances personal values, experiences, and priorities" (p. 66). It is essential first, that I disclose my intentions of inquiry with the subjects. To work together uncovering constructions, subjects must know my position within the study as well as my former position with Rustic Pathways. As a researcher working towards uncovering reality with the subjects, I will be a "passionate participant" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112) as I engage in construction and subjectively take stances about the categories, codes, and themes drawn from the data, using prior knowledge gained from personal and professional experience with Rustic Pathways. Hermeneutics is the scientific model serving as the methodological structure for this research and supports the constructivist paradigm. In combination with the constructivist paradigm, hermeneutics acknowledges three principal

elements. These principle elements serve as philosophical commitments of hermeneutics while also defining the epistemology guiding the study. The three principles are the nature of reality, the nature of human experience, and human nature. The constructivist ontology attaches to the hermeneutic understanding the nature of reality by acknowledging the active human construction of reality, knowledge, and identity. The nature of human experience through the hermeneutic perspective is followed by interpreting individuals' emergent narratives and situated freedoms rather than seeking to confirm predictable outcomes directed by environmental or individual boundaries and constraints. The nature of experience is interpreted as emergent in that it considers the unexpected themes within the experience that construct a unique narrative. Considering the emergent qualities in the narratives of place experience can help to deny the situated environmental structure that sets boundaries on the nature of possible experience. The hermeneutic perspective considers the emergent or unexpected themes at play within experience and sees the confluence of experience as both situated and free. Situated freedom is the agreement that human experience exists somewhere in between environmental determination and personal freedoms

> On the one hand, the environment presents situations that constrain what a person may experience and how a person may act. However, humans have the freedom to make choices and act in a purposeful manner, and one's personal project and practical activity make perception interpretive. (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 18)

Finally, human nature is acknowledged within the hermeneutic perspective as recognizing that humans are actively engaging in the construction of meaning as opposed to analytical, goal-driven information processors. Social awareness of experience is holistic, and

this principle seeks to interpret the experience as a whole rather than the sum of its parts (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Beyond trying to understand the emergent narrative and constructed reality of the interview participants, a critical dimension of analysis will be used to examine the entire sample of Instagram posts to detect which voices are most prominent within the images, which voices remain silent, and what is assumed about social reality and identity. This method is established by Norman Fairclough (2003) through a textual analysis that addresses the structures at work beyond individuals' actions within texts, in this case, within the primarily visual texts of Instagram posts.

Interviewing Rustic Pathways participants will be a valuable tool in understanding students' in-person articulation of place connectedness. Interview subjects will have completed a Rustic Pathways program during the summer of 2018. Allowing Rustic Pathways participants, the time and space to discuss their experiences and attachments is essential for the study to compare themes uncovered in posts or new themes altogether. Researchers Manzo and Devine-Wright (2013) note that interviews are the most common method used for the qualitative study of place attachments. Patterson and Williams (2002) also state that interviews are the most common means of data collection within the hermeneutic method of tourism and recreation research. Because the understanding of place attachment is heavily embedded in listening and interpreting an individual's connection to a place, interviews are well suited to give the individual the platform to express their perspectives on place. Hermeneutics encourages a constructivist ontology of meaning-making produced between the interviewer and subject (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Within this methodology, Mishler (1986) suggests that the interviewer encourages the creation of the narrative with the subject in two ways. First, how the interviewer "listens, amends, encourages, interrupts, digresses, initiates topics, and terminates responses" (p.

82) is integral to the respondent's account. Second, the researcher adopts the role of "self as instrument" and the interview participant is presenting themselves in a particular light to an audience, in this case, the researcher. This encourages an emergent discourse that follows an interview guide as opposed to a structured interview script. Within this study, the pre-planned questions frame the interview to ensure they are systematic and focused, while also allowing for flexibility and thematic direction with subjects' responses.

While the Instagram posts will be examined using a blending of hermeneutic and critical analysis to uncover the emergent narratives as well as unlying power structures within the texts, the data gained from interviews will allow the researcher to reveal a greater depth of the meaning and nature of the place-based experience. Themes and categories defined in interview transcripts will be compared with the Instagram posts to determine if the same themes are emerging.

Instagram Posts and Interview Participants

Manzo and Devine-Wright (2013) identify the visual approaches to studying experiences of place as underutilized but highly valuable. "Visual methods have, over time, become increasingly 'representational' or symbolic, consistent with the symbolic meaning-based nature of place attachment" (p. 113). In today's mediated society, travel, tourism, and place-based experiences are communicated and shared in highly visual ways (Rakic & Chambers, 2011). Examining Instagram posts of travel experiences can be an insightful and innovative approach to understand the visual representation of an individual's reality, as individuals select and curate the images and captions worth sharing based on the meaning they make of their experience. The hermeneutics perspective will be used to acknowledge the nature of reality and human experience through a constructivist lens interpreting emergent narratives and understanding situated freedoms of individuals within the data. The hermeneutic philosophy within visual

methods allows for the individual to communicate their *own* experiences and encourages the researcher to meet in the middle in understanding the individual's construction of reality by "questioning the cultural, temporal, and spatial contexts for which a human act takes place" (p. 116)

Rustic Pathways participant's Instagram posts tagged with the hashtag #sorustic will be systematically random sampled. As cited in Manikonda et al. (2014) teenagers use Instagram as a platform for self-expression and identity portrayal. Through the Rustic Pathways #sorustic photo contest, students are encouraged to share posts of their travel experiences with the incentive of being selected for a free trip offered through the organization. These #sorustic posts are an ideal sample to understand the digital presentation of place-based experiences and representations of identity, as Rustic Pathways requires that the posts be a depiction of the students' experience. By merely posting and using the hashtag #sorustic, students are indicating that they are willing to share their experiences of place with their Instagram network, and it is assumed that they had a positive travel experience with Rustic Pathways and desire to travel again. These two factors seem to indicate a meaningful experience with place a result of traveling. A further study of the posts is necessary to understand more about the nature of experience, consider the individual's identity, objectives, and desires by interpreting the photo along with its contextual narrative elements (captions, hashtags, geotags).

Sampling of Instagram Posts

A sample of Instagram posts was gathered by entering the hashtag #sorustic in the Instagram search bar. At the time of sampling in February 2018, there were 25,900 public posts tagged with #sorustic on Instagram. When examining a hashtag on Instagram, the digital interface of the application separates the tagged photos with two menus. One menu is labeled

"Top," and one menu is labeled "Recent." The hashtagged photos featured in the "Top" post menu are chosen by an algorithm that ranks photos based on variables of engagement including the number of likes and comments a post received. The "Recent" menu compiles all public Instagram posts with the #sorustic hashtag in order of when they were posted.

The entry period for the 2018 #sorustic photo contest was from June 9th to August 31st, 2018. Using the "Recent" menu within the search feature on Instagram, posts will be sampled within that time frame. Within that time frame, there were 1,875 posts shared with the hashtag #sorustic. The posts selected were chosen through a systematic random sample of 75 posts. The sampling interval between post selection was 25. A random number generator was used to select a number between 1 and 25 and generators the number 15. The sample selection began by choosing the 15th photo after the last photo shared with the #sorustic hashtag on August 31st, 2018. I selected every 25th posts after the first selected post until I had chosen the entire sample of 75 posts. This method allowed for a balance of posts shared across the period of the Rustic Pathways photo contest.

It should be noted that in order to select posts shared by Rustic Pathways students, I had to occasionally alter selections if the next 25th post was shared by Rustic Pathways Instagram (@RusticPathways) or an affiliated branded account (@rustic.meme, @rustic.fan, @rustic.itzel, @rustic.danielle, @rustic.amanda, @rustic.lauren, or @rustic.lia) who often also use the hashtag #sorustic. When this occurred, I selected the previous post and continued the selection process from the newly selected preceding post. I altered the sample in this way when necessary, as I did not wish to analyze content shared by Rustic Pathways directly or any of the affiliated accounts.

Recruitment of Interview Subjects

Interview subjects were recruited working through Rustic Pathways. When planning my

interview methodology and speaking with members of the marketing team at Rustic Pathways,

they suggested I recruit Rustic Pathways participants who are members of the Rustic Pathways

Squad. The Rustic Pathways Squad members are student brand ambassadors who wish to stay

involved with the organization after completing a program.

> Squad members receive cool swag when they're accepted and join an amazing
>
> community of super engaged, go-getter, like-minded students. It is expected
>
> that Squad members stay active in the Facebook group, participate in focus
>
> groups, attend public speaking opportunities and local events, take advantage
>
> of mentorship with regional staff, and build a deeper connection with the
>
> larger Rustic community ("Alumni Association", 2018).

A member of the Rustic Pathways marketing team posted the interview participant recruitment

information in the Rustic Pathways Squad Facebook group. The Facebook group is a closed

group with 257 members. The interview recruitment information was shared in a post by Liz

Cortese, a Rustic Pathways marketing team member and admin of the Facebook group. The post

shared information about the study and encouraged students to contact me directly or comment

on the post if they were interested in participating in the study. Liz Cortese collected email

addresses from students that expressed interest in the study by commenting on the posts. Those

names and email addresses were passed off to me, and I reached out to the students directly. This

procedure was employed as a way to lessen the involvement of Rustic Pathways in the recruiting

process. It was also communicated in such as way so that Rustic Pathways would not be aware of

which students specifically participated in the study, so students would not feel pressure from the

organization directly to participate and feel that their status or standing with the organization would be negatively impacted if they did not participate. The selection of interview participants could not be randomly selected through the same or a similar method of sampling of Instagram posts for several reasons. First, contacting teenagers through direct messaging within the Instagram application would be unexpected and could be considered intrusive and garner negative attention towards Rustic Pathways as an organization. Working through Rustic Pathways and the Rustic Pathways Squad to recruit interview subjects was the best approach as it targeted students who already opted in to be contacted by the organization. This method also allowed my intentions as a researcher and my affiliation with the organization to be explained in a space (i.e., the Rustic Pathways Squad Facebook group) where the members of the group were familiar with and receptive of communication of this kind.

The Facebook post generated 31 comments from interested students. I also received six emails directly from students who did not comment on the post. I followed up with all interested students to share more about the study, the interview process, the consent and assent forms, as well as a summarizing cover letter. While interview communication occurred with 31 students, several potential students did not respond after second or third follow-up communication attempts. Fifteen interviews were completed. Interview subjects were all female, ranging in age from fourteen to nineteen years of age, with the average age being seventeen (see Table 1). All interview subjects were from the United States. Pseudonyms are used in place of the real names of interview participants to maintain anonymity for the subjects. It should be noted that the Instagram posts shared by the interview subjects will only be described and not shared within this study, to maintain the anonymity of interview subjects who have their Instagram profiles settings private. Instagram posts from the larger sample are used as examples within the analysis

and discussion section of this study as those were gathered from the public #sorustic hashtag collection.

Table 1 Interview Subjects

Interview Subject	Age	Country Visited
Ashley	18	Morocco
Abigail	18	Tanzania
Sarah	17	Cambodia
Catherine	17	Fiji
Charlotte	17	Tanzania
Lauren	18	Costa Rica
Elizabeth	17	Morocco
Katie	17	Fiji
Emma	17	Peru
Sasha	17	Peru
Kristie	14	Costa Rica
Alex	17	Dominican Republic
Maggie	19	Fiji
Nikki	18	Thailand
Mary	17	Tanzania

Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted over the phone, Facetime, Skype and Whatsapp. Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. In addition to interviewing participants about their travel experience with Rustic Pathways, I also asked questions about the posts they shared with the

#sorustic hashtag. Haldrup and Larsen (2011) recommend the mixed methods approach of "hearing" and "reading" travel and tourist photos (p.157). "Hearing" tourists describe the content of their travel photos through qualitative interviews can uncover the meaningful personal experiences of the photographers. Haldrup and Larsen also conducted a separate quantitative content analysis apart from discussions with interview subjects to mark and categorize the content of the photographs, marking "scenes" and "actors" (p. 156). While this study will employ a qualitative textual analysis of all Instagram posts examined in the study, the 15 Instagram posts shared from the interview subjects will benefit from receiving an additional lens in the hopes of unveiling the subjects communicated place experience. After my initial communication with the interview subject, while setting up an interview time and date, I requested that the interviewee send me their shared #sorustic post. I learned during this process that students often posted more than one Instagram from their Rustic Pathways program and used the hashtag #sorustic. Some students shared a post containing multiple images. In adhering to a constructivist ontology and a hermeneutic philosophy that encourages an interpretation of the meaning and nature of experience, I allowed the interview participants to share their favorite #sorustic posts with me for discussion during the interview. The first half of the interview followed a semi-structured interview guide regarding the participants' travel experience, the places they visited, and the connections they made (or did not make) concerning place. During the second half of the interview, I allowed the interviewee to elaborate on his or her shared Instagram photo. These questions encouraged the interviewee to elaborate on the context of the post, leading with a lose prompt to "narrate the action of the posts." Questions thereafter explored why they wanted to share the post and why they wanted to use the #sorustic hashtag. I also sought to understand how the post defined or did not define their experience as a whole.

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This method offered a unique perspective to my data, as I hoped to gain information directly from participants about what this post depicted, what it meant to them as individuals, how it represented their experience, and why they wanted to share this post with others.

Interview Guide

An interview guide was created to best address study goals and research questions and allow for flexibility throughout the interviews. The interview guide allowed for relevant themes to be pursued over the course of the interview. Using an interview guide is most appropriate within the hermeneutic method as it enables for contextual follow-up questions that might emerge over the course of the conversation (Patterson & Williams, 2002). These follow-up questions were necessary during the interview procedure, as they allowed for further explanations after answers appeared to be incomplete, ambiguous, or contradictory from the participant.

The interviews were structured in two parts, beginning with part one as a discussion of the subjects' travel experiences with Rustic Pathways and part two as a discussion of the subjects shared #sorustic Instagram posts. This structure was explained to the subjects at the beginning of the interviews, accompanied with an encouraging statement about allowing the participants to elaborate on their experience; however they see fit. The interview guide for both part one and two began with a comprehensive, minimally directive question. General and open-ended questions answered with broad responses were often followed up with more narrowed or focused questions to explore topics most relevant to this study. It was the hope that this method would result in data that "is co-produced by a respondent describing her or his experience and an interviewer asking questions that are inherently leading" (Patterson & Williams, 2002, p. 45) and inherently unique for each interview subject.

General Place Questions

❏ Tell me about where you traveled and what you did on your Rustic Pathways program? (Describe your experience as if you were telling a friend about your travels)
❏ Are there specific locations and/or experiences that stand out in your mind?
❏ Were any of these experiences and/or locations meaningful to you in someway?
  ❏ Why or how were they meaningful?
❏ In comparing your experience in XX place, what are some similarities and differences to your home or community?
❏ Can you describe your comfort level in XX place?
❏ Did your comfort level change or evolve over the course of your trip?
❏ Do your think about XX place often? Do your talk about XX place often?
  ❏ Has XX place stayed with you over time? Describe that.
❏ Would you visit again?

Instagram Post Questions

❏ Can you narrate this photo?
  ❏ What is pictured?
  ❏ What is the action?
  ❏ Where are you?
  ❏ Who is pictured?
    ❏ Who took this photo?
    ❏ What is happening around this photo that is not in the frame?
    ❏ Did this photo take a lot of organization or planning?
❏ Can you talk about your caption?
❏ Can you explain you geotag?
  ❏ If no geotag was used, explain why.
❏ Why did you include the hashtag #sorustic?
  ❏ If for entry into the photo contest, did you believe this photo would win?
    ❏ Why or why not?
❏ How does this photo represent your experience in XX place?
  ❏ If it embodies your experience - how so?
  ❏ If it's an element of your experience - explain more.
❏ What are your thoughts on your social media response to this post? (i.e. likes and comments)

Data Analysis

Textual Analysis

Investigating the role of social discourse within the images is challenging, as prominent pressures and influences within social and cultural discourse are often examined and identified within linguistic texts. While the hermeneutic philosophy interprets reality through a constructivist lens, leaning heavily on narrative ontologies and meaning-based models of human nature (Patterson & Williams, 2002), questions around power and social discourse will be explored to uncover a critical dimension of the visual texts within this study. Norman Fairclough (2003) outlines an approach for examining texts through textual discourse analysis. This approach will be paired with the guiding hermeneutic methodology to detect critical elements within the Instagram posts. The pairing of the methods will allow for a more rounded approach to the data, as Fairclough acknowledges that textual analysis alone is limited. To uncover the causal effects of texts and meaning-making within texts, Fairclough recommends looking at the interpretation of the texts as well as the texts themselves. Interview subjects will aid in the understanding of their Instagram posts which will widen the lens for interpretation and textual analysis of the larger sample of Instagram posts.

Fairclough (2002) recommends identifying how texts are acting, representing, and being. The acting, representing, and being in texts can be interpreted as identifying the action or event, the subjects that are apart of the action or event, and the subject's relation to others. In addition to identifying the subjects, actions, and relationships, understanding what power dynamics might exist within those relationships is also essential to the analysis. When examined together, the analysis can identify the main cultural and social themes that are being represented and from what perspective or point-of-view they are being represented. In practice, these subjects, actions,

and dominant cultural and social themes of the posts can be addressed by asking and answering specific questions during analysis. I will attempt to identify what has been chosen to be included within the frame and what has been left out, where is the main actor or where are they implied. Also, this portion of the analysis will seek to understand what is behind the camera or beyond the lens and is this action more or less important than what is in front of the camera being pictured. Finally, I will seek to identify who is making the decisions as to what is being depicted in the photo.

Extracting what is assumed within the posts through a critical discourse perspective can address conceptualizations of identity and how identity is performed, stylized through repetitive acts, and reinforced by authoritative discourses. The hermeneutic methodology encourages an understanding of these experience representations as individuals navigate within the boundaries of their social, cultural, and environmental backgrounds, claimed and communicated through their emergent narratives of the Instagram posts. Using the two methods in combination with each other allows for an expanded perception or emergent narratives, individual consciousness, and the powerful forces behind decisions within the Instagram posts while also addressing what identities and discourses might be collapsing to social powers beyond the photos.

Hermeneutic Circle

The hermeneutic circle is a metaphor to reference the dialogical encounter between the phenomenon researchers are trying to study and the forestructure of understanding by the researcher, interview participants, and texts examined (Patterson & Williams, 2002). The metaphor can also be used to describe the process of analysis in which the texts, representative of each individual, are read separately to develop an idiographic understanding of the data. Next, a nomothetic analysis is used to create a part-whole understanding across all of the data. "The

closer determination of the meaning of the separate parts may come to change the originally

anticipated meaning of the totality, and again this influences the meaning of the separate parts"

(Kvale, 1983, p.185). This method usually employs the following steps:

1. "Establishing a point of view from which to to begin analysis (the forestructure of understanding),

2. Reading the entire narrative servel times to gain an understanding of its entirety,

3. Using this preliminary understanding as the basis for a deeper exploration of the "parts",

4. Modifying the understanding of the whole on the basis of the more detailed understanding of the parts." (Patterson et al., 1998, p. 429)

Organizing Systems Approach

The data analysis will take on an organizing systems approach (Tesch, 1990) to identify

meaning units within the texts and organize those meaning units into thematic labels. Exposing

themes within interviews and visual narratives (Instagram posts) can then be interpreted in

meaningful ways. The purpose of organizing the predominant themes through this system can

encourage the most holistic understanding of the phenomenon, show the inter-relationship

among the themes, and allow of the specific themes to retain their structure and meaning. An

organizing systems approach is outlined in five key steps. First, the transcripts will be re-read

one or more times to establish a fundamental understanding of the content. Next, meaning units

will be identified. Meaning units are defined as "a unit of the interview narrative that expresses

an idea complete and coherent enough that it can be focused on separately" (Patterson &

Williams, 2002, p. 47). Meaning units are more likely to be primary aspects of the texts like

groups of sentences as opposed to words or phrases. Texts can contain meaning units that might

be irrelevant to the phenomenon of study. It's suggested that this portion of the analysis focus on meaning units most relevant, however, some otherwise irrelevant meaning units can end up providing insights during a second or third analysis. The next step of the analysis involves the grouping of meaning units into a thematic label. While meaning units are representative of the hard data and exact statements form the text, the thematic labels are what the meaning units reveal about the phenomenon of concern. The thematic labels are the cords that connect the meaning units to the interpretive analysis.

It should be noted that thematic labels do not serve as mutually exclusive categories. Meaning units can be coded into more than one label and can be grouped under different labels. The next step in the analysis process is understanding the interrelationship among themes, allowing for the holistic understanding across the data and often encourages the use of visual aids to make these connections (2002). This step distinguishes the distinct hermeneutic circle as a perspective that interprets that data as opposed to just reporting on the discovery of themes. The discussion of the interpretation involving empirical evidence from the texts is the final step in the analysis process. It's recommended that the researcher play a role as a justifier as opposed to an illustrator, being specific when explaining selected excerpt that supports the holistic view, while also including contradictory and ambiguous data in the final discussion.

