Using technology appropriately: Photography

As you study abroad, there are many opportunities to broaden your worldview and see our world from a different perspective. One particular challenge around technology arises when we think about how we are going to remember our experiences. For most of us, we try to supplement our memories by taking pictures of the people and places we have visited. This often creates pressure to “get the right shot,” and in the process we forget to be fully present in the moment.

*Photography can be a powerful tool for understanding and sharing, but it can also widen the gap between the host and the traveler, experiential engagement and obnoxious observer, the culturally immersed and the imperialistic tourist. It is important to be intentional when thinking about how one uses photography: does it build bridges? does it enhance engagement? does it reinforce stereotypes? does it focus on colorful pictures of minority groups because they are more “exotic?” In essence, it is crucial to involve intentionality in photography abroad.* (Melibee-Global, 2015, p. 2).

The attached articles provide an opportunity to step back and think about how you should intentionally use cameras and social media in appropriate and reasonable ways while studying abroad. No doubt the answer to these questions will vary from individual to individual. Travel writer Pico Iyer writes:

*So what to do? The central paradox of the machines that have made our lives so much brighter, quicker, longer, and healthier is that they cannot teach us how to make the best of them; the information revolution came without an instruction manual. All the data in the world cannot teach us how to sift through data; images don’t show us how to process images. The only way to do justice to our onscreen lives is by summoning exactly the emotional and moral clarity that can’t be found on any screen* (P. Iyer, 2011, *The Joy of Quiet*).

So be intentional about asking yourself hard questions (like those listed below) and then try to live into the answers.

- Have you ever taken a picture in a place where it was not allowed? In the moment, did you decide that your desire for that perfect picture was more important than respecting a request from a local host or place where you were visiting? How can you be intentional about how you use photography in a respectful way, to build bridges or enhance engagement?

- Do you take selfies? Are there any unwritten rules about when and where you take selfies? If you needed to develop two or three guidelines about when and where to take selfies, what would they be?

- What specific strategies do the two attached articles present to help be more intentional in picture taking? Do you agree or disagree with these strategies? What other strategies might you suggest?

- Review the code of research ethics and guidelines related to visual sociology (found at: [http://visualsociology.org/images/stories/about/IVSA-Ethics-and-Guidelines.pdf](http://visualsociology.org/images/stories/about/IVSA-Ethics-and-Guidelines.pdf)). The general principles include: professional competence, integrity, professional and scientific responsibility, respect for people’ rights, dignity and diversity, and social responsibility. How do these principles relate to the attached article: *Ethics and photography in developing countries*. How might this code of ethics and this article assist you in making decisions about ethical photography?
Students Abroad: First, Do No Harm With Your Camera

By Lise Saffran DECEMBER 06, 2015
THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Programs that send American students to developing countries for practical service in the health sciences and medicine are proliferating, both under the auspices of universities and in connection with commercial organizations such as Projects Abroad, which advertises among its offerings, "Exciting opportunities at Ho Leprosy Village, Ghana." Examples abound of students or volunteers "practicing" medicine beyond the limits of their own training or good sense in under resourced communities.

On a recent visit to Cape Coast, Ghana, with my family, I was greeted in a restaurant by an American high-school student who, having embraced one of those exciting opportunities, said he was in Ghana for two weeks, "treating lepers and painting houses."

Myriad regulations, conventions, and guidelines address patients’ rights to privacy in health care, and these have evolved rapidly to include the widespread use of social media by health-care workers and trainees. While there is ample documentation that students violate these guidelines both at home and abroad, recent findings by researchers at the University of Florida suggest that these lapses may be more likely to occur on foreign medical "missions" in developing countries.

Perhaps this phenomenon is merely another expression of students’ applying different medical standards abroad than they would find acceptable at home — unfortunately, it happens all the time — but my colleagues and I believe there may be something additional at work. In their article "#Instagramming Africa: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism," Lauren Kascak and Sayantani DasGupta observe that "photography — particularly the habit of taking and posting selfies with local children — is a central component of the voluntourism experience."

We agree that social-media narratives exert a powerful tug on would-be volunteers to seek their own versions of the images they’ve seen; they might even be a factor not just in medical trainees’ violating patient privacy but also in their temptation to operate above their level of training while overseas. After all, health education is not nearly as photogenic as giving an injection or drawing blood.

