

Short-Term Mission Trips: Developing the Racial and Ethnic Consciousness of White Participants

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Abstract

Utilizing a theoretical framework of the racial and ethnic habitus constructed from Bourdieu's habitus, in addition to theories of racial identity and whiteness studies, this study examines the potential of short-term mission trips to raise the racial and ethnic consciousness of white participants, oftentimes a first step in improving race relations. Due to the limited empirical research on short-term missions, research on study abroad regarding racial and ethnic consciousness is utilized as a proxy. It is concluded that the racial and ethnic habitus is not easily malleable to social forces that are present in short-term mission trips, and even if it is, the effects may be temporary. Furthermore, it is more likely that differing racial and ethnic habituses may result in conflict between the various stakeholders involved in short-term missions. It is evident that more empirical research needs to be conducted on short-term missions to provide a better understanding of these religious initiatives.

Key Words: short-term missions, habitus, racial consciousness, racial and ethnic identity, race relations, study abroad

Short-term Christian mission trips are not a new phenomenon. However, only recently have scholars begun to apply a critical lens to these activities (Ver Beek 2006; Wuthnow and Offutt 2008; Howell 2009; Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009; Beyerlein, Adler, and Trinitapoli 2011). They are greatly understudied and most of the research has centered around the effects of participating in these trips on the religious attitudes and beliefs of participants (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009). No research has examined the effects of these trips on participants' racial and ethnic consciousness. Since the majority of short-term mission trip participants belong to the dominant racial group in the United States, whites (Johnson 2013), there is a need to consider what impact participation in such trips has on their racial and ethnic consciousness. Furthermore, while many short-term mission organizations root their mission and activities in a theological perspective, sociology can contribute to a better understanding of what happens to

participants as they interact with individuals racially or ethnically different from themselves. One way sociology can lend a critical lens to short-term mission trips is through identifying potential social effects as a result of participation in such trips. Since many trips are cross-cultural, one area of interest is how participation affects participants' racial and ethnic consciousness. This is important because greater racial and ethnic consciousness among whites could improve race relations between dominant whites and people of color.

Moreover, despite the popularity of short-term missions across diverse communities of faith in the United States, skeptics question the effectiveness of such trips for producing any change in the participant (Ver Beek 2006). For example, a study by Trinitapoli and Vaisey (2009) found that participation in short-term mission trips led to a significant change in the religious beliefs and practices of participants. This type of "transformative experience" may also impact the development of participants' political, social and economic views and opinions, as well as encourage them to engage in altruistic behavior such as giving to charity or volunteering (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009:141). Furthermore, due to contact with people different from oneself, participation may also impact participants' attitudes towards race, ethnicity, and religion by either reducing or intensifying them. It is possible that short-term mission trips may also influence an individual's perspective of race and ethnicity.

Literature Review¹

An Overview of Short-term Mission Trips

Participating in short-term mission trips is a popular contemporary trend among American Christians and there are hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of mission organizations engaging in a variety of short-term activities. The most common destinations for these trips are Mexico and Central America due to their relative proximity as well as the perceived economic need (Priest and Priest 2008; Fogarty 2009; Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009). However, short-term mission trips occur all over the globe. These trips are popular predominantly among church youth groups, but have also become common among adults (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009). In fact, it is not uncommon when visiting a church, especially during the summer months, to hear some reference related to the church's short-term missions involvement, whether it be the recruitment of participants, fundraising for trips, or a presentation from returning participants. Many churches partner with short-term mission organizations to facilitate these trips.

Short-term mission trips cross religious and denominational borders, with the highest rate of participation in the following order: Mormons, mainline Protestants, conservative

¹ The sections: "An Overview of Short-term Mission Trips," "Effects of Short-term Mission Trips," and "Racial Attitudes among U.S. Evangelicals" draw heavily from the author's previously published article in this journal. Johnson, Lindsey. 2014. "Can Short-Term Mission Trips Reduce Prejudice?" *Journal for the Sociological Integration of Religion and Society* 4(1):10-22.