Evaluating Hermeneutic Research:

Evaluating the legitimacy and acceptability of hermeneutic research are founded on three criteria: persuasiveness, insightfulness, and practical utility (Patterson et al., 1998). The requirements of persuasiveness most closely echos the notions of validity. The persuasiveness of the research questions the existence of sufficient evidence to persuade the reader that the interpretation is appropriate. Persuasiveness is defined by Giorgia (1975) as to whether or not "a

reader adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not her (or she) agrees with it." (p. 96). Next, the evaluating criteria of insightfulness can be defined as allowing the reader to see the consistent pattern across the presented data through an organized holistic lens. In other words, the patterns are understood comprehensively as opposed to simply the sum of its parts. Finally, the practical utility of the findings refers to if the findings address or do not address the concern motivating the inquiry, as well as the degree to which other researchers can utilize "the concepts, methods, and inferences of a study, or tradition of inquiry, as the basis for their theorizing and empirical research." (Mishler, 1990, p. 419). In addition to the three hermeneutic evaluation criteria, additional elements of trustworthiness traditionally established in qualitative research will be achieved through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and reflexivity.

Procedure

The qualitative method of analysis was utilized to interpret the interviews, interview subject's Instagram posts, and a larger sample of Instagram posts. I began by analyzing the interviews, with a first cycle coding of structural codes across all interviews. I decided on structural coding of meaning units as my first step of interview analysis as I felt it gave me a "grand tour" of the interview content (Saldana, 2009, p. 48). Structural coding is the identification of large segments of texts identifying broad conceptual phrases representing a topic of inquiry related to specific research questions (MacQueen, McLellan-Lemal, Bartholow, & Milstein, 2008). Structural codes can "act as a labeling and indexing device, allowing researchers to quickly access data likely to be relevant to a particular analysis from a larger data set." (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008, p.141). The structural codes established a foundation for more detailed coding and a head start on an idiographic understanding of each interviewees

experience. I felt that the marking of general structural codes effectively mimicked the hermeneutic method and practice of marking meaning units while acknowledging the forestructure of understanding as the first step in the analysis. Meaning units are identified as pieces of an interview narrative that express whole and coherent ideas that can be examined separately (Patterson & Williams, 2002). This first cycle of coding identified three primary structural meaning units: 1) *place experience reflection*, 2) *identity*, and 3) *social media influence.* These three general codes helped me distinguish and pull out the fundamental data for further analysis.

Place Experience Reflection

This was employed as a primary structural code as it helped me distinguish the interviewees' simple descriptions of place and experience from their reflections. While some place experiences were both reflective and descriptive within the same complete idea and coded as place experience reflection in such instances, other interview content was purely descriptive and unnecessary for the goals of this study. Some students responded with lengthy descriptions of the chronological order of events from their travels. For example, when asked the first question from the interview guide "Tell me about where you traveled and what you did on your Rustic Pathways program." some students would answer this question as if reading from an itinerary. One interview subject went to the Rustic Pathways website during the interview to read the website's description of her trip. An example of this detailed response from Emma reads: "Then we took a flight at 2 a.m. or something to Lima, and we got there the next day. Then all the trips separated and met our trip leaders. Then my trip took about an hour flight to Cuzco." This was not coded as a place experience reflection as Emma was not sharing any personal thoughts, feelings, or attitudes about the experience. An example of a coded place experience

reflection from Emma's interview is: "Then from there we went to our host families, which was in this little village called Patchar, I think, and we're all really scared, because I don't speak Spanish. So, I was really scared." This initial structural code became a primary category with additional subcodes: *Beauty in Place; Cultural & Community Connection; Discomfort; Reward;* and *Surprise.*

Identity

Identity was chosen as an initial primary structural code as it is a conceptual phenomenon explored through this study's research questions. *Identity* annotated any instance of personal identity communicated by the student. This included any discussion, description, or reflection of how the students navigate through the world as a unique individual ("I am a Rustic Pathways Brand Ambassador", "I am a world traveler", etc.), how they perceive themselves in relation to others ("I live in a very suburban town. It's just a lot of very white, rich families. I, myself, don't really fall under that category."), how others perceive them ("Like you hear kids at school say like, "You are just going for two weeks, and you aren't doing that much."), how they represent themselves online ("I'm very against being a fake version of yourself on social media"), or how they reflect on personal growth and transformation from their place experience ("So I feel like it was ... I got more comfortable with being uncomfortable, in a way.")

Social Media Presentations

In discussing students' shared Instagram posts, it became clear that students were open to sharing their general reflections on social media norms and presentations. This led to the creation of this primary structural code *Social Media Presentations*. The interview questions regarding their shared post would typically open up a larger discussion about teenage social media culture. An example from one student coded with this structural code is: "girls who post selfies and then

post trip pictures, I'm more likely to like and comment on a selfie picture because that's something ... I guess it ... more guts to post something like that." This initial structural code became a primary category and refined with additional subcodes: *Insecurities; Norms; Posting Selfies; and Posting Travel Photos.*

After establishing the three foundational structural codes, I began noticing an overlap across codes. I coded for overlaps of *Place Experience Reflection* and *Identity* as *Place & Identity.* Overlaps of *Identity* and *Social Media Presentations* were combined into *Identity & Social Media Presentations.*

Place & Identity

The structural code *Place & iIdentity* was used for instances where a student discussed their identity as being negotiated or impacted by their experience of place. This will be explored in greater detail but an example of a student who traveled to Tanzania said: "it's definitely sparked like what I want to do when I grow up. So, I'm going to major in international affairs in college," The experience in place has influenced their academic interests and potential career path. This initial structural code became a primary category and was refined with additional subcodes: *Identity Transformation* and *Inclusivity*

Identity & Social Media Presentations

While students offered up their general knowledge and opinions of teenage social media norms and culture, instances where they discussed these norms in relation to their own online social media presence and practice were coded in this section. One student, Sasha says: "But I'm not like selfie poster type. I don't post selfies."

Per the organizational and hermeneutic model, after the initial round of structural coding for all transcripts into the five structural codes: *Place Experience Reflection; Identity; Social*

Media Presentations; Place & Identity; and *Identity & Social Media Presentations,* I examined each transcript individually to develop an idiographic understanding of the individual's narrative. I made annotations and attempted to gain a more complete understanding of their general place experience, their personal identities, and how they communicate those identities online. Interestingly, I began to notice many instances within the narratives where all three original structural codes intersected: *Place Experience Reflection; Identity;* and *Social Media Presentations.* For these instances within that data, I created a new code: *Place, Identity, & Social Presentations.* This led to reorganization and removal of the initial primary codes *Identity* and *Identity & Social Media Presentations.* The meaning units coded within *Place, Identity, & Social Presentations* notate if and how place has negotiated their identities and then if or how social media has influenced the communication of their place identity.

Place, Identity, & Social Presentations

This structural code recognizes that exceptional experiences in place can significantly influence one's identity but what makes this code unique within the data is where and how students discuss those negotiated identities concerning their social media communication of those place experiences. This would often come up during interviews as students discuss their shared Instagram post. Elizabeth, a student with Rustic Pathways in Morocco, speaks of her shared Instagram posts, a reflective pose of herself alone with a small Moroccan village on the horizon in the background: "I think it's definitely a symbol of my experience. I'm wearing a headscarf in the photo, which I was mostly wearing that to protect myself from the sun, as opposed to anything else, but that was experiencing this whole new culture, and this religion that I was getting to know a little bit, and just being a part of that. Also, it's really me. I do a lot of poses and stuff like that I guess you could say." Elizabeth expresses her awe and wonder at this

new place, hinting at a degree of cultural assimilation by wearing a headscarf, understanding aspects of a new religion, all encompassed in one Instagram photo, posing in a way that she typically does in her shared posts. This initial structural code became a primary category and was refined with additional subcodes: *Rustic Influence; Captions; Geotagging; Post Engagement; Self in Post;* and *Struggle to Communicate.* A full list of the coding hierarchy for interview transcripts (i.e., including sub-codes) is listed in Appendix A (See Appendix A)**.**

Following the idiographic understanding of the hermeneutic method, I next turned towards the Instagram posts shared by each interview participant. During the interviews, through a variation of a photo elicitation with the interview subject, I allowed the subject to elaborate on the context of the photo (action, subjects, setting) but also the feeling, memory, or meaning behind the photo and how the photo represented their place experience as a whole (or if it did not). While the posts were discussed and inspected visually during the interview process along with the participant, the shared posts were kept separate from the interview transcripts during that analysis process. While reading and interpreting the interview texts, I chose to keep the posts separate to not use the exact text from the interviews to influence my understanding of the context of the shared posts. A few weeks had passed between interviewing, analyzing interview transcripts, and then examining the subject's posts by themselves. I wanted to understand if the post captured their experience of place in the way that I understood it based on our "in-person" conversation. I believe that while viewing the posts during interviews with the subjects, I was able to ask clarifying questions and allow for more elaboration from the interviewee on specific settings, poses, captions, etc., leading to a richer data set. Admittedly and perhaps advantageously, being a consistent consumer of travel content on Instagram, I had cloudy

memories of exact shared posts before analyzing the posts individually, which I believe allowed

for a fresh perspective during the individual analysis of subjects' posts.

I examined each post individually before marking any codes or categories to get a general

understanding of the subject's communicated narrative. Next, I systematically coded the

contextual post elements. This coding process required identification of what the post *actually*

shows. In addition to marking contextual codes, textual analysis of the posts also marked codes

that identified critical themes within the posts. Primary categories were created: *Caption; Geotag*

Use; Self in Post; Visual Place Experience (PE); Critical Themes; and *Complete Narrative.* A

full list of all codes (i.e., including sub-codes) for Instagram Posts are listed in Appendix B (See

Appendix B).

Based on the data gained from interviews and my reflexive role as a researcher, the

subject's Instagram posts were able to be analyzed in a precise way that follows the order of the

study's research questions. This portion of the analysis acknowledges a certain degree of

reflexivity within my role as a researcher in the "hearing" and then "reading" of shared

Instagram posts from Interview subjects in a similar style to Haldrup and Larsen (2011) as cited

in the Methods Chapter. "Reflexivity implies acknowledging that researcher and field or

image/text are inevitably entangled and mutually constitute each other in the production of

knowledge" (Haldrup & Larsen, 2011, p. 153). I first wanted to view the individual posts as an

audience member, combining each post element (caption, photo, hashtags, and geotags) to

construct what I think might be the communicated narrative and made notes on my thoughts and

ideas. In forming the discussion portion of this study, I often returned to the subject's interview

transcript to re-examine the subject's responses about their shared photo. I extracted their

responses about the specific descriptions and explanations of each post element (caption, photo,

hashtags, and geotags), how they defined the post as personally meaningful (or not) and any important stories that accompanied the posts that might not have been pictured.

Additionally, I pulled my summarizing notes from the idiographic analysis of each interview subject on the participant's complete narrative of their place experience reflection. My final interpretation came from cross-comparing these three data sets to understand differences or similarities between descriptions of place experiences from interviews versus online presentations. The discussion section of this study attempts to explicate why Rustic Pathways students examined in this study might be representing different/similar experiences. While this process was time-consuming, requiring me to revisit the data over and over again, I felt I was able to interpret the interview subjects' posts from multiple angles: as an audience member, as a co-construction, and as a critical researcher.

The creation of contextual codes and critical themes for the interview subjects' posts allowed me to turn to the analysis of the larger sample of 75 #sorustic Instagram posts utilizing the same coding schema as a skeleton structural coding. I felt that the contextual codes and critical themes were observable in the smaller sample of Rustic Pathways students' Instagram posts, so was able to build off the established categories for the larger sample. For a full list of the coding hierarchy (i.e., including sub-codes) for Instagram Posts, see Appendix B.

Social and cultural geographer, Tim Cresswell says of place, "Place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world." (2004, p. 11) This recognizes the notion that while we can grasp "common-sense ideas of what places are" (p. 11) when pushed towards a critical reflection on place and experiences in place, place can become obscure and difficult to define. When questioned about their travels, the interview subjects often verbalized their struggle to communicate their place experiences. Here are several responses from students acknowledging their struggle to communicate place:

> Ashley: You can go home and try to explain all this to someone and just try to emphasize like how amazing and emotionally significant this trip was, but nobody else besides the people who went on the trip are truly going to understand what it was like.

> Sarah: I never know how to put it into words, like the relationship you build with these people is just like so genuine.

> Maggie: I've been a lot of places in my life, but I think that I've only had two or three of those true moments where I'm like, wow, this unreal.

> Mary: I don't know what it was. I don't know if it was the people, I don't know if it was the projects we were doing, where we were, but it was just really interesting.

This section will explore place reflections as communicated by Interview subjects as well as visual place experience presentations as observed in Instagram posts. Excerpts from interviews will be cited as well as photos from the larger sample of Instagram posts.

Place Perception

When looking past the common-sense definition of place, several themes emerged within the student interviews as well as pictured in Instagram posts, as students in this study attempt to make sense of place and communicate their sense of place.

66

Beauty in Place

> *"This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary."* - *Edward Abbey*

This research identified reflections and presentations of the beauty of place in interviews as well as Instagram posts. Rustic Pathways interview participants found and expressed beauty in place in several ways. The most traditional way in which beauty was communicated was through descriptions of landscape and scenery. Creswell (2004) notes that landscape often appears alongside place in geography texts. It's no surprise that interview subjects were easily able to elaborate on the beauty of the areas they were visiting. Rustic Pathways designates scenically stunning travel destinations. From coastal Thailand's crystal-clear waters to Mongolia's snow-capped mountains, Rustic Pathways chooses visually remarkable locations. A fundamental element that encourages people to travel is to marvel at beautiful places, and fantastic scenery and amazing landscapes were experienced by interview participants and Instagram users within this study. Here are several examples from interview subjects expressing experiencing beautiful landscapes:

> Niki: Laos stood out to me a lot, just because when I think of Southeast Asia, Laos is not the first country to come to mind. And when I went, I was just really, not overwhelmed, but I was shocked by how untouched it is. It's so beautiful. The countryside, it's just so pretty.

> Katie: It was a sand gar. The water was super shallow, the weather was so nice that day, so I really liked that view. It was so pretty.

Often times in student interviews, the beauty of a landscape was expressed using the term "cool" as seen here:

Charlotte: Getting to go on the safari was really cool because it was the first time I was ever in such a big, open area where there's just nothing but wilderness around me, and so that was really cool.

Emma: So, we got up there, and we were just like, "Oh my god, this is the coolest thing ever." So, I was just kinda like ... even though it was really hard to get up here, it was worth it, because it's Machu Picchu, obviously.

Other students communicated their experiences of beautiful landscapes indirectly by describing their awe and wonder at the scenery:

Ashley: Every morning we would wake up and we would see the sunrise on the other side [of the valley] and aluminate the mountains. And it was like a really nice temperature in the morning because it was really cold overnight, but the day was warming up, and that day the moon was out, and I was like, "This is an amazing scene and I really need to take the picture."

Mary: I mean, I feel like in terms of just ... I don't want to say beauty and stuff, but the Serengeti was like nothing I've ever seen before.

Beauty was also experienced in towns, villages, and in viewing wildlife. Here this student describes her amazement at the colors of a city in Morocco:

Elizabeth: Chefchaouen was really special because it's my favorite shade of blue, the entire city is super, super blue, and it's really, really beautiful. I was just all over it, and I loved it. It was the part that I was looking forward to the most in my trip, and it was better than I could've ever imagined.

Figure 6 depicts an Instagram post of a market, remarking on the colors:

Figure 6. Instagram post illustrating Beauty in Place theme

Beauty in landscape was often communicated within Instagram posts. Posts with landscape photos absent of a subject were coded as with the subcode *Remote, Wild, & Exotic* under the category *Visual PE.* Figure 7 depicts a photo of a landscape that includes the caption: "@erin.nola.16: Beautiful day in Laos."

Figure 7. Instagram post illustrating Beauty in Place theme

Other posts were more descriptive of the scenery within the caption, absent of an personal reflection on the setting, however, those images undeniably share a visually beautiful landscape (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Instagram post illustrating Beauty in Place theme

Figure 9 reflects on the awe and wonder of the planet in the caption while sharing a landscape photo:

Figure 9. Instagram post illustrating Beauty in Place theme

The sample of Instagram posts also communicated the beauty and awe experienced during interactions with or observations of wildlife. Elephants, Kangaroos, alpacas, and seals were all featured in posts.

An element that each post or interview except has in common is the reflection and presentation of beauty found in place is that these vistas, villages, markets, or wildlife are all assuredly remote or exotic. Students are acknowledging their discovery of beauty in places that are vastly different from their own home, the landscapes they typically see, and the animals they might interact with daily. Their expressions of beauty, wonder, and awe, both verbally and digitally, sharply distinguish "this place" from the mundane and normal place of the student. Graburn (2018) encourages an understanding of tourism experiences specifically as experiences that are meaningful because they are contradictory to the daily life of the traveler. Experiences of place "is also a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world" (Creswell, p. 11). Rustic Pathways constructs these immersive experiences of contrasting landscapes and communities for students in the hopes of instilling intercultural competence in their students, an openness to new ideas, a sense of wonderment, and a belief that all people are connected by shared humanity ("Student Impact"). Processing, remembering, describing, and sharing visually unique aspects of a place could result in a deeper understanding of place and their relation to it. Perhaps some students just want to share the beauty they observed in an exotic place with others. Perhaps it's a student's intention to show off an exotic and remote landscape because it will make them seem more exotic and remote in the eyes of their audience. This notion of sharing the exotic and remote elements of place will be explored in greater detail.

Uncomfortable in Place

> *"I am in love with this world...I have climbed its mountains, roamed its forests,*
> *sailed its waters, crossed its deserts, felt the sting of its frosts, the oppression of*

its heats, the drench of its rains, the fury of its winds, and always have beauty and joy waited upon my goings and comings." - John Burroughs

In contrast to the visually remarkable landscapes and setting students experienced in place, interview subjects were also willing to share their challenges and feelings of discomfort in place. Subjects describe being cold, sick, dirty, and tired. Abigail describes her feelings the first few days in Tanzania:

> Abigail: We were all kind of angry, I guess at first. Angry that we drove on this dirt road and then we couldn't even take the dirt off of our bodies and we had to sleep in it for the next five days. And I think those five days everybody was very very uncomfortable because not only were we uncomfortable with how we were living with the fact that it was dirty and things like that.

Later in the interview Abigail remarks on settling into the discomfort: "Oh, we're all dirty and it's really gross and we all smell, but it's fine because we're here and we're having a good time." Sarah, remarks on being sick and an uncomfortable memory of a traditional marketplace while another student in Peru discussed the effects of altitude that persisted throughout her entire trip:

> Sarah: There were a lot of van rides, very long hours in vans. We kind of just rotated. We had two vans, there was always one of us sick, so we always rotated who got the back row all to themselves for a few hours and then, yea, we would stop along the way at fruit markets. One time we stopped at like a spider market. It was really disgusting.

> Emma: Obviously, [thinking about] physical comfort, not super fun, just because, you can take, you can walk up two stairs, and have to stop and catch your breath, just because the altitude is so high. The highest we went was 14,000 feet, I think, and you would walk up a hill and we'd all be dying.

Peru seemed to be a common Rustic Pathways destination in which students expressed reflections on the physical challenge of their experience. I conducted two interviews with students who attended programs in Peru, and both described struggling with the cold and altitude. Both students also alluded to the physical demands of Peru within their shared

Instagram post captions: "The view was worth the climb up #sorustic" (Emma) and "Raoul said the hike would be easy #itwasnt #sorustic" (Sasha)

Within the larger sample of Instagram posts, when elements of discomfort and challenges were encountered within a post, it was often mentioned in the caption. Some captions that contained elements of discomfort or challenge did so indirectly by acknowledging the appreciation of familiar comfort. For example: "@thaice.cream: Our first time at an actual 7/11 and not a minimart!! #blessed #icecream #sorustic." I can interpret this as the user's excitement at finding familiar foods at a western franchise as opposed to traditional foods at local mini markets. All captions acknowledging some form of discomfort or challenge did so by making light of the poster's uncomfortable situation. Most captions were in the form of a joke or tongue-in-cheek statement. An example of a tongue-in-cheek caption is: "@mmattaphotoss: 107° and loving it! #sorustic." One student posted a photo from the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro with the caption: "@izzard: You don't realize how important something is until you've lost it...it this case, it's the use of my fucking knees. #sorustic #climbingkilimanjaro #onlyyaked10times". Another student was more direct with the caption: "@wutianyu.h285: My hair is so messy #sorustic."