Research in health humanities suggests that narrative strategies can be useful in prompting students to reflect on ethical and professional questions. So rather than discourage health-sciences students from bringing their cameras on study abroad, my colleagues and I at the University of Missouri have begun incorporating student picture-taking into our discussions of social and cultural factors in health and health equity.

I begin before the students’ departure with an examination of the photos they already have on their phones. Choosing photos to represent both positive and negative aspects of their own lives, they write captions from their own point of view, with the background knowledge that implies, and again from the point of view of an imagined character of a different gender, age, race, or economic situation. This is an example of what social psychologists call "perspective taking." Students going to India in our pilot course began to understand an important fact about the pictures they might choose to post from there: The perception of something as "negative" or "positive" largely depends on the assumptions that the viewer holds.

In India recently, one of my colleagues asked the students to reflect further on their picture taking — for example, to consider how a caption might be written by someone in the photograph itself. Asking for permission before photographing someone is a minimum requirement, but does that level of consent precipitate ethical engagement? Did the students know the names of the people they photographed? Did they engage with them enough to be able to see if any assumptions the students held were true? Do students realize how their photos may be reinforcing stereotypes about developing nations and about other cultures within their own communities?

Travel is a powerful teacher, and photography is a potent storytelling tool. Young people in the health sciences are unlikely to abandon either one in the near future. Nor do we believe they should. That said, it is not necessary that the narratives they travel with and build from their experiences represent what Teju Cole calls the "White Savior Industrial Complex."

Not a health-sciences teacher? Instructing students in the principles of ethical photography — including the right of potential subjects to decline to be photographed; and the responsibility to avoid harm to the subjects as a result of the photographs, to avoid misrepresentation of the photographs, and to respect individuals and communities abroad — might lead them to consider principles of equity that they have not considered before. We are all engaged in telling stories to others through our pictures when we travel. It would serve us well to consider what stories we are telling ourselves.

Source:  http://chronicle.com/article/Students-Abroad-First-Do-No/234458?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en&elq=325afce5841e4be89d57b923d2b00dd3&elqCampaignId=2016&elqaid=7149&elqat=1&elqTrackId=eccedc0110d4fceb6e2922359bd226
#InstagrammingAfrica: The Narcissism of Global Voluntourism

Lauren Kascak with Sayantani DasGupta MD MPH on December 29, 2014

Sociological Images

Lauren Kascak is a graduate of the Masters Program in Narrative Medicine at Columbia University, where Sayantani DasGupta is a faculty member. DasGupta is the editor of Stories of Illness and Healing and the author of The Demon Slayers and Other Stories and Her Own Medicine.


An article in The Onion mocks voluntourism, joking that a 6-day visit to a rural African village can “completely change a woman’s facebook profile picture.” The article quotes “22-year old Angela Fisher” who says:

I don’t think my profile photo will ever be the same, not after the experience of taking such incredible pictures with my arms around those small African children’s shoulders.

It goes on to say that Fisher “has been encouraging every one of her friends to visit Africa, promising that it would change their Facebook profile photos as well.”

I was once Angela Fisher. But I’m not any more.

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I have participated in not one but three separate, and increasingly disillusioning, international health brigades, short-term visits to developing countries that involve bringing health care to struggling populations.

Such trips — critically called voluntourism — are a booming business, even though they do very little advertising and charge people thousands of dollars to participate.

How do they attract so many paying volunteers?

Photography is a big part of the answer. Voluntourism organizations don’t have to advertise, because they can crowd source. Photography — particularly the habit of taking and posting selfies with local children — is a central component of the voluntourism experience. Hashtags like #InstagrammingAfrica are popular with students on international health brigades, as are #medicalbrigades, #globalhealth, and of course the nostalgic-for-the-good-days hashtag #takemeback.

It was the photographs posted by other students that inspired me to go on my first overseas medical mission. When classmates uploaded the experience of themselves wearing scrubs beside adorable children in developing countries, I believed I was missing out on a pivotal pre-med experience. I took over 200 photos on my first international volunteer mission. I modeled those I had seen on Facebook and even premeditated photo opportunities to acquire the “perfect” image that would receive the most “likes.”

Over time, I felt increasingly uncomfortable with the ethics of those photographs, and ultimately left my camera at home. Now, as an insider, I see three common types of photographs voluntourists share through social media: The Suffering Other, The Self-Directed Samaritan, and The Overseas Selfie.