Protestants, black Protestant adolescents (Smith and Denton 2005). In general, trips are considered short-term if they range from one week to two years, and about half the trips conducted in 2006 were two weeks or less (as cited in Corbett and Fikkert 2012:152). Furthermore, the typical Christian youth that participates in short-term mission trips is female, white, Conservative Protestant, and comes from a relatively economically well-off family (Johnson 2013).

Short-term mission trips vary in their aims and activities. Some examples include supporting outreach of long-term missionaries, worshipping with local populations, learning a foreign language, studying the local culture of a destination, sponsoring summer camps for youth, painting homes, delivering medical supplies, or meeting with community leaders (Beyerlein et al 2011). These activities can be categorized as “charitable service work, learning about cultural and social justice issues, and engaging in evangelism efforts among local populations (Beyerlein, Adler, & Trinitapoli 2011:781). Churches promote short-term mission trips for various reasons. Some churches take as their goal to “transform members’ attitudes and behaviors about economic, political, and social issues” (Beyerlein et al 2011:781), while other churches emphasize the service performed by the participants (Howell 2009). Other reasons could be to practice altruism, to show solidarity, or to have an adventure (Priest and Ver Beek 2005; Fogarty 2009).

Effects of Short-term Mission Trips

While churches hope that participation will bring change to their congregants, measuring change effectively has proven to be quite difficult. While it is believed that participation in such trips may spark long-term financial commitment to mission work and becoming long-term missionaries (Corbett and Fikkert 2012), it is unknown how much of that materializes. Research has found some short-term effects. Trinitapoli and Vaisey (2009) did find that participation increased adolescents’ religious beliefs and practices, and Beyerlein et al. (2011) found that participation may also increase domestic civic engagement, especially in voluntary religious work. Regarding social attitudes, research shows that participants displayed less ethnocentrism (Priest, Dischinger, and Brown 2006).

Although there is some support for the benefits of short-term mission trips, more studies have focused on criticisms of such religious initiatives. Some negative effects may be that participants do not necessarily donate more to international charitable works (Priest et al. 2006; Ver Beek 2006), participants may benefit more than hosts (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009), and the long-term effects are questionable (Ver Beek 2006; Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009).

One approach has been cited as having more success in producing long-term effects. Fogarty’s (2009) research on short-term religious trips during the peace movements of Central America in the 1980s reveals that religious delegations traveled to rural areas, stayed in local homes, and experienced drastically different work routines and living conditions. As part of

their experience, participants learned about the political involvement of the United States in the civil wars that plagued Central American countries, saw the suffering of the local population, and worshipped together with them. In other words, they were equipped with a deeper sense of the socio-historical context of the location, something Howell (2009) believes is lacking in the way short-term mission trips seem to be done currently. Upon return, Fogarty found that participants became socially and politically involved. Beyond valuing the context of the location, research also reveals that an important factor in producing positive, long-term impact is a training process of pre-trip, on-the-field, and post-trip components (Corbett and Fikkert 2012).

Short-term Mission Trips and Ethnocentrism

In his dissertation research on short-term missions, Randall Friesen (2004) says that a common critique leveled against short-term missions is that they may actually contribute to the Western tendency towards ethnocentrism. This counters the argument mentioned above that participants possess lower levels of ethnocentrism (Priest et al. 2006). Furthermore, Slimbach (2000) believes the interaction between locals and participants actually takes place on a “staged tourist space.” The inequality exhibited in these relationships between participants and hosts has led scholars to describe these relationships as “benevolent paternalism” (Slimbach, 2000). Moreover, while contextualization is highly valued among contemporary long-term missionaries, Howell (2009) believes short-term mission trips contribute to de-contextualization. He contends that this is an unintended consequence resulting from the desire to differentiate short-term mission trips from tourism as well as to emphasize the “theological/missiological” purpose of short-term trips (Howell 2009:206). De-contextualization, then, is perpetuated in the standardization of short-term missions which also facilitates its packaging as a product. De-contextualization is related to ethnocentrism because the socio-historical identity of the local community is valued much less (or often almost completely ignored) than the activities of the trip itself. The focus is on the participants, their activities, and their superficial understanding of local life, rather than on the deep context.