While students described feeling physically uncomfortable and physically challenged during adventure activities like hiking to Machu Picchu, not one student interviewed expressed that those uncomfortable moments as negatively impacting their experiences of place. It was evident in specific interviews that the uncomfortable feelings were an important element of their experience but framed the interview subjects framed their reflections in such a way that the discomfort was something they were proud of, making the experience more meaningful. Two examples from student interviews:

Emma: Then the next day we hiked up to Machu Picchu, and we did not take the bus up, we hiked, which was hard. But obviously when we got up there it was fantastic. It was one of the coolest things I've ever done.

Mary: Yeah, I think part of it is, because we worked really hard during those two to three weeks, both physically doing labor, and then also just learning. We were all there and so passionate about what we were doing that every moment was a learning moment, and every moment was positive somehow…It was just like this experience unlike anything I've ever had before in that way, where even sad or emotional moments turned out to be something that was positive, and a learning experience.

When reflecting on place experiences, expressing negative feelings, discomfort, and personal challenge can be understood as an indication of transparent vulnerability. As a reminder, each interview subject was recruited from the Rustic Pathways Squad, a group of student brand ambassadors. It's assumed that they all have had overwhelmingly positive experiences with Rustic Pathways programs. Instagram users that cheekily captioned their photos with references to discomfort were also willing to acknowledge the not-so-beautiful experiences of place. However, in exploring the intersection of identity, place, and social behavior, these reflections on discomfort and challenge will be revisited to tackle questions around presentations of the self and accurate depictions of experience.

Connections in Place

"It is good people who make good places." - Anna Sewell, Black Beauty

Descriptions of powerful human connections was a commonly observed theme within the student interviews. The students describe their relationships with their peers, the communities they visited, the children they interacted with, and the strangers they passed in the streets. Students described feeling welcomed by members of a community as well as genuine happiness

as a result of interactions with locals. A few examples of students describing interpersonal connections:

> Catherine: Tica's are like the local people of Costa Rica cause that's what they call themselves. Um like anyone that like lives there or was born there. And so, they were adorable and I loved all the people there. They were all amazing.

> Emma: I also really liked the village where we stayed, that Patchar village, the first one. Everybody there was super nice, my host mom was fantastic. She was so nice.

Other students described connections that made them not only feel welcomed but as if they were a family member:

> Ashly: Everyone felt such a connection with all the people that we met. And we would go, we took a hike one time and every person we passed who is going to the market that day, the opposite way that we were going, we'd say hello to them. So it was just really nice to feel like you almost like have lived there your whole life….Like I knew we were going to do service and we were going to, you know, use locals, but I wasn't really prepared for the attachment we had to everybody else that we were working with. And just feeling like they were family or like we had always known them.

> Katie: I felt so welcomed. The entire time I was there, I felt just so happy to be there, because everyone was just seemed so happy to see us, all the time. I feel like that's something that we could really learn something from. Just everybody. I felt like it was a big family. Everyone so treats each other like family. Brothers and sisters. I felt like everybody was a family.

As discussed in the literature review section, Seamon (2008) argues that place can be interpreted through several dynamic processes. Place Interaction is the process that most closely illustrates the memorable and meaningful connections between Rustic Pathways students interviewed for this study and their attachments to place strengthened by their connections to humans that make up that place. Place interaction is how individuals actively engage in social and individual actions that are grounded in place. Each interview subject discussed the strong

interpersonal relationships they built in place, while some of those subjects supported those claims through their shared Instagram posts that communicated a visual representation of their person-to-person place connection with captions the reinforced the illustrated connection. Interview subject, Katie, who spoke of feeling like she had a family in Fiji, supported that in-person description of attachment with her post picturing herself on a jungle gym with seven Fijian children. Her caption reads: "Lots of love for my Fiji fam! #sorustic". Lauren, a student in Costa Rica, shared a post with the caption: "Already miss these heartwarming moments with the happiest and by far cutest children of Costa Rica #sorustic." In the photo, Lauren is tying a bracelet on the wrist of a young Costa Rica girl. Many of the posts from interview participants under the category of *Visual PE* were coded with the subcode *Remote, Wild, & Exotic* or *Tourist Experience.* The accompanying captions for the posts within these subcodes did not extend acknowledgements to interpersonal connections. Within the larger sample of Instagram posts, only three posts of the 75 posts depicted a Rustic Pathways student with a local community member and was marked with the sub-subcode *Local Community* under the subcode *Connection.* In some instances, within the Instagram posts, mentions of local interpersonal connection and attachment were discussed within the caption but not depicted in the actual photo. Captions offered thanks and gratitude to people in place or reflected nostalgia for people in place. Some examples of these captions:

> @theresa947: So much love and thanks to the picturesque Sop Wan Village (even though the little kids ruined my book by splashing hehe) #sorustic

> @emily.mae.wilding: I miss this country and I miss this squad even more #thesummerofemily #sorustic

> @quinniesunshine: I miss my people and my second home so so much #sorustic

Surprises in Place

"Through unexpected encounters, situations, and surprises relating to place, people are 'released' more deeply into themselves" - David Seamon

The communication of feelings of surprise became a common theme within interviews with Rustic Pathways students. Surprise manifested itself in two different dimensions of experience by the subjects concerning place. First, subjects felt varying degrees of surprise the learning about characteristics of the communities and places they were visiting. Second, students were surprised by their reactions to different situations or circumstances. For example, subjects were surprised at enjoying an activity like service work, or feeling content being disconnected from the internet. Surprise in Community identified several common themes. Interview subjects were surprised to witness expressions of overwhelming gratitude from community members.

> Charlotte: We basically have a mini closing ceremony where a lot of the village members that were the leaders of the village just came and talked to us and they were saying, you know, like, "Thank you," and they were explaining what this means for the village as a whole, and the school children actually made us the flower leis, and they gave it to us. They were so sweet.

Interview subjects expressed surprise at witnessing joy and contentment within communities that appeared to lack basic living necessities expected in Western societies. It seemed that the majority of the students interviewed were prepared to experience communities that were economically opposite of their own. However, observing happy, joyful, and welcoming communities that lacked even the most basic of needs like fresh water, education, and healthcare resources, was a surprise to these interview subjects. One student in Morocco says:

> Elizabeth: I had always thought if you're rich you're happy, and all this. I always thought that money definitely is happiness, but in those villages, they don't care about money at all. They have almost everything they need to be happy. They don't have the newest iPhone or whatever, they don't have huge mansions that have heated floors and all this stuff, but they're happy. That was just ... it was

really cool to see that firsthand. I'd always heard about it, and you hear about it all the time, but seeing it. This is a thing that exists, this is real.

Other students were surprised while working with local school children to learn of the value the local children placed on their education. Abigail describes the experience of walking primary school children home from school one afternoon. Most of the school children live between three and five kilometers away from school. Some school children are prevented from attending school for months at a time because of a large river that fills up during the rainy season. They have no way of crossing the river as the community cannot afford to build a bridge in that area. The school children expressed their sadness and frustration at having to miss months of school and falling behind their classmates. Abigail says:

> Abigail: With the river, you really empathize for the students I feel because you're able to look at like how much they care about school and they try to get to school and go through all of this effort and they go across the river and go through the mud and everything. But sometimes it really is too dangerous for them to go to school and they do get upset about that when you talk about how they can't go to school. We talked about how we kind of take going to school and education, being able to walk into our driveway, grab our cars and drive to school, for granted, whereas they have to walk miles to get to school, taking hours to get to school and sometimes they can't even do it and it really makes them upset.

Finally, a few students expressed nervousness prior to their program in anticipation of language barriers but were surprised at their ability to work past language barriers with community members. Some responses:

> Lauren: I just noticed like the kids were so willing to talk to us even though we had that language barrier. So I thought it was so interesting to see how much they clung to us.

> Maggie: We also taught English in the school. So, again, we didn't know any Fijian so it was really hard to break that barrier. But it was also really cool and funny, because they're kids. So they're just laughing with you. They'll mimic you.

Interview subjects showcased knowledge of the local language within their shared Instagram post. Abigail uses Swahili in her Instagram caption: "asanta sana haydesh, see your soon #sorustic." Elizabeth went as far as writing her entire caption in Arabic. The larger sample of Instagram posts revealed similar foreign language trends in captions. One user writes, "@akiliaann: Bula #sorutic." "Bula" is a traditional Fijian greeting. Another user mimicked the Australian slang in their caption: "@kristenwatkinsphoto: Australian sunsets, ay? - #sorustic." Using foreign phrases or slang words within an Instagram caption is interesting in that it expresses the individual's immersion in another culture and experience with a foreign language, but it also could be seen as excluding a portion of the audience that is not familiar with the language. This will be explored in greater detail when examining the intersection of place, identity, and social media influence.

Rewards in Place

> *"Fruits doesn't fall far from the tree but there seeds can go places*
> *and wherever they go*
> *by their virtues*
> *they leave their traces"* - Indira Mukhopadhyay

Finally, place experience reflection was often communicated in unison with feelings of reward, personal impact, or pride. A number of interview subjects communicated feeling a general sense of reward from working within a community on a service project and building relationships with people that were different from what they know and experience in their communities. In a sense, they were proud of their successes on a project level, an interpersonal relationship level, and personal level at succeeding in a diverse environment.

> Abigail: So for us to see that we were making an impact on these kids' lives and that they did want to go to school even more because of the fact that we were there and we were with them in the classroom.

Elizabeth: The service village was really cool, because it was really important to leave an impact somewhere else that I had never been, and it was ... I had gotten this really good fuzzy, warm feeling about volunteering and it was a really, really great experience.

In discussing the completion of a service project, Alex says:

Alex: Honestly, I didn't think we were gonna be able to finish it because of the rain and it was just tons of work. To see that come together and to see all the locals be so happy and so grateful for what we had done, that was probably, yeah. And everyone in my group, we were all teary eyed and everyone was super glad that we accomplished what we had set our goal to be.

Maggie had a similar experience working on a project in Fiji:

Maggie: The most meaningful would probably be being in Nasivikoso, just like being really immersed in the community. Seeing your work being reflected. I would pour cement and the next day it would be dry. Then someone else would build another part of the house, like, oh my god, this actually coming together right in front of my face. Usually, especially in the states, it takes so long to do one task like that, but just having a group of seventeen people, and actually taking turns, and painting things and doing stuff like that, you actually saw your work reflected. And you saw how happy the community was to actually have people there helping them, do this thing that would really benefit them.

Elements of place as rewarding were also seen in the larger sample of Instagram posts.

Some of examples of these student's captions:

@clairechurchilll: My duty as a personal cabello was a top priority during camp-- I spent the last half a year anxiously awaiting July because of this trip but finally being here and creating this camp was more rewarding a eye opening than I could have ever hoped for. So many moments of joy with these kids and my wonderful #sorustic leadership chicas

@gabrielsumwy: "What did your like most about Thailand?" "The people" This post is dedicated to the all the amazing people i got to know and work with in Thailand to help make a positive impact on the local community here. Thank you for the amazing experience #sorustic

Surprisingly, these posts that mention feelings of reward and impact are some of the most articulately reflective of all of the posts sampled. Elements of this theme are reminiscent of reflections on challenge from the section *Place as Uncomfortable* in that students elaborate on their uncomfortable feelings transforming into memories they are proud to share, almost like a badge of honor. Abigail was describing her initial experience in Tanzania as feeling dirty and extremely uncomfortable. Her group slept in tents and were without running water for five days. When asked if she ever discusses her trip with her friends and family back home she says:

> Abigail: I still definitely do talk about my trip a lot and something will come up and I'd be like, "well when I was in Tanzania I didn't shower for five days, like calm down, it's fine" So I really liked that, like being able to look back on something.

Understanding the examples of communicating place as rewarding from the interview subjects and within Instagram posts helps to introduce the transformative qualities of place as impacting personal identity explored in the next section.

Place as Inclusive

In the section, *Place Experience Reflection*, I explored Rustic Pathways students' place experience reflections communicated in interviews and Instagram posts. This section illustrated how the experience of place could evoke awe and wonder in seeing new landscapes and perceiving new cultures. This section also explored unfamiliar and uncomfortable aspects of place and how place can inspire human connections and invoke feelings of surprise and reward. The common and perhaps obvious thread that unites these themes is the idea that place, experienced by these students, is different from their home place, city, town, or community. Graburn (2018) says, "Tourism experiences are meaningful because of their difference from the ordinary, the home life from which a tourists stem" (p. 17) Graburn considers a "ritual reversal" when travelers seek experiences in new places, in the hopes of having a positive immersive experience that they cannot experience at home (p. 18). Graburn believes that rewards for experiencing ritual reversals are sought as a product of an individual's cultural background, delivering a break in routine and the ordinary. I agree that a break from the average might be a factor in those seeking new experiences of place. However, the application of the ritual reversal as a way of simplifying the place experiences of Rustic Pathways students situates place and the communities that makeup place, as bounded and exclusive. While the previous section on students' place experience reflections presented place as different and surprising in the eyes of the students, students also reflected on place in a way that helped them break down the often argued fixed walls of place.

In referencing a previous section, *Connections in Place*, students expressed feeling strong attachments to members of the communities they visited. Some went as far as to describe feeling like they had a second home in these places:

> Ashley: Everyone felt such a connection with all the people that we met. And we would go, we took a hike one time and every person we passed who is going to the market that day, the opposite way that we were going, we'd say hello to them. So it was just really nice to feel like you almost like have lived there your whole life.

Seamon (2013) acknowledges the inward and outward aspects of place and home. The inner aspect recognizes meaningful places as spaces that are insulated and controlled by the people that most closely associated with that space, delegating who enters into that world. The outward aspect of place works in conjunction with the inward, recognizing the necessity of social, communal, and external relationships. "The inward aspect of any place relates to its being apart from the rest of the world, while it's more outward, externally oriented aspects relate to the larger world of which it is a part" (p. 15). The places visited and temporarily inhabited by Rustic Pathways students reflected this inward/outward dialectic of place in that students were able to observe exemplary family units and cohesive and culturally bonded communities but were also allowed access into these spaces and accepted as a temporary member of place. Students witnessed the diluted boundaries of place as they were welcomed into homes and communities where they would normally be considered an outsider. Interview subjects expressed that being accepted into these homes and communities helped them recognize more similarities in themselves and their backgrounds compared to the new communities as opposed to shining a light on their differences.

> Charlotte: I was kind of surprised how much their daily routine doesn't differ that much from a daily American...I feel like everyone gets up at the same time, and it's like they go to school and they have a normal school day. So that was similar,

and also seeing the kids run around and just have fun outside made me think of what it was like for me growing up, having the chance to run around outside and do things like that.

Ashley: This is kind of a universal thing, but no matter where you are, what language you speak, there's certain things that ... Like the basic emotions you can always convey and I feel like there's always a sense of acceptance...being in a different place doesn't mean ... People would like to think that living in a different place, in a different country, makes you more different than you are the same. But I really think that, like I said before, again, there's an underlying theme of just people being willing to be welcoming and accepting of anyone.

Here, Lauren is elaborating on her shared Instagram post. Lauren is depicted sitting on the ground with a young Costa Rican girl tying a bracelet:

Lauren: So I think the reason I picked this photo is because it kind of showed that despite our differences in culture, our different languages, we're still able to interact with people who are just like us. And that even though I wasn't very educated in Spanish, I didn't really, I didn't know these kids at all but I was still able to have a good time with them in a different country and able to share some similarities and interests with friendship bracelets, something as simple as that.

During her interview, Mary reflected on her pre-existing stereotypes around Tanzanians before traveling and how those stereotypes shifted over the course of her Rustic Pathways program:

Mary: No one could change my mind on how I was looking at the people in Tanzania before I went there. That was something I had to experience and be there for myself and realize, "Oh, they're helping us as much as we're helping them. We're getting as much out of this as they are."

Massey (1994) called for a new conceptualization of place as open and inclusive, "a product of interconnecting flows--of routes rather than roots" (p. 54). Rustic Pathways interview subjects experienced the inclusivity of place and shared humanity that doesn't recognize borders, citizens, or cultures. This paper will go on to explore how place has negotiated the personal identities of interview subjects, as well as how social media can influence the presentation of

those identities. However, this concept of interconnected place will be a critical lens for navigating identity and the digital communication of place.

Place as Identity

The fundamental concepts of place and identity have long been linked together in the fields of geography, urban planning, ecocriticism, environmental psychology, and natural resources research. Proshansky et al. (1983) referred to *place identity* as:

> ... a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of, broadly conceived, cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives. These cognitions represent memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behavior and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being. (p. 60)

In reviewing interview transcripts, it became clear that experiences of place were having an impact on the self conceptualizations of the Rustic Pathways interview subjects. Proshansky et al. (1983) appended place identity with the belief that place identity is not static. Place identity can grow and change as one's social and physical world shifts. Interview subjects discussed impacts on their outward self-presentations as well as their inward self-concepts. Effects on self-presentations at an outer level influenced their behavior, preferences, and goals. Some students commented on learning valuable leadership skills and taking on leadership roles in school clubs or sports teams as a result. Other students discussed how their future academic primary or career path shifted after Rustic Pathways experience. Students also presented their behavior changes as a result of their place experience.

One interview subject described how connections with local children intensified her self-identified mother's intuition. She says later in her interview that her connection with children has inspired her to be a teacher when she is older:

Sarah: But then for the villages. Umm… I definitely connected, like the biggest things I remember, at each village, I have like a really big mother's intuition and at each place I found like one child that just like really stuck with me. So whether it was like Kita, or at the first school, there was like a little girl with down syndrome... and then there was a little boy named Lamong who I met who was maybe 9 months, he was an itty baby. And like everyone would make him cry and then I would hold him and he would stop crying. So like everytime a kid just like stays with me.

Sasha discusses how her experience in place has influenced what she hopes to study in college:

Sasha: I realized how much I like service trips, and it even led me to put down on my college applications my major as international development, which I totally had not considered before. I had opened my eyes to a service oriented world out there, and I didn't really think about it. I knew about USAID, and like other big, big companies that go abroad to do humanitarian work, but I had never heard of it on a small scale where you can actually see who you're helping directly and what you're doing to help, and I think that's pretty special.

Another student hopes to work with Rustic Pathways as a program leader:

Maggie: I love Rustic. I would love to work for Rustic. Being on these Rustic trips has helped me not only prioritize what I want to do in my life, and where I want to go, and the things that I now see as important, but it's also really just been an amazing experience overall.

After working on a turtle conservation project in Costa Rica, Kristie explains how her own behavior has shifted towards a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle and how she tried to influence her peers to follow suit:

Kristie: I feel like what we learned there, and the service that we did, basically changed our lives, and it gave us a unique perspective on life in general.
Interviewer: In what way?
Kristie: Just seeing how the beach and the turtles are affected by plastic, especially. It made us all a lot more aware that is a real issue. Plastic, pollution in the ocean, because before, we knew that it was a problem, but we didn't really see the effects of it until that trip.

Interview: Yeah, would you say your behavior or own actions have changed because of that?

Kristie: Yeah, I'm a lot more ... I have a new thing, I don't use plastic anymore, and I always recycle, and I'm like that annoying friend, that makes sure all my friends recycle, and don't use straws, and all of that.

Another student worked on a water conservation project in the Dominican Republic. Alex explains her behavior changes since her program:

Alex: Yeah, it's definitely impacted me. Just also saving water, too. I've noticed now, I'm more cautious. When I'm brushing my teeth, I turn the faucet off and I don't take as long showers anymore. I also don't start the shower too far ahead of time to when I get in to get the water warmer. Just little things like that, I guess, really just the trip definitely changed things like that.

Inward shifts to self-concepts as a result of experiences in place were also expressed by interview subjects in the form of influenced personal feelings about themselves, their attitudes and values. Ashley discussed how Morocco was influential in the development of her self-concept as a teenager in a transitional period of her life and helped open her mind to new ideas and experiences:

Ashley: As I'm growing as a student and discovering who I am, I've always taken the approach that new experiences are a chance for me to learn. And for me, I used to be the person who would be very worried about going on a plane, going to a new country, roommating with people I didn't really know, like all those new experiences...but I feel like I have the outlook now of I want to seek out new experiences and I know that that means that I'm going to have to go out of my comfort zone and do things I've never done before.