**The Suffering Other**

In a photograph taken by a fellow voluntourist in Ghana (not shown), a child stands isolated with her bare feet digging in the dirt. Her hands pull up her shirt to expose an umbilical hernia, distended belly, and a pair of too-big underwear. Her face is uncertain and her scalp shows evidence of dermatological pathology or a nutritional deficiency—maybe both. Behind her, only weeds grow.

Anthropologists Arthur and Joan Kleinman note that images of distant, suffering women and children suggest there are communities incapable of or uninterested in caring for its own people. These photographs justify colonialist, paternalistic attitudes and policies, suggesting that the individual in the photograph…

…must be protected, as well as represented, by others. The image of the subaltern conjures up an almost neocolonial ideology of failure, inadequacy, passivity, fatalism, and inevitability. Something must be done, and it must be done soon, but from outside the local setting. The authorization of action through an appeal for foreign aid, even foreign intervention, begins with an evocation of indigenous absence, an erasure of local voices and acts.

**The Self-directed Samaritan**

Here we have a smiling young white girl with a French braid, medical scrubs, and a well-intentioned smile. This young lady is the centerpiece of the photo; she is its protagonist. Her scrubs suggest that she is doing important work among those who are so poor, so vulnerable, and so Other.
The girl is me. And the photograph was taken on my first trip to Ghana during a 10 day medical brigade. I’m beaming in the photograph, half towering and half hovering over these children. I do not know their names, they do not know my name, but I directed a friend to capture this moment with my own camera. Why?

This photograph is less about doing actual work and more about retrospectively appearing to have had a positive impact overseas. Photographs like these represent the overseas experience in accordance with what writer Teju Cole calls the “White Savior Industrial Complex.” Moreover, in directing, capturing, and performing in photos such as these, voluntourists prevent themselves from actually engaging with the others in the photo. In On Photography, Susan Sontag reminds us:

Photography has become almost as widely practiced an amusement as sex and dancing – which means that…it is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power.

On these trips, we hide behind the lens, consuming the world around us with our powerful gazes and the clicking of camera shutters. When I directed this photo opportunity and starred in it, I used my privilege to capture a photograph that made me feel as though I was engaging with the community. Only now do I realize that what I was actually doing was making myself the hero/star in a story about “suffering Africa.”

The Overseas Selfie

[Photo removed in response to a request from Global Brigades.]

In his New York Times Op-Ed, that modern champion of the selfie James Franco wrote:

Selfies are avatars: Mini-Me’s that we send out to give others a sense of who we are … In our age of social networking, the selfie is the new way to look someone right in the eye and say, “Hello, this is me.”

Although related to the Self-Directed Samaritan shot, there’s something extra-insidious about this type of super-close range photo. “Hello, this is me” takes on new meaning – there is only one subject in this photo, the white subject. Capturing this image and posting it on the internet is to understand the Other not as a separate person who exists in the context of their own family or community but rather, as a prop, an extra, someone only intelligible in relation to the Western volunteer.

Voluntourism is ultimately about the fulfillment of the volunteers themselves, not necessarily what they bring to the communities they visit. In fact, medical volunteerism often breaks down existing local health systems. In Ghana, I realized that that local people weren’t purchasing health insurance, since they knew there would be free foreign health care and medications available every few months. This left them vulnerable in the intervening times, not to mention when the organization would leave the community.

In the end, the Africa we voluntourists photograph isn’t a real place at all. It is an imaginary geography whose landscapes are forged by colonialism, as well as a good deal of narcissism. I hope my fellow students think critically about what they are doing and why before they sign up for a short-term global volunteer experience. And if they do go, it is my hope that they might think with some degree of narrative humility about how to de-center themselves from the Western savior narrative. Most importantly, I hope they leave their iphones at home.
Ethics and Photography in Developing Countries

Introduction
Those who take photos while participating abroad have an ethical responsibility to preserve the dignity of their subjects and provide a faithful, comprehensive visual depiction of their surroundings so as to avoid causing public misperceptions. Visual images are a cogent way to convey an experience to an audience and to evoke strong public emotions, as people often formulate their opinions, judgments, and behaviors in response to visual stimuli. In this way, the photographer wields substantial control over public perception. Photographers’ decisions about how to depict their subjects can entirely alter viewers’ perceptions.