Ethnocentrism could also exacerbate conflict due to cultural differences. Corbett and Fikkert (2012) discuss at length the unintended consequences of short-term mission trips in their book, *When Helping Hurts*. One of their major concerns regarding these trips is the lack of participants’ cultural competency regarding the host culture. For example, differing perspectives regarding the nature of time and the role of individuals versus groups can be sources of conflict between participants and hosts. They argue that North Americans are from “an extreme” culture in that they hold strong notions of individualism as well as an emphasis on a monochronic perspective of time as being a valuable and limited product. As a result, participants focus on getting the job done quickly and efficiently, rather than taking the time to

develop relationships with the local hosts. This can be offensive to local cultures that may view development as a process, rather than a product.

Furthermore, since such trips many times take place in the majority world or in areas of the United States that are economically poor, participants tend to take a “poverty as deficit” perspective. This prompts them to seek poverty-alleviation strategies which place the North American participants in the superior position of ones who have “something” and give “something” to those that do not have it (Corbett and Fikkert 2012:155). The authors conclude that many times these trips focus on providing relief-like strategies to poverty, rather than working on long-term solutions for development. Moreover, even if relief is the appropriate response, the authors contend that the participants may not be the appropriate ones to provide the support. They should consider, instead, if there are local organizations or ministries that could more appropriately provide this assistance. This perspective is supported by Ver Beek’s (2006) research on construction teams following Hurricane Mitch in Honduras in 1989, which found that Honduran Christian agencies that rebuilt homes likely had a more positive impact on local communities than homes built by short-term mission teams from the United States.

Rather than a poverty-deficit perspective, Corbett and Fikkert (2012) argue that participants should take an asset and needs-based approach. In this approach, participants focus on identifying and mobilizing the resources of the community before bringing in resources from outside. Without considering local resources, participants may show a paternalistic perspective and undermine local assets. Thus, the authors conclude that the best situation is for short-term participants to partner with a local ministry or organization that is already implementing a long-term, asset-based, development approach.

Corbett and Fikkert (2012) also highlight the power differential in short-term mission trips. The participants often have power over the host communities due to the disparities in wealth. Finally, the authors are critical of the amount of money spent by trip participants, which they reason would be better spent sent to employed indigenous workers. The authors argue that such trips should be more about learning rather than doing. They cite the importance of staying in host community homes which creates time to talk and interact with local people. This resonates with Emerson and Yancey’s (2011) argument that more listening needs to take place for racial barriers to be transcended in the United States.

Although short-term mission trips have gained considerable popularity in recent years, a glance at a historical perspective of Western missions is instructive. Woodberry and Shah (2004) maintain that Western missionaries often supported local cultures and identities despite domination by political colonizers. Not only did missionaries convince British colonial powers to grant religious liberty in the colonies, they also advocated for the abolition of slavery and forced labor, and the printing of literature in local languages. Although the opposite has also occurred,

Protestants have a long history of valuing local cultures and people groups, as scores of missionaries have sought to integrate into host cultures.

Racial Attitudes among U.S. Evangelicals

To understand the potential of short-term mission trips to impact participants' racial and ethnic identity formation, it is important to take into account the racial attitudes participants may carry with them on the short-term mission trips. To do so it is necessary to examine the history of racial attitudes among U.S. evangelicals in the U.S. In their book, *Divided by Faith* (2000), Emerson and Smith examined the history of race relations in U.S. Protestant churches and identified three major stages. The first occurred from 1700-1964, where African Americans and whites worshipping in separate pews, at first due to slavery and then to Jim Crow laws and de facto segregation, converted to worshipping in separate churches. Therefore, while the Civil Rights movement brought more racial equality, it also witnessed a distancing between whites and blacks as racialization continued to characterize American society through informal segregation. The second stage was pioneered by Promise Keepers, an evangelical movement among males which promoted racial reconciliation. Nevertheless, Emerson and Smith are critical of the group's focus solely on individual change rather than on societal change. Racial reconciliation was to occur through changing the attitudes of individuals, not through confronting the racial inequality in social structures.