Ashley also explains how Morrocco helped adjust her tolerance for comfort, the unexpected, and willingness to try new things:

Ashley: So I feel like it was ... I got more comfortable with being uncomfortable, in a way. And just waking up every day knowing, "Okay. Maybe we do what we planned to do today. Maybe we don't do anything that we plan to do. maybe I'm going to try a new food that I really don't like or really do like." Stuff like that. And I feel like one thing that I've always taken away and always had to remind

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myself, is that you just have to be prepared for whatever happens. And I feel like having that approach will give you more,

Charlotte describes her struggle with positive mental health prior to her experience in Tanzania, and how feeling disconnected in Tanzania helped ease her stress and influenced her overall happiness after returning:

> Charlotte: When I went on that trip, I would say I wasn't struggling with depression but I would definitely say that towards the end of that school year, I was just down and ready to get out and just not having the best overall time. When I went on that trip and I was off my phone for over 10 days, I honestly loved it. It made me feel so much more grounded to myself, and not so much grounded to what's going on on my phone, and like texts and all that. When I got back I was just a lot happier... I think now, because of that trip, I'm a lot more relaxed. Like if I see something on social media, I don't let it consume me or anything, and I'm a lot more laid back and just being like, "You know, I'm just going to do this because I want to do it and I'm not so tense about everything." I think that definitely came from that trip because I kind of learned to like I don't know, to just be a happier person because everyone there was so happy.

Katie's experience in Fiji helped her acknowledge her personal values of need and consumption and to be more appreciative and content with what she has:

> Katie: I might not be so content with what I have, and not so appreciative, so after I came back, I reflected on that. I just thought about how the ways I could be more grateful for what I have rather than always wanting something else, or needing more. I could just focus on what I have in my life and how I can take that in and be happy with that. I think it actually changed me. Maybe not in the most notable way, but internally, it changed me. I felt more appreciative and more able to show gratitude after the trip, because I saw how all of them were happy and content with what they have.

The interviews allowed the subjects the time and space to elaborate on how place impacted or transformed their identities. This influence of place on identity was less noticeable when analyzing Instagram posts. Exploring the separate elements of the subject's Instagram posts (captions, hashtags, and photos), I was unable to record any aspects of similar themes of

place identity transformations as reflected by the interview subjects. It appears that shifts and impacts on identity from experiences in place are more challenging to communicate digitally through one photo and caption and much for fluid and accessible for students to reflect on during an in-person conversation. It could also be less of a priority for students to communicate that transformative identity aspect of their place experiences via an Instagram post, preferring to share place experience reflections that illustrate the themes explored within the *Perceiving Place* section. Also, most posts were posted while users were on programs or shortly after they returned home, while the reflections on self-conceptualizations as influenced by place during student interviews occurred months after the place experience. Knez (2006) discusses place-related memories as influential in shaping personal identity. Knez found that while interviewing subjects on their place-related memories, he found that when reminiscing on a past place experience, subjects reflected on their self-concept and identity growth periods. The interview subjects in this study have had time to experience the changes in their values, attitudes, and behaviors and can articulate those transformations in conjunction with their place-related memories. The Instagram samples were created and posted online between the months of June and August 2018. Perhaps users were unable to recognize the changes to their self-concept at the moment of posting. This study will not dive into the theoretical complexities of place-related memories but will attempt to understand the confluence of identity, social media influence, and place experience as presented in Instagram posts shared online during or just after the conclusion of their program.

Intricacies of Teen Instagram Culture

Jang, Han, Shih, and Lee (2015) found significant trends that distinguish the behavior of teenagers on Instagram from adult Instagram users in their study of 27,000 accounts. The study found that teenagers receive more engagement with their photos than adults. Their photos receive more likes and comments and teen users participate in liking and commenting more often than adults. Teens tend to post less than adults, use more hashtags, and teen posts are more reflective of their moods and emotions than adult posts. The researchers concluded that teens post more images picturing themselves as the primary subject and use the platform as a mechanism for self-expression, self-promotion, and validation. This study hopes to understand how teenagers are representing experiences of place and elements of their identity online versus in-person conversations. Examining the sample of Instagram posts of Rustic Pathways participants can be analyzed for trends in place experience content and critically assessed for themes of performance of the self.

One theme that emerged in the interviews with was unprompted and unique: their willingness to share personal opinions around Instagram norms, insecurities experienced using the platform, their opinions on posting selfies, and their thoughts around producing and consuming traveling photos. These assessments from interview subjects on the culture and expectations of teenagers navigating the Instagram platform can reinforce the findings from Manovich (2017) as categorizing teenagers as the mobile generation, capable of understanding and abiding by the rules in order to engage an audience. These *rules* are loosely communicated in the sections to follow. It should be noted that the information gained in the small sample of

interview subjects cannot be generalized to a larger population of teen Instagram users or interpreted as absolute feelings and beliefs from the larger sample of Instagram users within this study. However, the insights gained from interview subjects under the category as *Social Media Presentations* can be used as a lens for interpreting the understanding of online identity and place experiences construction within this study.

The Curated Feed

Merriam-Webster.com defines the word curate as "selected, organized, and presented using professional or expert knowledge" (2019). Historically, the phrase is often recognized in the work of museum exhibits, with curators meticulously combing archives, artifacts, and historical texts to create museum collections around a central theme. Museum curators are charged with the interpretation of those historical or cultural texts, communicating the theme into a cohesive narrative. In recent years, through the rise of the internet and consumable digital information, the word "curated" is often accompanied by the word "content." Online curated content requires a similarly selective process of bringing together digital media. User content curation on Instagram can also be a selective process but reflective of aesthetically appealing photos posted by the user. Curated Instagram accounts can be user-centric as a cohesive articulation of a user's life experiences. A central theme or narrative might be absent in personally curated feeds but with the common thread of being chosen and stylized by the account owner and often featuring experiences of the account owner. Interview subjects discussed their desires to present curated content on their Instagram accounts to have their account feeds look a certain way stylistically. Ashley described how she overhauled her entire Instagram account after observing the accounts of her sports teammates. She deleted old photos and began only posting photos that she felt were the most visually appealing:

Ashley: I saw a few of my other teammates doing it or have like very curated feeds and although I'm very against being a fake version of yourself on social media, I wasn't happy with a lot of the pictures that I posted. And I realized like I love the way it looks now and I love all my posts because they're like ... I'm trying to be as genuine as I can and I think I feel like more satisfied with it, when before I had a terrible picture of my dog and, you know, a bunch of just random pictures and stuff.

In the excerpt above, Ashley is acknowledging the idea that curated feeds might not be the most genuine representations of an individual and that she is "against being a fake version of yourself" on social media, yet she deleted former self-representations on her account to refine her collective presentation. Sasha also describes her thought process when posting to her account. She thinks about what photos fit visually into her feed and also considers the thoughts and feelings of her friends and how they look in her photos:

Sasha: Well, I think about my favorite picture mostly. I think about what I think is pretty, what goes with my feed. I also want to make sure that the people, if there's another person in it, they like the picture, too, because that sucks when someone posts something and you don't like you in it, it's just because they look good. So, there was another picture that I really like that I was going to post. It was with a llama in front of Machu Picchu, but my friend didn't look good, and she was like, "I don't want you to post that one." And I was like, "Of course. I wouldn't do that."

In the two excerpts above, the subjects discuss two different social forces that guide their online self-representations. Ashley observed the content curation of her teammates and felt the need to follow suit to improve the aesthetic of her online presence while Sasha allows the opinions of her friends and their presentations in her photos to influence whether or not she posts them to her feed.

Insecurities and Deleting Posts

A few of the interview subjects discussed navigating personal insecurities while posting pictures to their Instagram accounts. As Sasha mentioned in the section above, she considers the

insecurities of her friends and their preferences on how they look in her photos. The practice of deleting Instagram posts came up several times during interviews. As discussed in Ashley's interview, she admits to deleting old posts. She described her past anti-normative behavior on Instagram, engaging in a "daily photo challenge" in which she posted a photo every day for over a year. She felt that her followers did not "really care" about her Instagram content as it wasn't visually appealing. After seeing the curated feeds of her friends and the "terrible pictures" she felt she was posting in comparison, she deleted several photos from her account, including photos posted from her experience in Morocco.

> Ashley: Yeah. So I would post literally every day, I did a daily photo challenge for awhile, and I just ... I stopped posting, because like I said before, people scroll by and like it but they don't really care. And I just had to ... I needed kind of to take a break from just a posting whatever, even if it was an absolutely terrible picture every day, just to like keep the streak going. So then I looked back over all the ... I had like 400 posts, when I kind of stopped doing it every day, and I look back and I was like, "Okay, some of these pictures are really, really bad, so I'm just going to delete some of them.

Ashley expressed that she felt her Instagram followers don't care about her photos or her experiences in Morocco when discussing her shared #sorustic photo. Struggling to communicate place experience and the factors that influence this struggle will be explored in greater detail. Charlotte also discussed deleting photos of herself pictured alone, as a result of feeling insecure, while Maggie explained her personal growth from previously feeling the need to delete posts she felt unsure about when wanting to impress an audience. She says she is now confident in her content regardless of how she presents herself in her photos:

> Charlotte: I would say the only time I delete photos is more often when it's a photo of just myself, just because I'm so much more self-critical of it when it's just myself and if I look at it too long, I'm like, "Ugh, it needs to go."

Maggie: I've had the same Instagram since like 2014. So when I was little, like younger, little? I'm like 19. I was younger, I was really like, oh my god, this isn't going to get the right amount of likes. I have to delete it. Or if a cute boy follows me, I have to go back and delete all my ugly pictures. Ridiculous. But I haven't deleted a picture in years. Just because I'm at the point where I'm like, this is what I'm doing. This is what I'm up to. It's funny and it's weird. But it's me, and if you don't like it, you don't have to look at it. I don't care. It's not the end-all and the be-all of my life.

Selfies

In 2013, Oxford English Dictionary awarded "selfie" as "word of the year." Oxford

dictionary defines selfie as "a photograph that one has been taken of oneself, typically one taken

with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" (2019). Scholars have mused over

the selfie phenomenon and its implications for online social relations, real-time sharing, and

social network attention (Kohn et al., 2018; Arnold et al., 2017; Meese et al., 2015). This study

does not seek to corroborate the research of these scholars, but Rustic Pathways interview

subjects did provide a small window into the world of teen selfies. As discussed in the section

above on *Insecurities and Deleting Posts,* Charlotte says she feels most critical of her self-

presentations when she posts a photo of herself alone or a selfie. Sasha acknowledges the

vulnerability involved when posting a selfie and shares that she is more likely to engage with a

selfie picture by extending a comment or like to the user:

> Sasha: Well the thing is, pictures on Instagram that are of your face, just tend to get more likes, because I don't know. People feel bad not liking stuff like that, but more of a trip picture I guess people don't feel bad not liking that, because it's more about you. But I'm not like selfie poster type. I don't post selfies...but then when I thought about it, girls who post selfies and then post trip pictures, I'm more likely to like and comment on a selfie picture, because that's something ... I guess it ... more guts to post something like that.

Interestingly, of the 90 Instagram posts gathered for this study, Charlotte's post was the

only post that featured a traditional selfie, although she is joined in the selfie by a small

Tanzanian toddler. Charlotte's insecurities may have been eased within her shared post as she is not pictured alone in the image and she still has the image posted to her account. Many more posts feature students alone within the frame and were coded with the subcode *Self Alone* under the Instagram post category *Self in Post.*

Posting Travel Photos

While discussing their shared #sorustic Instagram post, interview subjects shared personal reflections on the practice of posting photos on social media from personal travels. Opinions from interview subjects on the typical social media practice of posting travel photos seem to be distinct from the practice of posting their own Rustic Pathways experiences online. Kohn (2018) takes an anthropological lens to understand tourist photography after a personal visit to the dramatic landform off the coast of Victoria, Australia known as the "12 Apostles". Kohn observes photos being snapped by visitors with high-end camera equipment, smartphones, and selfies sticks. She is initially critical of the visitors, with their backs to the magnificent limestone formations, posing for photos and then immediately burying their faces in their phone or camera screens to evaluate their images. She then becomes the object of her criticism, and muses over her contradictory desire to capture the landscape:

> I am lost without my iPhone and its camera eye while at the same time I wish to
> be free of it and to travel in the world around me with only the senses my body
> affords me, unmediated by the desire to capture, to compose, and to share with
> distance audiences. And yet, record I must! (Kohn, 2018, p. 71)

Interview subjects express a similar internal tension in navigating a social media space overwhelmed with snapshots of travel experiences. Lauren sees the value in sharing photos from travel experiences online as she believes it provides a window into other cultures and experiences.

Lauren: I think it's important that with traveling we post pictures that are from different cultures because it kind of gives ... You know, not everyone can afford to travel, so it kind of gives like a glimpse of different parts of the world without people having to travel and I think that's why people like my photo and that's why people were so interested and so drawn into it.

Sasha describes herself as an infrequent poster to Instagram but will post experiences that signify a momentous occasion, like a birthday or a travel experience. While this rumination is only anecdotal evidence from one interview subject of their general sharing activities online, it's contradictory to a common practice discussed by Jang et al. (2015) of digitally sharing multiple aspects of life, including everyday encounters with friends and family, photos of food, artistic expressions, and posts that reflect one's current mood or emotion. Abigail contemplates the varying levels of engagement across certain types of travel photos on social media. She feels that photos depicting adventure activities are more likely to garner engagement than photos that show more authentic place-based experiences with different cultures and community members:

Abigail: So I do think that pictures like skydiving or on a safari honestly get more comments than the ones with locals or in a community. I don't know if that's because a lot of people feel like they can't relate to the pictures. Like, say someone really wants to go skydiving, they can relate to those photos. Or they think "it's really cool she posted a picture of her jumping out of a plane or there's a lion in the background of her photo, that's really cool" as opposed to a response like: "oh she's posting a photo in this community that I don't know." I can definitely see how there's a lot more people who comment on the picture that looks cool as opposed to the picture that means something to someone.

It's Abigail's opinion that users might be more likely to engage with a photo online if they can place themselves within the experience, out of their desire to have the experience. Abigail feels that a photo featuring personal relationships with a community that is entirely foreign to an audience member, whom the audience will never meet or have no desire to meet, might be seen as less appealing. Despite this personal belief, Abigail's shared #sorustic post

featured herself and other Rustic Pathways students with school children in Tanzania. Abigail's desire to post experiences that she consciously recognizes will not be of interest to her audience is a noteworthy contradiction to concepts of online performance of the self. Contradictions of this sort will be explored in the next section. Nikki presented an interesting dimension when expressing her opinions on posting travel experiences online. Nikki says she enjoys consuming the travel experiences of others online as it inspires her want to travel more, but she is conscious of posting her own travel experiences as she worries that her followers might make "assumptions" about her. When questioned about what type of assumptions she fears others might make about her, she responds:

> Nikki: Just like, "Oh, she's so rich," because we're not, and stuff like that. Things like that. Yeah, because there are some people in my town, they'll post pictures from their travel, and then people will talk about it, and I just like, I'm not about that kind of thing.

There are two dimensions of Nikki's opinion on posting of travel experiences. The first dimension is that specific audiences might perceive travel experiences as affluent, unrelatable, and elitist. The second dimension is the fear that Instagram users might be judged not for the quality of their image and how they appear in a photo (as expressed as in the section on Insecurities) but rather that they will be judged for simply having the experience. Nikki did share a post from her travel experience with Rustic Pathways, and also says she is willing to have in-person conversations with friends or mutual friends about her experiences, but that posting every travel experience online is something she avoids.

Digital Elements of Place and Identity

The previous sections explored how place experience was reflected and communicated in interviews and Instagram posts. The communication of place experiences ranged from expressing place as beautiful and awe-inspiring to place as surprising or uncomfortable.

Interview subjects expressed experiences of place that resulted in a sense of global inclusivity and connection. Interview subjects also communicated how place mediated and transformed their identities. The above section explores how interview subjects expressed normative social media presentations, their opinions on selfies, and perceptions of producing and consuming travel photos on Instagram.

This section is devoted to explaining how the three elements, place, identity, and social media presentations, intersect as found in interview conversations and Instagram posts. To begin, I will present general findings across the data on the use of captions, geotags, and positions of the self in Instagram pictures. I will introduce critical themes interpreted within the data and how they can be conceptualized concerning digital presentations of place and online performances of the self.

Quirky Captions of Place

Captioning of Instagram posts communicating Rustic Pathways experiences appears to be a delicate undertaking for users examined within this study. Five different codes were created to organize the diverse captions of Instagram posts. Those codes are: *Attitude; Awe in Remote, Exotic, & Wild, Challenge; #sorustic;* and *Irrelevant.* These five codes were created to identify the content of the captions to understand what students were acknowledging within their captions. Three additional subcodes were designed to determine the linguistic style of the caption: *Funny & Playful; Foreign Language;* and *Creative*. The previous sections have explored examples of the captions coded as: *Attitude; Challenge; Foreign Language;* and *Awe in Remote, Exotic, & Wild.* Captions coded as *#sorustic* will be explored in an upcoming section.

As stated above, captions coded as *Funny & Playful* or *Creative* were first coded for the content of the caption. For example, this caption: "@annie.reed: laughing because I saw a zebra crossing the road (and later crying because I saw a real life Zebra) #sorustic" was first coded as

Awe in Remote, Exotic, & Wild as the student is articulating an experience on safari observing wild animals. The caption was also coded with the subcode *Funny & Playful* for communicating that experience in the form of a joke. Another caption reads: "@miakaybilezikian: EYE love elephants! (haha get it…) SAVE THE PHANTS #sorustic" and accompanies a close-up photo of an elephant's eyeball. Other captions subcoded as *Funny & Playful* were more abstruse, abstractly describing the photo but written in a playful way that required insider knowledge to comprehend. For example, "@aubreyklear: I can bring Picchu through the green glass doors...too bad I can't bring Macchu ://// #sorustic #rpphotochallenge" accompanied a photo of a student leaping in front of Machu Picchu. The student included the words "Machu" and "Picchu" but separated them inside of a nearly incoherent sentence. However, as a former Rustic Pathways program leader, I was able to read this caption and decipher it as a nod to common riddle called "Green Glass Door". This riddle is often told while hiking with a group. With this insider knowledge, I can presume that the students were challenged with solving this riddle while hiking during their program. However, most audience members would read this caption as gibberish. As discussed in the section *Place as Uncomfortable,* several other captions coded as *Funny & Playful* were also coded *Challenge,* situated as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the challenges and uncomfortable moments during the place experience.

Captions coded with the subcode *Creative* were often even more challenging to understand as reflections of place experience. One *Creative* caption reads: "@through.my_eyezz: Someone asked me, if I were stranded on a desert island what book I would bring…"How To Build A Boat" - Steven Wright #sorustic" This caption accompanied a photo of a dhow-style boat on a scenic beach with large rock formations in the background. Perhaps the narrative the student hoped to communicate was their experience on a remote island only accessible by boat.

However, in using this quote, I wonder if the student felt stranded on the island and found this quote a humorous representation of his feelings, or if he is a merely a fan of the quote creator and wanted to articulate that to his audience.

The use of *Funny & Playful* and *Creative* captions can be interpreted in several ways. Looking through a critical lens, I wanted to understand why students embed their experiences of place within a cheeky caption that may or may not be understood by their audience. As students choose to share their place experiences to their wider audience of peers and followers, why not be as articulate as possible within the caption to define the image within the post? A critical dimension of creative and playful captions is their indirect communication of exclusivity between users and the connections they have to place. Creative captions, captions articulating inside jokes, or captions written in a foreign language seem to drive a communication wedge between the user and their audience. As an audience member, I am unable to understand what is being communicated and the photo seems unsupported by a puzzling narrative. Place as illustrated in the photo becomes virtually more distant. The exclusivity of place will be explored in greater detail.

I can also interpret funny, playful, and creative captions as strategically utilized by users within this sample to perform place experiences that were challenging, exotic and remote, nostalgic and humbling for two reasons. The first is that users may use playful or creative expressions to communicate place as they feel these captions are more likely to garner positive attention from their audience. Playful captions in the form of a joke or pun are intended to be funny and garner a laugh. A "laugh" from an audience member can also be reciprocated in the form of a "like". Creative captions, while more abstract, can add a unique twist to an Instagram post, an attention-seeking act by the user. An audience member may pause, wonder, and extend a

"like" to the poster. The second reason users may use playful or creative captions is that they are easier and quicker for the user to construct than a full articulation of place experience. While the creation of playful or creative captions require deliberation by the user, playful and creative captions could also be seen as require less critical internal reflection and outward vulnerability in communication. Users don't have to think about all of the different ways their place experience impacted them and how to refine those overwhelming thoughts and feelings into 2,200 characters. They can create a funny joke or a pun and rest easy knowing their audience will, at the very least, think their joke is funny. As mentioned in a previous section, elements of the uncomfortable aspects of place were inserted into cheeky captions. These cheeky captions can be seen as a tool, allowing users to allude to a challenging experience veiling the more exact illustrations of the uncomfortable and unpleasant experiences of place. I should be clear that it is not the intention of this analysis to undermine the careful construction of captions in this sample, as many users have still found creative and thoughtful ways to include elements of their place experience within their captions.