Ethical Considerations
“We’ve all seen it: the photo of a teary-eyed African child, dressed in rags, smothered in flies, with a look of desperation that the caption all too readily points out.” (1) Like any other business, the non-profit and development sectors need revenue to survive. Many charities have found that their most effective tactic for eliciting donations has involved the use of dehumanizing images to evoke feelings of pity and charity. These photos are dangerous, however, because they completely fail to capture the intelligence, resilience, and capabilities of the communities that the nonprofit is looking to help. A “Perspectives of Poverty” project was recently implemented by Duncan McNichol of Engineers Without Borders Canada. Duncan photographed Edward Kabzela of Chagunda Village, Malawi. In the photo on the left, Edward was asked to look and act as poor as possible, while in the photo on the right, Edward was asked to dress as rich as possible.

The two images convey completely different stories, and elicit entirely different emotions in the viewer. The photo on the left does not reflect Edward’s success, portraying him instead as a hopeless, dirty, hungry and impoverished beggar. However, this is not an accurate portrayal of Edward. In reality, he is very successful as an area mechanic and grower of tobacco, and he also works for a basket weaving business. He is also thinking of investing in a truck to start a transportation business.

Edward also explained, “NGOs come to the village here to take pictures of people. At church, at the market, on the road, at meetings. Only people who are dressed poorly.” (2) These images are unfair to the local population and have “become a marketable commodity. They are blown up and displayed at fundraisers by NGOs, donors and UN agencies; they help organizations to stay in business. The more graphic they are, the more money they help to raise.” (3) Even Time Magazine recently published an issue that included a photo essay of an African mother dying in childbirth in Sierra Leone. This photo essay aroused outcry. Though the intentions of the editors may have been to motivate wealthy donors and nations to take action to improve maternal healthcare in developing countries, dehumanizing photos should not be utilized. “While these images might shock Westerners into digging deeper into their pockets, they have the unintended effect of disgusting the very people they are supposed to help. Moreover, they reflect double standards.” (3)

The Problem
Since donors are often more empathetic to one person facing hardship than to many people, organizations frequently elicit donations by evoking sympathy in the viewer by showing images of
hungry and ill children and, less frequently, adults. (4) These images have been termed “poverty porn,” which is defined as “words and images that elicit an emotional response by their sheer shock value. Images like starving, skeletal children covered in flies.” (5) Poverty porn is harmful because it “exploits the poor’s condition in order to generate the necessary sympathy for selling newspapers or increasing charitable donations or support for a given cause.” (6) In addition to violating privacy and human rights, poverty porn is damaging to those it is trying to aid because it evokes the idea that the poor are helpless and incapable of helping themselves, thereby cultivating a culture of paternalism. Poverty porn is also detrimental because it is degrading, dishonoring, and robs people of their dignity. (7) In order to demonstrate respect and sensitivity towards the local population and to avoid poverty porn, one should heed the following protocols:

Before Photographing

- Always get the subject’s consent first, especially if you want to do a close-up.
- Examine your motives for shooting a particular frame. Do you want to inspire hope and understanding, or maybe even expose wrongdoing and neglect? It is not acceptable to use the photographs simply to harness pity. People who donate out of guilt tend to see subjects as pitiful objects, which is dehumanizing and disrespectful.
- You should not bribe subjects to feign despair, anger, or other emotions, or seek to influence the “slant” of your photos in any way.
- Think about what you want to portray in your photo. While it is fine to portray the fears and poverty of your subjects in some photos, others should also convey the community's strengths and expectations. (8) Never portray your subjects as useless or inadequate. (9)

While Photographing

- Sometimes, it works well to photograph subjects from behind so that only their activities, and not their faces, can be seen. For example, your photo may show the face of the doctor who is performing an eye exam, but not the patient’s face. This not only prevents the patient from getting distracted, but also protects his or her privacy.
- Be humble, considerate and respectful, especially during private moments of grief. Try to take the picture from afar without being intrusive.
- Try not to be an aloof stranger; build a relationship of mutual understanding with your subject.

After Photographing

- Don’t stereotype or make false generalizations. (10) A single photograph of a starving African child is not representative of the situation throughout the continent. Use captions to contextualize visual images.
- Photos should be used to raise public awareness, not to exploit public sympathy.
- Photos must be carefully and faithfully edited (meaning there should be minimal, but acceptable digital manipulation and no fancy embellishments) to avoid misrepresentation.
- Ensure that your photos document what you believe is the real situation of your subjects. (11)

Photographers should use their skills to influence public perception responsibly, and it is crucial for organizations to use images that connect people from all walks of life through the language of visual understanding.

Footnotes

2. Ibid.