The third stage in the history of race relations among U.S. Protestant churches noted by Emerson and Smith (2000) is that of colorblindness, a stage that is also perhaps characteristic of the general American public (Carr 1997). The colorblind perspective as it relates to race relations maintains that the contemporary white evangelical perspective views prejudice as an individual problem. White evangelicals do not have much contact with those of other races, but when they do, it is usually friendly contact. Racial prejudice, therefore, is seen as limited to certain individuals that are not acting in accordance with Christian values. The authors conclude, therefore, that since white evangelicals see racism as an individual problem, they are unable to understand the social causes of racial prejudice and discrimination. This results in the belief that everyone, regardless of race has an equal opportunity in life. Therefore, failure to succeed is attributed to an individual's inability rather than to institutionalized sources of racism and discrimination.

While movements such as Promise Keepers and others have promoted racial reconciliation, a popular quote by Martin Luther King, Jr. still rings true today: "The most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning" (King 2010:207). In fact, 93% of congregations in the United States are racially homogenous (Emerson and Kim 2003). Emerson and Smith (2000) reason that this contributes to the structure of racialization in U.S. society. Since religion is an important force in solidifying the density of in-group ties, it often is also a motor for discouraging both out-group ties and intergroup bonds. This is

detrimental to race relations because it exaggerates similarities among members of the in-group and differences with members of the out-group. Furthermore, positive characteristics tend to be associated with the in-group and negative characteristics with the out-group. If the conditions for these ties are racialized, then it is no surprise that the contact between racial groups will continue to be low as a result. Emerson and Smith argue that due to these factors, religion actually contributes to racial division. It is important to include this information for consideration here because racially homogenous religious communities contribute to the normalcy of whiteness and American cultural identity.

And, while the above is likely true, it should also be acknowledged that not only do churches influence racial patterns within society, but they also reflect racial societal trends. According to Yamane and Roberts (2016), racial homogeneity within churches is in part due to racial homogeneity within neighborhoods and friendships. Therefore, there is likely a circular relationship occurring, in that racial homogeneity within churches is likely influenced by racial homogeneity in society, which in turn also then contributes to and strengthens this very same racial homogeneity.

Although uncommon, multiracial churches do exist in the United States. In his study of these churches, Yancey (2001) found that whites in multiracial congregations were more influenced by intergroup contact than were racial minorities. This was because white members were forced to confront racial issues that they would, and could, usually ignore. Perhaps this is why whites in multiracial churches also tended to show political support for social issues that promoted racial equality. Another finding by Yancey was that whites in multiracial churches displayed lower levels of social distance.

Racial and Ethnic Consciousness in Study Abroad Programs

Research on study abroad programs may serve as a practical proxy for short-term mission trips and interracial contact. While not necessarily religiously motivated, study abroad programs are similar to short-term mission trips in that they are usually brief in nature and bring Americans into contact with people of different races and ethnicities. It is important to mention that the majority of Americans who study abroad are white and female (Dolby 2004). Therefore, literature regarding racial and ethnic self-consciousness in study abroad programs will prove useful here.