Symbolic Mobility in Geotags

The diverse use of geotags was recorded in Instagram posts and discussed in interviews. The coding of geotags in Instagram posts were recorded as *None,* meaning a user did not include a geotag, *Country,* indicating a user geotagged the entire country they visited, or *Specific*, meaning they geotagged a more specific location like a village, city, or an iconic destination. Posts were more often tagged with specific locations than coded with *Country* or *None.* Charlotte shared her reasoning on geotagging the specific village she visited in Tanzania:

> Charlotte: I am definitely just a child of this decade because I was like, "Oh, I want people to know where I was." I think I did the one that was specific to it [the village], or at least I think it was the specific one, but yeah, I also wanted people

to know that I wasn't just on like a vacation. I was like, "Okay. I'm in a village," you know? Yeah, I wanted my friends to see all the photos and you know?

Charlotte felt the use of a specific geotag validated her experience as more authentic, showing that she was not on a "vacation." As stated in the excerpt above, she also expressed some uncertainty in not knowing the specific village name, choosing what she thought was the correct geotag for the village. Katie expressed a similar reflection on her decision to geotag her location in Fiji and also admits that she was unsure of her exact location:

> Katie: The village name? I don't know. I feel like if I just put Fiji, it was too general, so I wanted to put a specific village. I put the one that I thought was closest to where I was. I didn't have a specific idea, because some of the village names either I didn't remember or I couldn't really pronounce or spell out. Then, I just picked the village name that I thought was the closest.

Emma was candid about her decision to geotag her photo with "Machu Picchu":

> Interviewer: Do you typically geo tag your pictures?
> Emma: If they're somewhere ... if they're in Vermont, not really, but if I'm traveling, and I want people to know where I am, yeah. Yeah. I just wanted people to know that I was there, specifically.
> Interviewer: Why?
> Emma: Because it's cool.

Emma's response can be interpreted in two ways: expressing that Machu Picchu is a cool place or as wanting her audience to think she is cool for traveling to Machu Picchu. Another subject, Maggie, did not geotag her post but uniquely shared a photo that was taken at the John F. Kennedy airport before arriving in Fiji. She felt that the background of the image depicting an airport setting, signified her upcoming trip.

> Maggie: I was in the airport and you can kind of see that in the background, so I didn't really think it was a big thing. And I'm also pretty sure that I posted something on my Instagram story, of like me and Hanna's passports with like the John F Kennedy. So even though it's not on the picture, I definitely did post

something later that day that said John F Kennedy. Because I had to flex on everyone.

Of the Instagram posts that excluded geotags, it's clear in the majority of these posts that the user is in an exotic or remote location, based on the caption or the image. Some captions specifically mention the location, country, or community or the images depict exotic wildlife, remote landscapes, or culturally contrasts the subject within the image accompanied by local community members or local children. In other words, even without the use of a specific or more general country geotag, it is clear these posts are depicting a place-based experience.

The inexact use of geotags is difficult to analyze within the larger sample of Instagram photos as the user was unable to elaborate on their use of the geotag and its relationship to their knowledge of exact place. However, assessing the volume of the use of specific geotags and the reflections on geotagging from interview subjects, it can be surmised that geotags can be used as a symbol of place experience authenticity as well as privileged and exclusive mobility. Students wishing to "flex on everyone" might use a geotag to present the location of their experience as exotic, remote, and unattainable. This presentation of exotic place and the self in exotic place, in combination with exclusivity, will be challenged in a future section.

Positioning of Self in Post

The specific positioning of the subject in an Instagram post varied within the Instagram posts examined. Specific Codes for subjects positioned in photos included: *Not Pictured*; *Self Alone*; *Selfie*; *Self & Locals*; and *Self & Peers*. The analysis of identifying the user as a pictured subject in a post was inexact and involved making assumptions about the user being pictured as the subject, or one of the subjects, as well as assuming whether subjects were "peers" or "locals". The photos coded as *Not Pictured* were either depictions of landscapes or a group of small local children, whom I can assume are not owners of an Instagram account and posting images using

the #sorustic hashtag. A small percent of photos were coded with *Self & Locals.* This was a surprising finding after learning about the place experience reflections from interview subjects discussing their attachments and connections to community members. In total, only seven photos featured Rustic Pathways students with local community members, with an additional three posts that pictured small local children coded as *Not Pictured.* The reasoning behind this finding could be supported by Abigail's opinions articulated in the section *Posting Travel Photos.* Abigail felt that photos featuring community members might receive less engagement or attention on social media because audience members were less interested in these scenes, unable to relate to foreign communities and cultures. Perhaps Rustic Pathways students whose posts I observed were cognizant of this in considering their online presentations of place and were more likely to post a photo that their audience will engage with or relate to.

Most of the photos examined in the sample were coded as *Self & Peers* or *Self Alone.* Posts coded as *Self & Peers* depicted a group of what I assumed were Rustic Pathways students while *Self Alone* depicted just one Rustic Pathways student. This study has illustrated that place-based experiences can be transformative on an individual level and that these experiences are not experienced alone. In understanding images coded as *Self & Peers,* the impact of the newly formed micro-community should be considered. Small intimate groups of students of similar ages and cultural backgrounds are brought together for culturally immersive and intense place-based experiences. As a student of immersive travel experiences in high school, I vividly remember the relationships I built with my group of peers. We were out of our comfort zones, experiencing magnificent landscapes, and away from our own communities and families. We were allowed to build a social circle from the ground up. There is no question that the relationships these students build with their peers are powerful and is even more understandable

that students would want to post images of their newfound friends on social media. The sharing of experiences that depict oneself in a group of peers can represent friendship and connection for the user, while also being symbolic to an audience that the poster has friends and is welcomed and included in a group.

Many posts also contained pictures depicting a single subject and were coded as *Self Alone.* The sheer quantity of images depicting a single subject in a post is equally fascinating and puzzling. The coding of these photos made assumptions that the single subject pictured was the user. Often the photos featured the subject in front of a beautiful landscape: a beach, distant mountains, a sunset. These pictures evoked feelings of awe, wanderlust, exotic leisure, or remote adventure. Analyzing the photos as a researcher, I was reminded of the absent themes uncovered in the place experience reflections of the interview subjects. Absent were the articulated attachments to community members, the discussions of challenge and discomfort, the mentions of cultural surprise, cross-cultural inclusivity, or reward. These pictures depicted visual narratives similar to the reflections from interview subjects on the experience of beautiful, remote, exotic, and wild places. In attempting to piece together a place-based narrative using all the elements of a post, I coded a number of images with Remote, Exotic, & Wild as the primary caption code and subcodes identified as Funny & Playful or Creative. Figures 10, 11, 12, and 13 depict posts coded with this coding structure.

Figure 10. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone in post with caption context of Remote, Exotic, & Wild subcoded with Funny & Playful
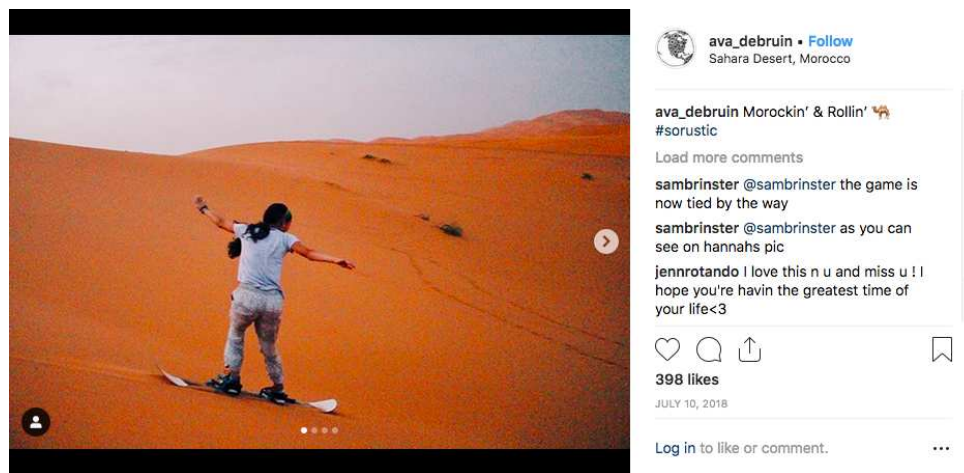
Figure 11. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone in post with caption context of Remote, Exotic, & Wild subcoded with Funny & Playful

Figure 12. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone in post with caption context of Remote, Exotic, & Wild subcoded with Funny & Playful

Figure 13. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone in post with caption context of Remote, Exotic, & Wild subcoded with Creative

A few posts coded with *Self Alone* were outliers in that they assembled a nearly complete narrative of their reflective place-based experience, absent of a veil of humor or creative captions. Figures 14 and 15 depict posts of individuals pictures alone but accompanied by a caption containing a more articulate narrative of experience.

Figure 14. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone and contextualizing experience with a nearly complete narrative

Figure 15. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone and contextualizing experience with a nearly complete narrative

Other posts lacked contextual elements that articulated an experience or action. The signifying place elements of Figures 16 and 17 is the inclusion of the geotag that identifies a location, an indication of place experience.

Figure 16. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone lacking a contextual caption but includes a geotag

Figure 17. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone lacking a contextual caption but includes a geotag

Figure 18 is depicting a post coded *Self Alone* excluded all descriptions and contextual elements of specific place experience, reflection, and action. Figure 18 is captioned with a reference to the subject belonging in National Geographic, an articulation that can be vaguely interpreted as the subject *feeling* exotic.

Figure 18. Instagram post illustrating Self Alone lacking a contextual elements

An interview subject shared another example of a post lacking all narrative elements. The photo depicted the subject with their back to the camera, nose-to-nose with an elephant. The post does not include a geotag and the caption reads "#sorustic." When learning more about this picture from Sarah, a student in Cambodia, she shared a remarkable story about her interaction with the pictured elephant. The interaction was so powerful for Sarah, she decided to travel to Thailand to work at an elephant sanctuary. As a researcher examining the *Self Alone* posts and being confounded by the lack of contextual elements in a number of these posts, Sarah's explanation of the story behind her photo redirected my critical thinking of presentations of the self in posts. Sarah's invisible narrative along with other interview subjects' invisible narratives will be explored in an upcoming section.

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"I looked out into the rest of the village and I'm like, "I wish everybody on earth could be able to see this and like feel what I'm feeling and enjoy this place as much as I do." And I just have to be okay with knowing that when I post this picture I'll get, you know, 40 likes on it, whatever. But people are just going to say, "Oh, that's a nice picture." Scroll, scroll, scroll. And I feel like that's just the weird thing about social media because I have a tendency to put out things that I'm very passionate about, and I just have to realize that people aren't always going to care. And people aren't going to understand" (Ashley)

This section explores the communicated conflicts between place experience reflection, place experience presentation, and performance of the self . This concept of conflict will be a guiding theme for understanding challenges in communication expressed from interview subjects and observed in Instagram posts. Conflicts within place experience communications can be interpreted through an understanding of the invisible narrative, the discursive influence of Rustic Pathways within students' mediated experiences, the performativity of self experiencing wild places, and acknowledging the presence of exclusivity in online presentations of place.

Ashley (quoted above) was one of several interview subjects who expressed frustrations on how to communicate their place-based experience. Yi-Fu Tuan said: "Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" (1977, p. 136). When analyzing conversations with interview subjects and place presentations from Instagram posts, it is clear that as space transforms into place, the definition of place for each Rustic Pathways student is complex and multidimensional. What if the communication of that "definition" and the personally constructed meaning is even more tangled in a web of digital constraints and performative social media expectations? Rustic Pathways students experience places that amaze them, inspire them, connect them, and challenge them. Rustic Pathways students are then expected to share these

experiences on a platform that can be considered its own place, "an interactive digital construct" (Adams and Gynnild, 2013), made up of social norms, ideologies, and customs. In interview conversations, subjects expressed this struggle directly. Different examples of this communicative struggle include:

> Abigail: And even though I want them to see the fact that I was on this trip and like, look how many amazing people I met, I understand that not many people are going to necessarily stop to really look at that picture and understand it.

> Elizabeth: It's just ... I like doing everything I can to share that experience. Honestly I would still be sharing stuff right now, but most people don't care.
> Interviewer: But you care, right?
> Elizabeth: Yea, I do

Interestingly, one interview subject of the fifteen did not post an Instagram of her experience. When questioned about her decision not to post, it wasn't her disinterest in the platform or the #sorustic photo contest. She admitted that she struggled in choosing photos to share. Kristie says:

> Kristie: I had way too many pictures, and I couldn't decide…. It had a limit of ten, I think, and I didn't really want to put all of them. I feel like, I don't know, the trip was really special, and I didn't want to just post a bunch of random pictures from it on there. I don't know. I felt like other people wouldn't enjoy it as much, or wouldn't appreciate it.

At fourteen, Kristie was the youngest participant interviewed within this study. Perhaps I could consider her age and the pressures of social media, impacting a younger generation of students who are even more influenced by expectations of online identity performance and audience impression management. However, I believe that as the youngest interview subject (by three years) and the only subject to not post an Instagram of her experience due to her inability to decide on her presentation, supports both the complexities of the place experience and its

entanglement with a users desire to communicate a meaningful narrative and their perception of the online audience in the digital space.

The interview excerpts above present a common conflict in wanting to communicate experience but feeling their experience will not be understood. Interview subjects are cognizant of the challenges in communicating these experiences and must navigate a platform that constrains their presentations with digital parameters and social rules. The digital parameters of Instagram limit captions to 2,200 characters, ten photos per post, 30 hashtags, and predefined geotags. Interview subjects discussed the culture around their use of Instagram, resulting in internal and external pressures of presentation, social norms, ideologies, and customs. When examining the sample of Instagram posts, I can understand how user's compliance within the interactive digital construct of Instagram can result in semi-homogeneous presentations as observed across the sample. I commonly observed short captions that acknowledged challenges, gratitude, or nostalgia for an experience, stylized with a playful or pithy semblance. Specific geotags are almost always added to Instagram posts within the sample. Visual place experience representations depict remote landscapes, adventure activities, or a visit to an iconic tourist destination with the subjects pictured as groups of Rustic Pathways students, or a single subject alone. The culturally immersive activities, scenes from homestays, or service work projects, were left out of most posts. In examining the Instagram posts, I initially struggled to understand how these presentations represented narratives of experience. I wondered if the digital parameters and social rules were extinguishing the place experience narratives. However, my analysis procedure allowed me to revisit the interview transcripts while viewing interview subjects' Instagram posts. During this portion of the analysis, I reviewed conversations with interview subjects' as they provided additional context to accompany their Instagram posts. The subjects shared elaborate

and unexpected stories of experience that could not be interpreted when viewing their Instagram posts alone. The stories shared by interview subjects can be interpreted as emergent narratives of experience. I understand these narratives from the interview subjects as emergent, as their unexpected attributes directly challenged my previous interpretation which considered the posts conventional, predictable, and confined within the Instagram frame. The interview subjects communicated meaningful stories and vivid details that brought their Instagram images to life. The interview subjects communicated the value and meaning they ascribe to their Instagram posts. The posts serve as windows into and symbols of their emergent narratives. I will next explore how and why these emergent narratives are presented as nearly invisible within the posts. The invisible narrative is a concept I will explore in the next section as its scope can be extended to all the Instagram posts examined in this study and supported by conversations with interview subjects.

The Invisible Narrative

Champ et al. (2013) explore place identity as a way for users to relate to and connect with place through narrative. The researchers examine online wilderness trip reports that can serve as "social microclimates" for the construction of meaningful narratives by users and the reciprocal engagement by a digital audience that can result in validation of an individual's wilderness experience (p. 143). If wilderness trip report websites are social microclimates built to encourage more lengthy user narratives, Instagram is a social microclimate that results in the production of invisible narratives. In examining user posts, I work to piece together the narrative using the post elements. I am often left wondering what actions or events led to this post and what meaning, or story was experienced beyond the image.

Interview subjects were able to fill in some of these narrative holes. Abigail shared more about her Instagram post, a group photo with local school children from the Haydesh village in

Tanzania. Her caption expressed gratitude for the village using Swahili and English: "asante sana Haydesh, see your soon #sorustic" but her verbal explanation of the photo included the names of the children depicted, the games they were playing with the children just before the photo was taken, the shy children just outside of the photo's frame that were too nervous to join in the picture, and the excitement that ensued as school children grabbed the camera to see themselves pictured on the screen. Abigail felt this photo showed her authentic experience in the Haydesh village as an average day working with school children. She also felt this was an appropriate photo to enter into the Rustic Pathways photo contest, as she saw it as an image that captured Rustic life best. Abigail says,

> Abigail: That's why I wanted to enter this one because I feel like it really captures that other side of Rustic. Like yes, there's the fun-friends-hanging-out type of Rustic, but I had a public account at the time I posted and so I was able to show anybody who clicked on the hashtag that we do a lot of service and we spend time with these children and were able to develop these relationships. And it's not just like, "the stars are really pretty tonight" look at this photo to see, I want to show you what it's really like.

It became clear during interviews that the influence of the Rustic Pathways #sorustic photo contest was a mediating variable in the Instagram presentations of the interview subjects. While the interview subjects were direct in their articulations that the posts they shared on Instagram were personally meaningful, their reflections almost always included some consciousness or consideration of the #sorustic photo contest or hashtag collection. I began to decipher what impact the #sorustic photo contest or Rustic Pathways as an organization had on students place experience presentations and their invisible narratives.

#sorustic Power Over Narrative

Sarah's post and caption were discussed in the subsection *Self in Post* and can be further explored here as an illustration of an invisible narrative mediated by the power and influence of

the #sorustic photo contest. Sarah's post depicted her back to the camera, nose-to-nose with an elephant. Sarah's post was absent of a geotag and her caption reads "#sorustic." She explains how this moment was captured at an elephant rehabilitation facility in Cambodia. The Rustic Pathways students were observing the elephants from afar. The elephants were keeping their distance from the students as the students posed for photos, facing towards the cameras. Just as the students finished their photo shoot, this particular elephant walked right up to Sarah. She describes the moment vividly:

> Sarah: All of a sudden this elephant just like came up to me and I was like, "I don't know what to do." The instructor was like, "just don't move, don't freak out, it's fine." Then it kind of like put his head and trunk down. Like my shoe was inside it's trunk. But it was just an awe moment. They looked huge from far away and then up close in person your can feel the way they feel, it was so weird. It didn't feel like leather and also their eyelashes are like the longest things I've ever seen. It was just like an awe-struck moment.

To Sarah's delight, a fellow student on her program snapped a candid photo of the moment. She says she was "grinning from ear-to-ear for the rest of the day." She says the moment inspired her next Rustic Pathways program, a specific elephant conservation program in Thailand. The moment was impactful, but when captioning her photo, she decided on "#sorustic," leaving out the remarkable story and vivid details. When asked about her reasoning with the simple caption, Sarah responded:

> Sarah: Yeah, I definitely thought about putting a caption with it, but I was also convinced that if I put a caption with it I wasn't going to win it [the photo contest] so that was part of it. I have no idea. I just like, it's been three years and I posted such cool pictures over and over and awesome videos and I never get it [the grand prize] so like every year I'm just waiting for that free trip.

Sarah was willing to conceal her narrative to increase her chances of winning a free program with Rustic Pathways. Additionally, similar to Sarah's simple caption reading "#sorustic",

numerous photos examined in the larger Instagram caption also read plainly, "#sorustic" or

"#sorustic" accompanied by an emoji (a small digital image or icon) and were coded with the

caption subcode *#sorustic*. These users may have also felt this would improve the likelihood of

winning the contest, or perhaps they felt their image embodied the meaning they ascribe to

#sorustic, and the simple caption was enough to narrativize their experience. As discussed

previously, Rustic Pathways does not explicitly define the parameters or expectations around the

production of #sorustic images but rather indirectly communicate the #sorustic photo

expectations through word-of-mouth conversations between Program Leaders and students as

well through marketing the #sorustic Photo Contest campaign on their social platforms. They

informally communicate that #sorustic images could be "moments that portray friendship,

connection, impact, wanderlust, adventure, fun, silliness, and more" (Rustic Pathways Program

Leader Guidebook, 2018, p. 107). The accompanying image within Instagram posts that used

the simple "#sorustic" caption varied, but most often contextualized the #sorustic themes of

"adventure", "wanderlust', and "friendship." Figures 19, 20, 21, and 22 are examples of posts

with the caption code *#sorustic.*

Figure 19. Instagram post illustrating #sorustic caption code contextualizing #sorustic themes

Figure 20. Instagram post illustrating #sorustic caption code contextualizing #sorustic themes

Figure 21. Instagram post illustrating #sorustic caption code contextualizing #sorustic themes

Figure 22. Instagram post illustrating #sorustic caption code contextualizing #sorustic themes

As quoted previously in this paper, Rustic Pathways Social Media and Influencer

Marketing Manager, Liz Cortese, states that it is Rustic Pathways hope that students will follow

the Rustic Pathways Instagram account to get a visual understanding of the meaning of #sorustic:

"Generally we put a lot of trust that students follow us on social to see the #sorustic contests" (E.

Cortese, personal communication, December 14, 2018). In addition to promoting the campaign

on their social platforms, they also award weekly micro-contest winners over the course of the

contest entry period. Through their own marketing imagery and by awarding student posts

throughout the contest, Rustic Pathways plays a powerful hand at setting visual expectations for

experience presentations of its students. A number of examples of weekly contest winners were

provided to me by Rustic Pathways and explored in an early section of this study. Figures 1 and

2 depict two diverse yet incredible landscapes, and both captions from Rustic Pathways comment

on the stunning scenery within the frame (see Figure 1 & 2, p. 13). Perhaps the users'

presentations depicted in Figures 19 - 22 attempted to enact similar visual representations previously awarded by Rustic Pathways, providing images they hope will align best with Rustic Pathways expectations.

Another interview subject, Sasha, walks me through her thought process of posting a picture of herself and another Rustic Pathways student in front of Machu Picchu:

> Sasha: I mean, Machu Picchu was a huge part of the trip, and a huge part of Peru, so it reminds me of the trip in that when I think of Machu Picchu, of course, I think Peru. And this was one of my really good friends from Peru [pictured in the image with Sasha], so when I think of her, I also think of my Peru trip. I didn't look this [in Peru], like my hair was rarely down, because it was disgusting. It was usually braided up, but I'd say, yeah, it's an okay representation of my trip....but I mean, if they [Rustic Pathways] wanted to award a Machu Picchu picture of two girls in front of Machu Picchu, I thought this had a chance, but I had no idea what they were looking for really. The #sorustic stuff that won ended up being from like Cambodia of a waterfall or something, and a person wasn't in it, so I was like, "Oh, maybe this is just not it." I thought it was a good picture. It's clear, you can see what it is, and if they're trying to advertise to people who are interested in touristy destinations, like Machu Picchu, I thought it would be an okay bet.

Sasha acknowledges that this photo was "an okay representation" of her trip. Using her entire interview narrative to understand the post, I see the post as a symbol of the close friendships she formed in Peru, friendships she discussed extensively. Her caption reads: "raoul said the hike would be easy #itwasnt #sorustic." This caption acknowledges the physically difficult aspects of her program that she discussed at length but is also a specific reference to the challenging hike to Machu Picchu. She explains that Machu Picchu was a destination she was looking forward to and looks back on fondly. In her interview, Sasha describes the intensity of the service project the group completed, and that personal hygiene was well below her normal standards of cleanliness. From her interview, I understood her experience to be immersive and impactful because she was entirely out her comfort zone: dirty, sweaty and working on a service project for

the majority of her three-week program. In the excerpt above, she comments on her hair being "rarely down" in the photo as she is pictured-clean, groomed, and laughing with her peer. Without an understanding of her place experience as learned through her interview, I find it difficult to interpret her invisible narrative through her shared post. The rest of her experience is lost beyond the frame. It seems as though Sasha's attractive self-presentation along with the influence of the #sorustic photo contest were both powerful forces in the posting of this photo. She is fond of the photo, herself in the photo, and of her visit Machu Picchu but also admits that she felt by presenting her experience at an iconic tourist destination would enact the goals of the #sorustic photo contest. Emma, also a student in Peru, posted a photo of herself alone in front of Machu Picchu. Concerning #sorustic photo contest she says:

> Emma: I mean, I was like, "Oh, maybe it could win", but there's so many others out there, that I was like, "I don't know. I'll just try." I think, everybody did that for all of their photos that they posted from the trip, just in case one was good enough to win, because who wouldn't want a free trip?

Other interview subjects were entirely unaware of the photo contest but observed the use of the #sorustic hashtag by their peers as well as on the Rustic Pathways Instagram account. While these students did not discuss any direct influences on their content in terms of presenting photos in an attempt to win the grand prize, they did express feeling compelled to add the hashtag to their photos in order to be represented in the hashtag collection on Instagram and identify their involvement with Rustic Pathways to their audience. Nikki said she used the hashtag, so others would see that she traveled with Rustic Pathways and might encourage her audience to travel with them as well:

> Nikki: I just had a really good time, and I guess, I just wanted to share how good of an experience it was for me, and encourage other people to go on a rustic trip or just to travel in general.

Maggie posted a photo before the start of her experience, depicting herself and her friend at New York's John F. Kennedy airport. She tagged the photo with #sorustic and described her disappointment in not winning the contest. However, she sees the use of the hashtag by Rustic Pathways students as a comprehensive tool for engagement, as other students were able to see and relate to her post in the hashtag collection:

> Maggie: But it was definitely a cool way to get people to interact with each other. Some people saw it, when I met them in the airport, they were like, "Oh, I just saw your Insta. I saw that you were coming here. Where are you going?" And I was like, "Oh, I'm going to Fiji. Where are you going?" That kind of thing. So it's a good way to get people to see each other and look at each other's Instagrams and get an idea of, "Okay, I'm not the only person that's going to be living on this mountain. Everything'll be okay."

Mary used the hashtag to include her photo in the collection on Instagram and admits that she found out about the contest later. She explains that while she could have chosen better photos to be entered into the contest, she is happy with her post because it was a genuine and meaningful representation of her experience:

> Mary: I mean, I didn't even know it was really a photo contest. My friend was like, "Hashtag it #sorustic." I realized afterwards that it was a photo contest. I was like, "Oh, I took some cool photos. I could have posted those." But I'm kind of happy I hashtagged these photos specifically #sorustic, because I'd rather have people scroll through the hashtag and see a photo that was super meaningful to me, instead of one that I just posted and hashtagged to be like, "Uh, this is a cool photo."

I interpret this excerpt as Mary being thankful that she did not succumb to the pressures of the #sorustic photo contest, although she was cognizant that a wider audience may see her post tagged within the larger collection of #sorustic posts. She felt that had she considered the photo contest; the stakes of the contest may have led her to post a photo that was less meaningful to her and less representative of her experience.

The interview excerpts explored above, along with the posts using the simple "#sorustic" hashtag as the caption from the larger Instagram sample, can serve as evidence that Rustic Pathways has a discursive influence over the presentations of experience of Rustic Pathways students. Foucault's study of discourse as a system of representation can be considered in the influence of Rustic Pathways on the students' constructed meanings of their experience (Hall, 2001). Foucault defines discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic" (p. 72). Discourse extends beyond a linguistic concept expressing knowledge and meaning through language. Rather, discourse recognizes the ways that knowledge is constructed through the relationship between social practices and power relations. Foucault's study of discourse argues that power relationships in society are thought to establish rules on the construction of knowledge, meaning, language, and practice. Through social media marketing campaigns and in-person word-of-mouth conversations from Rustic Pathways authority figures, Rustic Pathways is enacting discursive rules that define the meaning and practice of #sorustic, influencing users' visual presentations. The degree to which students abide by those discursive rules in the construction of Instagram posts varies. Foucault argued that discursive rules can influence meaning ascribed to a topic and representations of that meaning; several of the students seem to demonstrate this idea by precisely picking and choosing which images they believe will embody #sorustic photo contest imagery. Other students choose to acknowledge the overall goals repeatedly communicated by Rustic Pathways and are influenced by that discursive power in presenting their photos to reflect the organizations "conduct, understanding, practice, and belief" (Hall, 2001, p. 78). This power is experienced by students who feel compelled to present their experiences and discursive representations to attentive audiences. Through the #sorustic photo

contest and the social influence of using the #sorustic hashtag by default for some students in this study, Rustic Pathways has created a feedback loop, positioning themselves as the beneficiaries of these discursive online representations. By establishing the discursive rules, Rustic Pathways has a population of users echoing online representations that are positively promoting Rustic Pathways. This promotion can result in more students choosing to travel with the organization, leading to a greater profit and more power and influence for Rustic Pathways.

This reiteration of Foucault's argument of discursive rules can be understood in Nikki's excerpt as she described how she felt compelled to use the hashtag to be included in the hashtag collection but also to add that she traveled with the organization in the hopes of influencing others to travel with Rustic Pathways. Rustic Pathways and the #sorustic photo contest are powerful mediators in the produced discourses of place experience.

This section explores the influence of place mediation disseminated by Rustic Pathways; however, this influence is just one block in a much more pervasive system of power in which the structure and action of digital social mediation is built. The multi-billion-dollar social conglomerate Facebook owns the Instagram platform. Facebook is seeded with algorithms that employ unique technical elements and user analytics that feed specific content to users. The construction of these algorithms is said to balance the personal relevance of content, timeliness of the content, as well as content engagement. This engagement element dictating the algorithm means that content that receives the most engagement with likes and comments is presented at the top of a Facebook or Instagram feed. While algorithms are digital mechanisms, they are constructed and managed by software engineers, content strategists, and data scientists The human beings working for one of the most potent and prevalent media companies in the world are the puppet masters responsible for pulling strings and feeding a user content that is then

deemed meaningful and essential. Popular content is seen first, considered the most influential

and the receiver of even more interaction among an audience. The aesthetic nature of this content

is not only captivating and reactionary by its position at the top of a social media feed, but an

audience can recognize the value of the aesthetic presentation and construct similar images that

audiences will engage with, replicating these images in their social media content. This

penetrating power structure can result in the repetitive images of experience we see on Instagram

and Facebook and can whittle down highly complex and emotional human experiences into what

Butler deems a "stylized repetition of acts"(1988, p. 519). This section sets the framework for

understanding to power of performance of the self and performativity, but the influence of

authoritative discourses and mediating power structures can extend beyond the discursive

structures put in place by Rustic Pathways and Facebook. Performance of the self and

performativity will continue to be explored as we understand the sociality of online identity

constructions resulting in repetitive images and invisible narratives from Rustic Pathways

students examined in this study.

Performance and Performativity in Wild and Exotic Places

Interview subjects articulated how place experience influenced their identities, beliefs,

values, and behaviors. Identity transformations were tangible to the interview subjects and

expressed during interviews. Several subjects said they felt and acted differently after their place

experience. However, I was unable to interpret and record any elements of similar themes of

place identity transformations in subjects' Instagram posts, as reflected by the interview subjects.

In a previous section, I speculate about several reasons why I might not be observing

presentations of place identity transformation in Instagram posts across the entire sample.

Communicating shifts and impacts on identity influenced by place in an individual Instagram

post is challenging, requiring inner reflection in combination with place experience processing. It

is possible students might be overwhelmed with processing their place experience and not prepared to recognize the impacts of their identity at the moment of posting. Temporality plays a role in this as well, as students are posting on Instagram during or shortly after their place experiences. Instagram has normalized the immediate sharing of images across a social network. This temporality has shifted the sociality of sharing presentations of experience and presentations of self online. Posts are required to be shared immediately *and* carefully curated. Perhaps the immediacy required when using Instagram doesn't allow time for inner reflection. Any additional "time" between user experience and the posting of the experience by the user is perhaps most commonly spent crafting the visual image: posing, repositioning, deleting, evaluating, selecting, and editing images. Time might be influencing where Instagram users are focusing their efforts in the creation of the post.

While the impacts of personal identity transformation as communicated by the interview subjects were not observed within the subject's Instagram posts, elements of identity and a desire to represent the self in a certain way were observed across the Instagram samples, both aesthetically and performatively. The Instagram platform is inherently visual with users presenting a refined image to an audience. Goffman's performance of the self (1955) can be understood in this process as users take into consideration how the audience may perceive their performance of self. The Instagram image is the most central element to the post, and as such, users are calculated and strategic in the curation of their visual representations of place experience and themselves in place. Instagram is a social platform built around engagement in the form of affirmation and validation from an audience. As noted in the section above, Instagram's algorithm populates a user's digital feed with posts that are popular, receiving the most likes and comments. Perhaps users seek a similar level of engagement from their audience

and in order to engage an audience, a user must captivate. Within this study, the Instagram sample findings support the trend in popular posts as an image positioning of the self alone against a visually stunning landscape. Interview subjects expressed wanting their audience to know where they traveled. The subjects' remarks on using geotags supports this performative concept of place: "so people do know I was in Tanzania" (Abigail); "but I am definitely just a child of this decade because I was like, 'Oh, I want people to know where I was.'" (Lauren); "I had to flex on everyone." (Maggie). Other subjects hoped their Instagram posts would showcase their experiences as more immersive than a typical vacation; they wanted to communicate the exoticism of their experience that likely could not be experienced on vacation. The common use of geotags coded as *Specific* and *Country* across the Instagram sample, and numerous captions coded as *Awe in Remote, Exotic, & Wild* support this trend in presenting the self experiencing remote and exotic place.

In examining why performance of the self in exotic, remote, or spectacular environments is a normative online presentation, I examine the historical and cultural discourse around the appreciation and communication of wild places. I can agree that visually stunning landscapes and exotic environments are captivating. Exotic is defined as "strikingly, excitingly, or mysteriously different or unusual" (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Hence, placing the self within a stunning landscape or exotic environment may become a captivating photo, resulting in engagement and affirmation from an audience. This communicative process is almost like a formula for engagement and extends beyond the digital space, introducing Butler's performativity, a "stylized repetition of acts" (1988, p. 519), and an echoing of institutionalized discourses. The appreciation of wild and exotic place as a dominant discourse can be traced back to the Enlightenment, as European scientists focused their studies on earth's distinct physical features

(Nash, 2014). Scientific discoveries informed society of the environmental complexities of the Earth and inspired curiosity for the unknown and undiscovered.

However, the strict logic and reason required to interpret the earth and its processes objectively, resulted in a rejection of this strict ontology in favor of a more subjective understanding of the world. This new ideology resulted in the era of Romanticism, with prominent attitudes that celebrated the beauty, mystique, and grandeur of wild scenery, previously considered chaotic, hostile, and ungodly. Eighteenth-century philosophers like Edmund Burke (1757) and Immanuel Kant (1763) wrote about the concept of sublimity in wild places. In 1768, William Gilpin published an essay defining the word "picturesque" as "the pleasing quality of nature's roughness, irregularity, and intricacies" (Nash, 2014, p. 46). The notion of sublimity in wild places persisted into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as ideologies expanded into artistic genres and an aesthetic moment. The new genres focused on expressions and illustrations of natural and organic scenery. A common theme in Romantic paintings was the position of a single subject alone against a natural landscape, similar to the Instagram posts coded as *Self Alone*. It is theorized that Romantic painters often positioned subjects against natural landscapes to encourage feelings of awe, amazement, and terror of natural environments, but it was also hoped that the contrasting human presence against the landscapes can be interpreted as a conqueror of wild place (Pepper, 1996). Nash writes that "Romantic writers represented themselves as a particular social type whose "sensibilities" were superior to those who brought economic criteria to wild country. Enjoyment of wilderness for them was a function of gentility" (p. 60). The romantic discourses gained power as literary and artistic consumption for these places became synonymous with the affluent and educated social class. The appreciation of the picturesque was acknowledged in the United States as lawmakers

solidified the value of wild space in the federal protection of stunning landscapes in the Western United States. Awe and wonder in the remote and wild became a ritualized leisure activity among affluent populations. The rise of tourism and leisure appealed to wealthier populations who could afford to escape crowded cities. These populations were cognizant of far off landscapes and curious to experience spectacular destinations. Travel and alluring tourism experiences seemed limitless as innovations in transportation encouraged cross-continent mobility and advancements in communication technology allowed for the capturing and sharing of wild, remote, and exotic place. One might even consider Romanticism and the aesthetic genre that emerged as the moment in which unique and sublime landscapes across the globe began to be mass represented. Our own media landscape is saturated with stunning landscapes, depicted in advertisements, the setting for television and film, painted, drawn, photographed, commodified and consumed. Destinations became "iconic" through repeated citation in popular and authoritative discourse. This homogenization of natural and spectacular landscapes through images and repeated representation in popular media texts becomes a continuous loop of reproduction. Images are romantically, historically, culturally, and often touristically constructed over and over. Considering tourism and travel, reproductions usually represent the tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011) that highlights the values and identity of the outsider as opposed to the interests or identities of the individuals or communities local to the region.

The review of this historical and philosophical evolution in appreciation of wild places can aid in the understanding of Instagram depictions of self in an aesthetically stunning landscape, as a reproduction of institutionalized societal constructs, conceptualizing and communicating beautiful places, and the performative desire to position oneself in place as a dramatic and appealing presentation to an audience.

Exotic as Exclusive

This presentation of the exotic, remote, and wild imagery across Instagram posts modifies the in-person interpretations of place experience gained from interview subjects. Interview subjects expressed experiencing beauty, interpersonal connection, and inclusivity. They want to share these experiences but express that they struggle with how to share, describe, and present those experiences to others and fear others will not care or understand. However, in settling on a presentation of experience, more often than not, they present remote, exotic, and wild depictions and typify those scenes with a caption that reinforces the remote, exotic, and wild nature of the scene. Presentations of an individual's remote and exotic experience seem to create distance between the audience and the individual in place. The presentation of place becomes foreign and distant. Presentations of place in this way introduce an element of exclusivity of place, a contradiction of what was communicated in-person by the interview subjects. Place becomes an experience owned and claimed by the user, exclusive and unattainable for the audience. This contradicts the inclusivity of place as discussed by interview subjects who recognized a shared humanity. This idea of a borderless and inclusive place can be seen as suppressed and enclosed within a framed Instagram post. The numerous presentations of the self alone or subject with peers in Instagram posts reinforces this communicated exclusivity of place.

The subject, interpreted as the Instagram user in this study, is physically alone in their representations of place. This type of presentation makes it challenging for an audience member to interpret the narrative. The subject has claimed the parameters of the scene as their own, as framed by the photo — this echoes a common theme of Romantic painters in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Subjects were positioned alone against striking landscapes, symbolic of strangers to the land but could also be interpreted as conquerors of a wild domain (Pepper, 1996).

Presentations of place depicting a single subject alone within an exotic or wild frame can be recognized as produced performances saturated with power. These performances can be seen as the citational reproduction of the intrusion of a superior sociocultural structure on a less developed environment or community. While this study is unable to evaluate the socioeconomic status of each interview subject and user, I can reference the tuition costs of Rustic Pathways programs ranging from $1,495 to $9,495 per program ("Student Travel Programs"). In order to finance such an experience, it can be assumed that many Rustic Pathways students come from middle to upper-middle class families in Western countries, although Rustic Pathways does offer financial aid and scholarship opportunities, so this assumption is not meant to generalize about the socioeconomic status of all students ("Scholarships"). As referenced previously, interview subject Niki shared concerns about her peers making assumptions about her family's wealth: "Just like, "Oh, she's so rich," because we're not, and stuff like that." In comparing the average cost of a Rustic Pathways program to the average annual income of many of the countries, Rustic Pathways visits, a Rustic Pathways program costs more than many of the yearly salaries reviewed ("Trending Economics"). Niki and perhaps many other Rustic Pathways students fail to see the role they play as a member of the dominant Western society, a society that affords young teenagers the opportunities for foreign travel and exotic experiences. This desire to experience foreign destinations and the impulse to travel for more than necessity, became a ritualized leisure activity among affluent populations granted with mobility by the latest transportation innovation. "To be a tourist is one of the characteristics of the 'modern' experience. It has become a marker of status in modern societies" (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 18). As the transportation industry grew, remote and foreign destinations became more accessible. Yet still, there seems to be a correlation in modern tourism practices between the remote and exoticness of the destination and the

traveler's socioeconomic status affording them the experience of the remote and exotic. Westerners spend money to reach these destinations and gaze on and consume the uniqueness of the destination once they arrive. The tourist gaze conceptualized by John Urry suggests that tourist experiences suggest a particular way of seeing environments that is different from everyday experiences (2011). Urry finds photography to be central to the tourist gaze, juxtapositioning the use of camera, a product of modernity operated by a Western foreigner, to "see" a remarkable and often otherworldly environment. Through this concept of the tourist gaze, representations of remote and exotic environments by outsiders through images can be understand as a consumptive practice, where people and unique elements of an environment become objectified as spectacles. This commodification of the exotic and remote can be understood as representative of powerful capitalist ideologies that can be critiqued for exploiting underdeveloped communities and degrading natural environments for financial gain.

In examining organizations like Rustic Pathways, specifically the structuring of travel experiences around cultural engagement and service work in developing countries, one can argue that these experiences may build upon and reinforce the power and socioeconomic disparities between modern societies and developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Interview subject Abigail, spoke about her experience learning about the struggles Tanzanian children face when going to school: walking many miles to school or not being able to attend due to river flooding. This experience encourages Abigail to reflect on the lack of value she places on her education, often "taking it for granted," but it appears as though she is still failing to recognize her involvement in a capitalistic education system that encourages this jarring inequality. Perhaps in the context of these teen adventure and service travel programs, one could excuse the naivete of the students, however, as a researcher, it is almost impossible to deny the glaring

economic disparities between within these images depicting a Western student in a remote and exotic landscape. In Rustic Pathways Instagram posts, one might consider the single subject as performing as a foreigner, an outsider, or a Westerner in an exotic scene, discursively highlighting the cultural, political, economic, and environmental differences between societies in the presentation of place. One might understand these Rustic Pathways performances as a self-serving way to draw the attention of the audience towards the self. In considering tourists as performers, Edensor states, "When tourists enter particular stages, they are usually informed by preexisting discursive, practical, embodied norms that help to guide their performative orientations." (2018, p. 147). I can acknowledge the place presentations of Rustic Pathways students as a performance and performative. Within these user presentations, I can consider how performance of place can articulate the power relations that reinforce social and identity differences across cultures. Looking through a narrow lens, I acknowledge the discursive pressures of the Rustic Pathways #sorustic photo contest that influence and mediate the digital place presentations of Rustic Pathways students. Widening the scope, I can also recognize the capitalistic power structures of modernity and Western affluence as a dominant discourse resulting in the seemingly normative presentations of Rustic Pathways Instagram posts.

However, in acknowledging the traces of performance and performativity by recognizing the "reiteration of norms" (Butler, 2011, p. 6), I can understand the template from which to deviate, and consider a semblance of subjectivity and agency in experience and presentation that might push against these conventions. We must remember there is more to a student's Rustic Pathways experience than the posting of Instagram images. The images are only one element of the nature of the users' experience and not meant to fully embody their place-experience narrative, the data would indicate that users have control over meaning they make of their

experience *and* control over the creation of their unique Instagram posts and perhaps this

representation is a moment of singularity for the students. That is, a moment captured in an

image and pushed onto a social network that represents their personal experience. The

uniqueness of the experience can indeed be argued, as these ritualized travel destinations have

been commodified, captured, and reproduced by Western society. However, the uniqueness

comes not in the situated imagery of the photo or even course of events of the experience, but

rather the claiming and presenting of the personal involvement by the student. This perspective

can be explored through the concept of situated freedom. Situated freedom is the idea that

humans are free to experience the world in "highly individual, unique, and variable ways"

(Patterson et al., 1998, p. 426), within the boundaries set by the environment. An illustration of

situated freedom that fits well within the analysis of this study is Nicholson's (1984) quote,

"What the traveler sees in glancing out the window [of a train] we call a house (or a group of

houses). But he sees it as an indicator of the distance he has yet to go." (p. 40) This quote can

support the idea that a user's practical activity at the time of "seeing" influences their perception

of experience. The students have a perception of beauty that inspires wonder and awe that is

likely very similar to the rest of society and aligns with scenic and stunning imagery that has

been mass represented across every media channel, however, this representation of "seeing"

could be understood of their self-constituted discovery of that world. Their Instagram post is

them seeing and discovering the world that has already been represented to them over and over

again, but the image serves as proof of their place within it.

 While I previously struggled to observe the transformative aspects of place on the

individual's identity as conveyed within the Instagram samples, when considering the concept of

situated freedom, I can understand how place identity can be interpreted within the Instagram

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posts by recognizing expressions of the spatial self (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014). Interview

subjects communicated that their experience with Rustic Pathways impacted their personal

identity. I can assume that while the "situated" aspect of the environment set boundaries and

constraints on the nature of the experience, this environment structured the nature of their

experience by facilitating the individuals' engagement with unique landscapes and communities

they do not experience in their everyday life. These environments led to the experience of awe,

wonder, connection, challenge, surprise, and reward. As reflected in interviews, these

experiences affected their personal identities and how they navigate through the world. The

"social rules" of Instagram and the expectations of the #sorustic photo contest result in a digital

system that only allows for presentations of traces of experience of place and self in place "that

play a significant role in identity performance as well as sociability: they are not absolute or

precise but abstracted, symbolic, and performative." (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014, p. 1649). As

observed within the data of this study, the commonly repeated place presentation is a user

depicted alone in an exotic place. I can understand this repeated place presentation by Rustic

Pathways students for a number of reasons. First, I presume that this presentation was the most

easily accessible for the participants to curate in the short time frame, fitting within the norms of

presentation of the platform and the #sorustic aesthetic. Next, students have seen these types of

striking images mediated hundreds of thousands of times. These images are circulated to the top

social media feeds due to powerful algorithms that value influence and engagement. Images of

this style are also celebrated in popular Western media: advertisements, commercials, movies,

and television. Beautiful, wild, and exotic places have been captured and re-represented by a

Western society that considers experiences of those remote and nearly unattainable places as

symbols of affluence, hence producing and circulating them reinforces the value of the

constructed image and the Westerners contrasting position within the image. Finally,

understanding those two realities, Rustic Pathways students feel a need to present their place

experience as a self-constituting discovery and conquering of the place they have already seen in

images so many times before. The users are communicating that these places are strikingly

different from their everyday Western environment, and their position within that environment as

depicted in the post is symbolic of their uniquely independent and personal experiences. While

the experience appears to be whittled down within the constraints of the Instagram frame to

abide by the rules of the platform, the concept of the spatial self helps me to interpret how the

individual self-constitutes within this system to present the nature of experience and their

identification with place within those confines. In communicating their experience to an

audience, they are reifying their self-constituting experience of place but also performing to an

audience that engages and reinforces their sense of self. It's challenging to identify which desire

is primary and which is secondary. I believe it is essential they document their moment

experiencing the stunning and exotic place that has been overtly represented to them as their

own, but I also understand their desire to present that moment to an audience as a means for

validation and performance. One of the interview subjects, Ashley, remarked: "I wish everybody

on earth could be able to see this and like feel what I'm feeling and enjoy this place as much as I

do. And I just have to be okay with knowing that when I post this picture I'll get, you know, 40

likes on it," This can serve as evidence that students might also be challenged with understanding

the experience of their self-constituting moment and feeling compelled to share that moment

with an audience that might or might not engage with it. The conflicts this study has uncovered

between communicating a real place and reality of experience on an online platform leads this

discussion towards understanding the process of negations of online representations of place

through the theoretical conceptualizations of spatial self, hybrid place, and Floridi's onlife

manifesto (2014).

DIGITAL NEGOTIATIONS OF PLACE EXPERIENCE

In reviewing the literature on digital representations of place, I examined the blending of offline and online place. Schwartz and Halegoua (2015) theorize the creation of the spatial self within a social network that curates an online performance of place, including or omitting the experiences of offline locations shared with the online world. The concept of hybrid place seeks to explore how the online presentation of place can "replicate, complement, anticipate, and substitute for more 'traditional' place experiences" (Adams & Gynnild, 2013, p. 115). Hybrid presentations of place and the spatial self see negotiations between individuals' offline and online worlds, working together to ascribe a unified meaning to an individual's experience. Finally, Floridi's (2014) onlife manifesto rejects these real and virtual negotiations and sees the virtual onlife moving into the real offline world and placing a layer of online experience on top of real experience. The symbol of experience, or referent, becomes more important than the act of sharing the experience, or the reference. Conceptualizing onlife within the parameters of this study, Floridi believes that an Instagram user places a higher value on their Instagram post as a symbol of experience and presentation of the self than as a tool or channel contextualizing their experience to share with others. The concept of onlife recognizes powerful social pressures as well as power in the presentation by the user. An individual considers themselves and their experiences through a third-person lens and wields the digital power to adjust and modify self, experience, and experience in place. The resulting onlife experience is likely to be less representative of an individual's physical experience and more focused on the curation of an idealized online self.

When considering these different theorizations of online presentation of place, I am drawn towards the spatial self and hybrid presentations of place as the dominant conceptual frameworks for understanding the findings of this study. Conversations with interview subjects opened a window into the world of students' place experience and their acknowledgment that place experience is challenging to communicate digitally. As opposed to a war between the real and the virtual, the creation of Instagram posts result in a user's negotiations between the limits of the digital platform, the expectations and perceptions of their audience, the reality of their place experience, and the way they associate themselves and their identities with place. The spatial self (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014) is an important conceptual framework as it helps to connect the performative aspect of Instagram posts with the lived spatial realities of Instagram users examined within this study. The two essential dimensions of spatial self that converge in the online space are performance of the self and an individual's physical experience of and relationship to physical place. The online users enact a performance of self by considering the audience by curating their relationship and interaction with an offline place. While the presentation can be curated, the experience of place is rooted in reality through a digital geolocation or visually representation of a real place. I see the spatial self the conceptual bridge linking the real and the virtual recognizing how experiences of place, presentations of place, identity, and performance of identity work together in the hybrid space. I see the spatial self represented in interviews as subjects made connections between their perceptions and experiences of place and shifts in personal values, behaviors, and beliefs. While I noted that the influence of place on identity was less noticeable when analyzing Instagram posts, the spatial self helps me to understand the processes within a user's online presentation of the place as a

negotiation of their offline identity's association with place. Schwartz & Halegoua support this interpretation:

> When a user chooses to broadcast their location in relation to a specific venue, they are relating themselves with the values and social groups that are represented by that specific physical place. In this way, users are building their online identity through attaching themselves to the specific narrative of a physical place. (2014, p. 1649)

The interview subjects were exposed to alternative values and attitudes within the communities of the places they visited, and their resulting place perspective, while positive, was overwhelming and often challenging to communicate. In accordance with the spatial self, the posts of interview subjects and Instagram users depicting the self alone within the frame is the hybrid experience of linking the online presentation directly to the offline narrative represented by that specific place. This interpretation should not be misunderstood as a simplified understanding of the user's presentation of place within the online environment but rather introduce the complexities of the hybrid space and negotiations between real and virtual presentations that can result in fragmented narratives and depictions of the self.

Users and interview subjects in this study created posts they feel are meaningful representations of their experience of place, even if the image is not wholly reflective of the beauty, connection, surprise, reward, and inclusivity found in place. While critical perspectives might only recognize the fragmented online narrative of place presentations as curated and idealized performances of the self, I agree with the interview subjects and perhaps many users from the Instagram sample who would identify their posts as "meaningful", that these presentations are both personal and collective experiences and narratives of place. The term "collective" is important in that the spatial self is inherently a construction involving digital and physical elements that considers the audience in the performance of the self and place by the

user. The interview subjects stated that their presentations were meaningful but also hoped to communicate their place experience to their audience. As expressed in interviews, presenting an offline narrative online was challenging but connecting the real and the virtual through the symbolic use of contextual elements of their Instagram posts, they felt they were able to express their identity and meaningful relation to place.

One finding from interview subjects that has not been discussed is the numerous mentions of in-person conversations as a result of their Instagram posts. Several interview subjects explained that their Instagram posts sparked in-person conversations with their peers curious to learn more about their experience. While they were conscious of their Instagram narratives being incomplete in some way, they were encouraged by the fact that these posts allowed them the stage to share their invisible narratives during an offline conversation. I see this as reinforcing the hybrid experience by linking the real and the virtual experience. Interview subjects' reported that Instagram posts presented a significant element of their experience and opened up a dialogue that allowed for a more in-depth and vivid discussion related to that experience.

The limiting structure of this study requires that I make assumptions about the larger Instagram post sample and the creators of the posts, whom I was unable to interview. As discussed in previous sections, the Instagram sample produced an overwhelming amount of posts illustrating the self in exotic, remote, and wild landscapes. The reasoning behind this trend can be understood through historical and cultural discourses that encourage the appreciation and presentation of wild and exotic places. This leads to wonder whether the users that from the larger sample of Instagram posts are also overwhelmed, surprised, and proud of their place experiences with Rustic Pathways. Perhaps these users feel that if they communicate just a sliver

of the awe, beauty, and sublime they experienced, in a spectacular snapshot capable of

influencing their audience, they are presenting their place experience as literally as they can,

constrained by the digital and social norms of the Instagram platform.

When explicating the literature around onlife, I considered how onlife relates to

presentations of place experience by asking the question: which matters more to an individual,

the production and distribution of a photo of place in the digital space, or the experience of the

place itself? Responses from interview subjects on the intensity of the value and meaning they

ascribe to their Instagram depictions of place experience as symbols and slivers of their offline

reality helps me to understand the complexities of experience that extend beyond the concept of

onlife. I am willing to acknowledge social forces Floridi considers as present within the

Instagram platform and how they can partly contribute to the style of presentations of place

experience. Floridi discusses the consumption and production of "micro-narratives" in the digital

space that encourage users to record, monitor, and report elements of themselves to a very large

audience (2014, p. 62). Floridi sees the digital dissemination of the micro-narratives as impacting

an individual's self-concept and shaping their personal identity. Floridi terms this online

presentation of the self, the social self. In describing the interdependence between the social self,

social media platforms, and personal identities, he says:

> Change the social conditions in which you live, modify the network of relations
> and the flows of information your enjoy, reshape the nature and scope of the
> constraints and affordances that regulate your presentation of yourself to the
> world and indirectly to yourself, and then your social self may be radically
> updated. (p. 60)

I certainly agree that the consumption and production of micro-narratives are normative practices

across the Instagram platform, and found in many cases within that data that the narratives were

less than micro and more often invisible. Floridi says "a new generation lives in virtual bubbles

where the shallowest babbles are the only currency; that cannot engage with the genuine and the authentic; that is mesmerized by the artificial and the synthetic" (p.63). In considering this perspective when interpreting the micro or more often invisible narratives of Rustic Pathways students, I can understand how their Instagram presentations can be critiqued as overly stylized for aesthetic impact. However, I would not agree that these presentations are artificial or synthetic, and do not believe that posing for pictures and curating a visual image should synonymous with an inauthentic presentation of experience. I fear that by equating stylized and aesthetically pleasing online images with inauthentic and artificial experiences, we are discounting the creative affordances of the Instagram platform, and the self-constituting experience of the self in place by the Instagram user. Floridi would argue that the image produced by the Instagram user is taking over the users' concept of reality over the experience. However, I am unable to conclude within my small sample of subject interviews, that students placed a higher value on their image than on their experience. I learned that interview subjects regarded their shared Instagram posts as profoundly meaningful and symbolic, but I do not interpret the symbolic nature of these image as being more important than the reality of their experience. A characteristic of onlife is to recognize a users' power over place, and their ability to present the self and place however they choose. However, I believe the data in this study can support the recognition of the power of place. Place was perceived by the interview subjects as inspiring, transformative, challenging, uncomfortable, rewarding, and surprising. Place holds all of things and many more complex stories and narratives of experience. The Instagram users and interview subjects are trying to honor the forces experienced in place, as difficult as the communication of that complex place experience may be for the users. Floridi considers the social forces within communication technologies, as opposed to the power of place, that affect

who we are and how we socialize, along with our conception and interaction with reality. I do not believe that these forces are influencing an individual's experience of reality, at least to the extent that Floridi indicates. I do not interpret these experiences of reality to be a means to end, that is, experienced for the purpose of presentation or that the displays are a more significant symbol of self-constitution than the experience itself. I can acknowledge, in agreement with Floridi, that there is an overlap between the online world and offline experience by recognizing the nature of the production of these images. It is undeniable that in general, the normative discursive nature of social media communication, and more specifically, the discursive influence of the Rustic Pathways photo contest, encourages that overlap. As evidenced from the interviews, users of Instagram present to an audience and engage with others in the social network, abiding by the "social rules" within the limits of the digital culture. I do not believe users are attempting to control and manipulate the reality of experience with the end goal being an online presentation, but rather, are curating a captured moment within a more complex and singularly powerful experience of place.

CONCLUSION

Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

This study sought to achieve credibility through persistent and prolonged engagement with the data. The methodology and data analysis required that the data be revisited again and again to compare emerging categories for repetition and consistency (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patterson & Williams, 2002). Triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data collection methods and the analysis of various data sets (both Instagram posts and Interviews) for the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). The consistency of the findings was checked across both sets of data.

The goal of transferability is to "describe not just the behavior and experiences, but their context as well so that the behavior and experiences become meaningful to an outsider" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I sought to achieve transferability by first, providing a detailed background of my involvement with Rustic Pathways as an employee with the interviewee, as I felt this established a sense of trust between myself and the participant. I attempted transparency in explaining to the reader my background with Rustic Pathways and elaborating on my initial observations about student presentations of their travel experiences with the organization through their Instagram posts while working for Rustic Pathways in Tanzania. The context of the #sorustic photo contest and the Instagram campaign is also necessary for the audience to understand how the sample of Instagram posts came to be. Finally, a thorough description of the interview subjects as past Rustic Pathways participants and a detailed description of the interview process was also crucial for achieving transferability.

Dependability ensures that the conclusions drawn are grounded in the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Detailed notes and decisions on categories, codes, and themes interpreted have been recorded and organized through the data collection and analysis process. As a researcher conducting a constructivist qualitative study, my role within the process has been transparent with the subjects, and I have attempted to maintain self-awareness as an interpreter recognizing my own constructions.

Limitations

While this study offers useful insight into place experience presentation on the social media platform Instagram, it cannot be understood without considering its limitations. Evaluating qualitative research is heavily dependent on the researcher's interpretation of the data. In recognizing the challenges of analyzing qualitative research, Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) say "Although it is impossible to share with readers all the knowledge generated by the study, it is important to quote sufficient evidence to support the researcher's interpretations" (p. 150). This study produced an immense amount of diverse data in the collection of Instagram posts and interviews. This resulted in a time-consuming analysis that sought to maintain a level of investigative rigor across the diverse data sets. I had to make decisions about how codes, categories, and themes fit together. Another researcher may have identified alternative codes and organized the codes, categories, and themes differently. Nonetheless, my goal was to meet the hermeneutic evaluative criterion of "insightfulness" and transform the data into a coherent pattern using an organized holistic lens.

My role as a researcher can be seen as a strength and as a limitation. My insertion as a researcher into the problem, data collection, and analysis is born by an accident of my current biography (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 11). My interest in this phenomenon was inspired by my

own personal and professional background within the place-based student travel industry enabling me a unique lens for assessment. Giorgia (1975) defines the hermeneutic assessment criteria of persuasiveness as whether or not "a reader adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not her (or she) agrees with it." (1975, p. 96). In evaluating the findings through the hermeneutic perspective, I hoped to persuade readers to understand my interpretation by providing sufficient evidence and by encouraging them to look through my personal and professional lens as I attempted to achieve shared meaning and understanding with the participants. The hermeneutic ontology believes that unbiased observation is not possible when conducting interpretive research. Patterson and Williams say, "two observers viewing the same phenomenon at the same time witness the same thing but may interpret it differently. Interpretation of what is seen depends in part on one's experience, prior knowledge, professional background, culture, and expectations" (2002, p. 19). In approaching the research from my unique position, the inherently subjective biases must be considered within the interpretation.

The findings of this study are not generalizable to a larger population as they are based on exploratory research with a small sample size within a specific population with similar attributes. These results seek to begin to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of study. The interview subjects included fifteen women ranging in age from 14 to 19 years old. It should also be noted that Rustic Pathways interview subjects were voluntary and recruited from a pool of highly engaged and enthusiastic brand loyalists through a purposive sample. Their extensive involvement with Rustic Pathways through the Rustic Pathways Squad could mean that their ability to articulate their meaningful experiences and connections to place is at a higher level than the average Rustic Pathways student. These students may have answered these questions in

such a way as to appear more intelligent and engaged in the eyes of the organization. More generalizable findings would have been achieved through a random sampling technique selected from the entire population of Rustic Pathways students.

Users' gender and specific demographic characteristics were unable to be recorded from a larger sample of Instagram posts. The interview recruitment process was open to male and female students within the Rustic Pathways squad. However, the interview participants ended up being all females Rustic Pathways students. This is a limitation as it could indicate that male Rustic Pathways students might not be as engaged with the Instagram platform and online presentations of place. Male involvement in the interview sample would have likely presented more diverse responses and more generalizable findings. It can be assumed that interview subjects and Instagram users' participation with Rustic Pathways programs can indicate their similar socioeconomic backgrounds. This study considered the critical perspectives of performance of the self, performativity, and onlife, and recognized the powerful social discourses at work within place presentations but could neither accept nor reject the power of discourse and performance as being the only mediator on place presentations. Talking with students of other demographics categories, conducting more interviews, examining more Instagram posts, structuring a quantitative analysis, or an extended ethnography would be necessary to fully understand the evidence and implications of power dynamics at play within these place presentations.

Future Research

I believe this phenomenon presents an abundance of opportunities for future research. An interesting avenue for investigation would be to understand the audience interpretation of Rustic Pathways student Instagram posts through content or textual analysis of comments and likes.

While this study was specific to one student travel organization, the understanding of place experience can be expanded to more general populations posting place experience presentations on Instagram. Perhaps a future study could examine a specific destination through an Instagram geotag and analyze the collection of photos tagged using the geotag to understand how different or similar presentations of the same location are interpreted on the platform. Examining travel bloggers or Instagram influencers who make a living posting travel experiences would also be a unique study to understand the interpretation of their audience's expectations of aesthetically stunning locations in combination with sponsors paying for their constructed presentations of experience.

From a critical discourse perspective, I believe a future study could seek to understand the dichotomy of conqueror versus wanderer within the presentations of experiences of mountaineering athletes. I have observed famous alpine mountaineers like Jimmy Chin, Conrad Anker, and Alex Honnold active on Instagram, posting pictures from spectacular summits and unbelievable climbs. Their juxtaposition as the subject against a sublime landscape is undeniable, but I also observe a seemingly consistent intention to always "conquer" the landscape. A study of a larger sample of mountaineers on Instagram could uncover new themes around tensions between sublimity inspired by the landscape and triumph over the landscape.

Finally, I am interested in an emerging Instagram trend that encourages users to disguise their locations in wild places. I have seen this practiced within the world of fly fishing and backcountry skiing on Instagram. I have observed Instagram accounts dedicated to fly fishing intentionally blur the background of a photo and exclude a geotag to conceal the location of where a large fish was caught. Additionally, I have observed professional backcountry skiers post photos in remote locations using a misleading geotag like "Taco Bell" or "The Library",

seemingly to intentionally exclude the skiers' exact location. The intentions behind this exclusivity of wild place would be an interesting aspect to explore in a future study.

Summary

RQ1: How are Rustic Pathways participants describing their experience of place in interviews?

RQ1a: How are Rustic Pathways participants communicating elements of their identity during interviews?

Human geographers discussed in this study, like Edward Relph (1978), Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), and David Seamon (2013), turned away from the hard spatial science understanding of place and emphasized the subjective experience of place that resulted in place-making. "It was not so much places (in the world) that interested the humanist but 'place' as an idea, concept and way of being-in-the-world" (Creswell, 2004). Human perception and experience lead us to understand the world through places. The Rustic Pathways interview subjects participating in this study rarely discussed spatial details and measurable attributes, but rather their own perceptions of place. They described how they perceived place and what they discovered or learned in place. Interview subjects describe the beauty they found in place, experienced both within spectacular remote landscapes and new communities. Interview subjects also described aspects of place as being uncomfortable, challenging, surprising, and rewarding. Experiencing challenge, surprise, and reward can be seen as elements of Seamon's immersive place processes, leading to the construction of a sense-of-place. As reviewed in the literature, Seamon's (2008) dynamic place processes can contribute to the emotional bonds with place, the development of a sense-of-place, and meaning-making for individuals. Finally, powerful human connections were discussed as an element of making sense of place for the interview subjects. These powerful social interactions led students to reflect on feeling at home or a part of a family in place.

Creswell (2004) says, "The most familiar example of place and its significance to people is the idea of home" (p. 24). Home can be synonymous with belonging, and concerning place, belonging can reinforce a sense-of-place experienced and communicated by the interview subjects.

Their bonds with place can be interpreted not only through dynamic place processes and strong human connections, but also through the transformative impacts of place on their identities. Interview subjects discussed implications on their outward self-presentations as well as their inward self-concepts as influenced by place. Experiences of place were found to have shifted the way the interview subjects navigate through their world, what they value, and how they behave. Interview subjects also described how place introduced a sense of global inclusivity. This expressed sense of global inclusivity as inspired by place experience can be interpreted as interview subjects recognizing an open and borderless aspect of place.

RQ2: How are Rustic Pathways participants whose posts I observed representing their experience of place via their Instagram posts?

RQ2a: How are Rustic Pathways participants whose posts I observed, communicating elements of their identity via their Instagram posts?

This study uncovered literature that explored a less understood communicative dimension of place as it is represented within online spaces. Within the Instagram posts, I found a communication of place experience that resulted in digital place-making for Instagram users. Analyses of the Instagram posts were conducted by examining the separate elements of the posts (photo, geotag, and caption) and then combining those elements to understand the communicated narrative of the user. The most prominent themes illustrated in Instagram photos included visual representations of place through 1) remote, wild, and exotic scenery, 2) connections, and 3)

tourist activities. Geotags were used more often than not used, as identifiers of specific locations or countries (although in the case of specific locations, I was unable to confirm the validity of the geotag concerning the users' exact position). The content of captions was most reflective of 1) awe in remote, exotic, & wild, 2) gratitude and nostalgia, and 3) challenge. These three themes were most prominent in identifying the content of captions, but captions were often stylized with a playful or artistic flare in the form of a joke, pun, or creative quote. Finally, observing the position of the assumed subject in the post was necessary to attempt to understand how the user positions themselves within the online narrative. The subject was most often positioned alone within the frame or with Rustic Pathways peers. Considering all the elements to understand the communicated narrative, the most commonly represented narratives were subjects positioned alone or with peers against a landscape, geotagging a specific location, and expressing gratitude, challenge, nostalgia, or awe in the beauty found in place.

Instagram posts also served as platforms for users to communicate distinct individualized presentations of the self. Captions were an element in which I could interpret as traces of user's distinct identity. For example, "@wutianyu.h285: My hair is so messy #sorustic" could be an indication that this user's self-concept is polished, and this remark indicates to an audience that their Instagram presentation is contradictory to their normal self. "@lousybeatnik: Outback adventures make for one happy camper #sorustic" can be interpreted as a common idiom to indicate contentment or satisfaction. The use of idioms in communication can add color or creativity to speech or text and it can be seen in this context to add flair and style but also be a literal representation of this user being excited by their experience in the Outback. Using the caption to interpret the user's self-presentation, I can understand the phrase as the user identifying as an outdoor enthusiast, excited by the wild space found in the Outback. Many

captions that included more playful or creative styles could be interpreted as symbolic expressions of creative and quirky personalities.

While each caption can be interpreted for multi-faceted presentations of the self, a nomothetic interpretation of all the post elements found commonality in identity presentations in relation to place. Similar narratives of personal place experience observed across the sample were captions using words like "I", "me", and "my", accompanying a picture of the user pictured alone, with peers, or locals. Captions that supported this personal identification included examples like: "@emdalli: The day my dreams came true #sorustic," and "@quinniesunshine: I miss my people and my second home so so much #sorustic." I see two different dimensions of identity conceptualization at play in relation to place within these normative presentations. First, I acknowledge the "stylized repetition of acts" of performativity (Butler, 1988, p. 519) as well as a subjective presentation of experience reflecting a sense of personal independence and a unique and meaningful personal-place connection. Both dimensions recognize an audience, but perceptions on the level of attentiveness and engagement of the audience can be debated based on responses from interview subjects.

RQ3: If differences or similarities (or something in between) are discovered of representations of place experience through interpersonal communication versus online presentations, why are teenagers representing different/similar experiences?

RQ4: Based upon the presentations of place experience, what can we say about how interpersonal versus online communication plays a role in the communication of place experience and identity for Rustic Pathways participants?

Allowing interview subjects to elaborate on place experience reflections, I observed the influence of dynamic place processes that contributed to subjects' emotional bond with place.

When describing experiences in place, interview subjects and Instagram users rarely discussed spatial details and measurable attributes of place. In analyzing the content of Instagram posts, I observe some overlap in themes communicated by interview subjects and themes depicted across the Instagram sample. Interview subjects discussed the beauty that inspired awe and wonder found in place. Beautiful photos, as well as captions that expressed awe in the landscape, were commonly exhibited in Instagram posts. Place experience by interview subjects was described as challenging, uncomfortable, and rewarding. Traces of these emotions were also identified in several Instagram captions. Interview subjects discussed feelings of general gratitude and nostalgia of place. These feelings were communicated in the captions of Instagram posts, however, not as often as the communication of awe in the remote, exotic, or wild scenery. Meaningful personal connections with local communities was a common theme communicated in interviews. These connections were illustrated less across the Instagram photos, but a number of posts pictured Rustic Pathways peers and local community members. The captions expressing gratitude and nostalgia were often more general acknowledgments of experience and less specifically recognizing peers, people, or communities that make up place. It should be noted that the smaller Instagram sample, provided by the interview participants, illustrated images and captions that aligned more closely with the interview subjects' descriptions of place. For example, Katie discussed her deep personal connections with a Fijian community. She says:

> Katie: I felt so welcomed. The entire time I was there, I felt just so happy to be there, because everyone just seemed so happy to see us, all the time. I feel like that's something that we could learn something from everybody...I felt like it was a big family. Everyone so treats each other like family. Brothers and sisters. I felt like everybody was a family.

Katie's shared Instagram post pictures herself on a jungle gym with seven Fijian children and her caption reads: "Lots of love for my Fiji fam #sorustic." Similarly, Abigail talked about her close

ties with school children in Tanzania. Her shared Instagram photo depicts herself and another Rustic Pathways student with four Tanzania children in school uniforms paired with the caption: "asante sana haydesh. See you soon #sorustic." While not all of the presentations of experience observed in Instagram posts shared by the interview subjects mirrored the place experience reflections as specifically as these two examples, every interview subject who shared an Instagram post with me overwhelmingly described their meaningful attachment to their post. For example, Sasha's photo in front of Machu Picchu was a presentation that she felt was outside of the norm of her Peru experience as a whole. She was clean, laughing, and visiting a tourist destination. The rest of her time in Peru she said she was dirty and working on a service project in a rural Peruvian village. However, to Sasha, this photo was symbolic of her experience. It represented the friends that she made and the challenges she overcame. The interview subjects commonly discussed the struggle to communicate about their experience, but all interview subjects were satisfied with the Instagram presentations they shared with me, personally feeling as though those posts encapsulated their experience. It is important to note that the interview subjects were recruited from the Rustic Pathways Squad, a group of student "brand ambassadors." Their experience impacted these students so much that they have chosen to continue to engage with the organization after their experience has ended. They are exceptionally passionate about Rustic Pathways and take pride in flying the Rustic Pathways flag. I can understand how their willingness to stay involved with Rustic Pathways can be correlated with their Instagram presentations being an authentic reflection of their feelings of the experience, or their emotional bonds with place. However, in the larger systematic random sample of Instagram posts, I cannot discern if any of those users are also members of the Rustic Pathways squad, so my assumptions about Rustic Pathways squad members presenting more "accurate"

representations of place experience should not be considered absolute. I was only able to understand how certain interview subjects' presentations of place experiences on Instagram were supported by their interviews, as they were able to give me insight into their invisible narratives.

As mentioned before, the larger sample of Instagram posts commonly depicted presentations of place experience as the subject against a spectacular landscape. I consider two different dimensions of identity-place performances at play within these presentations. First, I explore the many discursive forces at work within the presentations. Users are impacted by the power and influence of Rustic Pathways and of the expectations of the #sorustic photo contest that encourage a type of conformance across the presentations. This discursive pressure expands the users' audience and their consideration of that audience. Their audience grows to include Rustic Pathways, as well as users exploring the #sorustic hashtag collection. In widening the scope of power relations influencing the style of place presentations, I also consider the powerful system in which social media platforms are built. Billion-dollar corporations employ data scientists and content engineers to develop algorithms of engagement, pushing stylized and similar content into the feeds of users, encouraging more participation and influencing what type of imagery a user might value and believe others will appreciate as well. The influence of Butler's concept of performativity cannot be ignored within the images. We could understand the users' normative presentations across the sample as their regurgitation of the citational discourses that often juxtapose the privilege of Western modernity against developing societies of the Global South. The users might simply be highly influenced pawns of this broader Western ideological system, seemingly unaware of their affordances to not only visit remote and exotic places, but *to leave* remote and exotic places. This lack of awareness of the inequalities across societies is replaced with an overwhelming fascination for the wild and exotic. This lack of full

awareness of inequalities between cultures was observed within interviews, as one student remarked her family "was not rich," seemingly oblivious to global norms of wealth and how her family might rank in comparison with many families from developing countries. For the country she visited in particular, she failed to consider what her families presumed standard of living might be compared to the majority of that country's citizens. We could extend this concept of performativity and critique on Western societal influence and intrusion and see these experiences and resulting representations as to the commodification of humans and landscapes. These diverse environments become objects for consumption, captured in the background of online performances of the self to boost the aesthetic appeal of an image.

I can interpret Butler's influence within these images and interviews, and further research with a larger sample could likely uncover even more power relations within these place presentations; however, I sought to explore the second dimension of identity-place performances within these presentations. I recognize the aesthetic trend across the sample but hesitate to make impenetrable assumptions about these experiences as being contrived, disinvested, or overtly objectifying representations of the user's place experience. I find Valerie Walkerdine's (1986) ethnographic research on working-class families as useful in supporting my hesitancy to interpret the presentations of Rustic Pathways users in this study as trivial performances of the self. Walkerdine cautions qualitative researchers to seek truth through interpretations of interactions but also to acknowledge the voyeuristic and reductionist practice of imposing preexisting stereotypes and discursive structures on research subjects. Within her study of a working-class family, she is moved beyond the dominant discursive constructions of class, gender, and ethnicity after inserting herself into a narrative the family values highly, the film Rocky II. On the surface, the film seems to embody the normative sex-role and class stereotypes present in

domestic working-class families. However, she begins to interpret the complexities with the family and their identification with themes of pain, struggle, fulfillment, escape and triumph present in the film. While the nature of Walkerdine's ethnographic research is far from the place presentation phenomenon examined in this study, I hope that Walkerdine's ontology can reinforce my interpretation. The second dimension of identity-place presentations attempts to move beyond the shallow performance and discursive structures of performativity at play within the Instagram presentations. This dimension seeks to understand the complex dynamics of place, a sense of place, and self-constitution of self in place in the online environment.

The second dimension considers the singularity of the self and the desire for a self-constituting experience of place. This dimension recognizes that these students have likely seen these landscapes and images mediated time and time again, but yet their experience of these places is wholly unique and singular. Their representation of themselves in place is their act of establishing their moment of singularity in that place within that experience. Situated freedoms play an integral role in the nature of their experience in place and can be connected to the concept of the spatial self, serving as the virtual avenue connecting those offline experiences to the online space through identity performance. By understanding place experience and presentation of place through the concept of situated freedoms, I can interpret that the users and interview subjects' experiences as variable, unique, and individual. The interview subjects shared stories of place experience that ranged from fun and adventure to challenge, discomfort, and sadness. The boundaries of the physical environment indeed mediated experiences to a degree, but individuals communicated what they felt constituted a complex and multi-dimensional experience of place. The spatial self connects the nature of their experience of place to the online space through a presentation rooted in the reality of place that allows for an abstract, subjective,

and symbolic performance. I see the presentation of place as a negotiation between the nature of the reality of a user's experience and their communicative expectations on the Instagram platform. This notion of negotiation of place experience can be extended to the users and interview subjects working to communicate their experiences within both the real and virtual place and abide by the limitations of those spaces within their presentation and representations. Interview subjects and users are navigating their understanding of place through the digital constraints of the platform and negotiating the meaning of their experience, while considering their online audience. Additionally, this negotiation is mediated by governing rhetorical expectations that value spectacular images of remote, exotic, and wild places.

In summary, this study sought to understand if online presentations of place produced by Rustic Pathways students are different from descriptions of place experience offline. If these experiences were found to be different representations, then I wanted to understand why students are disinvesting meaningful place-based experiences from their social profiles. Before making these judgments, I had to investigate the subject's understanding of place. The qualitative hermeneutic method of analysis and interview guide allowed the subjects to move from the path of quantifying place with physical attributes and spatial dimensions and describe place as a state of understanding influenced by the value and meaning they ascribed to their experience. By allowing interview subjects to elaborate on their Instagram posts, I was able to understand how these presentations of place were an expression of the singularity of the self-experience, a meaningful representation produced by the student showcasing the student's personal and individual connection to experience. While the students discussed how meaningful their experiences were and how significant their resulting Instagram presentations were, the "uniqueness" of the experience along with the representations produced by the students seemed

to overlap. The analysis of the larger sample of Instagram posts uncovered overlapping presentations of place, the value in awe-inspiring landscapes, and the communication of challenge, nostalgia, and gratitude. With that observation, coupled with my interpretation of student interviews, perhaps the uniqueness lives within the intensity of the act of self-constituting the experience of place. These landscapes, in one way or another, have been mass represented to these students over and over again and this overwhelming and enjoyable experience in a foreign country was constructed and sold to them (coupled with more beautiful imagery). I can assume that the students had an understanding in advance of their program, what sort of experience they could expect, and what type of landscapes and cultures they might encounter. With that understanding, I believe the significance of these experiences for the students along with the presentation of the self in place by the students might be a reflection of their self-constituted experience, virtually a performance by the student stating: "I've seen, heard, and read about places like this in the world, but this is my experience of it. This is not just me looking at it. This is me in it." Presenting this side of my interpretation, I don't mean to ignore the powerful concepts presented by both Butler and Floridi as influencers of both identity presentations, the performance of the self, and virtual power of online presentation over place. The influence of these two scholars can undoubtedly assist in a critique of the aesthetic similarities across the posts. I understand how the normative presentations across the Instagram sample can be represented as an onlife synthetic, curated, and citational performance of Western modernity, mobility, and affluence in a developing nation by teenagers who are blissfully unaware of their society's impact on global inequalities. I see how this data can point me in that direction. However, I believe this research indicates that we need to avoid reductionist conclusions about the assumed shallow and inauthentic simplicity of the identity performances of the Instagram

users in this study. I believe the data gathered can indicate that place experience and presentation is both personal and synthetic, both singular and contrived. This conclusion is not meant to rule out discursive powers and performativity, but I hope to provide a perspective from which to continue to investigate this phenomenon.

Concluding Thoughts

I enjoyed every moment of this study. From reading the literature around place experience, to interviewing subjects, to observing Instagram posts, I was genuinely captivated at every twist and turn. My fascination with the phenomenon of photographing and sharing experience of place began as an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia. During a communications studies course, I was introduced to the cultural and philosophical shifts embedded in image-making devices. The course explored the perspectives of Sontag, Foucault, and a multitude of "gazes." I felt my worlds colliding as the course dove into the "tourist gaze" and power conflicts within the photography of nature. I felt an internal struggle between my desire to "capture" the spectacular landscape through a lens and wanting to be present, humbled, and grateful. My internal struggle and fascination with the gazing and capturing of landscape and scenery grew alongside the popularity of the Instagram platform. My curiosity got the best of me, and I found myself researching this phenomenon after recognizing the utility of the Rustic Pathways #sorustic photo contest as the perfect stage for investigation. Although challenging and time-consuming, I have learned how much I enjoy qualitative research (although I expected I would). I see this study as building the foundation for future scholarly pursuits examining the conflicts in the digital communication of wild places.

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APPENDICES

- Place Experience Reflection
    - Beauty in Place
    - Cultural and Community Connection
    - Discomfort
    - Reward
    - Surprise
        - Surprise in Self
        - Surprise in Community
- Place & Identity
    - Inclusivity
    - One shared humanity
    - Identity Transformation
        - Inward level
        - Outward level
- Social Media Presentations
    - Insecurities
    - Norms
    - Posting Selfies
    - Posting Travel Photos
- Identity, Place, and Social Media Influence
    - Rustic Influence
    - Captions
    - Geotagging
    - Post Engagement
    - Self in post
    - Struggle to Communicate
        - Post Engagement

- Visual Place Experience (PE)
    - Connection
        - Friendship
        - Local Community
    - Remote, Wild, & Exotic
        - Culture
        - Landscape
        - Wildlife
    - Tourist Experience
        - Adventure Activity
        - Tourist Destination
- Self in Post
    - Not Pictured
    - Self Alone
    - Self & Locals
    - Self & Peers
    - Selfie
- Geotag Use
    - Country
    - Specific
    - None
- Complete Narrative
- Critical Themes
    - Beauty, Wonder, & Awe
        - Remote & Exotic
        - Self Performing Remote & Exotic
    - Cultural Tension
        - Cultural Assimilation
        - Cultural Authenticity
        - Cultural Opposites
    - Something is Missing
- Captions
        - Funny & Playful
        - Foreign Language
        - Creative
    - #sorustic

- ○ Attitude
    - ■ Gratitude
    - ■ Impact
    - ■ Nostalgia
- ○ Awe in Remote, Exotic, & Wild
- ○ Challenge
- ○ Irrelevant to Experience