Studying abroad also often encourages a development of self-awareness and, specifically, exploration of one's national identity (Wilkinson 1998; Dolby 2004). Dolby's (2004) study of about twenty undergraduate American students participating in a study abroad program in Australia examined how this experience shaped their perceptions of their national identity. She draws several conclusions from her study. First, becoming the "other" as a result of being in a global context makes one's national identity shift from a passive to an active identity. Students encountered anti-American sentiment which forced them to reflect on their

national identity. Second, she finds that students become aware that they are not the only authors of the “American” identity, but rather that this identity is further defined outside of the United States. Many of the students had encounters with non-Americans that were much more informed about the history and the foreign and domestic policy of the United States than they were. Students needed to reconstruct their American identity in order to negotiate the negative sentiments they learned about Americans and the United States. In fact, Dolby (2004) found that students displayed a “‘patriotic trace’—a vague, ungrounded, floating vestige of its opposite: a patriotism grounded in knowledge and information” (2004:167) due to the fact that they felt they had to defend their country. Students also displayed “infantile citizenship” that identified the policies of the state as equivalent with the nation (2004:168). On the other hand, embarrassed by the perceptions of the United States and Americans, some students were challenged to differentiate between the state and the nation.

The above cited literature provides mixed attitudes towards the potential for white participants on short-term mission trips to develop their racial and ethnic consciousness. Scholars cannot agree as to whether short-term mission trips contribute to, or combat, ethnocentrism. On one hand, exposure to different cultures and ways of doing things may lower the ethnocentrism of participants, but at the same time it could strength it, especially if a poverty-deficit perspective is taken (Corbett and Fikkert 2012). Moreover, the stark power disparity between participants and local community members may further exacerbate ethnocentrism. And, while historically Protestant missionaries have valued local cultures and identities (Woodberry and Shah 2004), it should be noted that this activity was done by missionaries who had had considerable exposure to the local cultural context, usually serving their entire adult lives in the mission field. Short term mission trips may be an opportunity for participants to learn the value of local cultures, and through this contact, be challenged to further reflect on their own racial and ethnic identity, Nevertheless, considering Howell’s (2009) finding that may short-term trips do not value the context of their activity, the potential for this outcome is questionable.

Yancey’s (2001) research on multiracial congregations supports the idea that coming into contact with diverse communities has an impact on whites’ racial attitudes, raising their consciousness and sparking attitude and behavior change. Nevertheless, he examined only congregations where people had regular, ongoing contact with each other. Because short-term mission trips do not provide a setting for such long-term relationships to be formed, it is probable that being in a diverse setting for such a limited time would have much less impact on participants. Furthermore, while attempts at racial reconciliation have been made, the evangelical tendency is towards individual attitudinal change (Emerson and Smith 2000), and while this paper examines change at the individual level, it is difficult to determine how much individual change is possible without societal change along with, or preceding it.

The literature regarding participation in study abroad trips provides more hope in that students experienced what it felt like to be a minority and to not belong (Dolby 2004), which prompted them to reflect on their national identity. At the same time, study abroad trips differ significantly from short-term mission trips, not only in their length, but also in that students usually receive classes or other resources to actively take the position of a learner in the new culture. They are the ones receiving rather than giving, which changes the power dynamic, and thus could reduce ethnocentrism in a way that participation in short-term missions could not. Since the literature is inconclusive on the potential for short-term missions to raise the racial and ethnic consciousness of white participants, it is helpful to look at this issue through various theoretical lens.

Theoretical Framework

Racial and Ethnic Habitus

The main theory guiding this paper is the racial and ethnic habitus. Bourdieu's (1984) habitus is a concept that can be helpful in considering the way individuals develop and understand their racial and ethnic identity. When Bourdieu coined this term, he actually developed it within the context of socioeconomic class identity. Habitus refers to an individual's "inculcated and embodied dispositions (e.g., tastes, perceptions, cognitive frameworks) that are formed through habitual practice consistent with one's class position" (Perry 2012:90). In fact, these dispositions are so ingrained that the individual is rarely aware of them, yet at the same time these dispositions still influence the individual's behavior in such a way as to socially reproduce class distinctions. Thus, a habitus aids individuals in having a "sense of one's place" and also a sense of the place of others within the class structure. Having a "sense of one's place" creates an understanding of limitations, thus, discouraging the dominated from questioning the perception of reality, and much less, challenging those who impose it. This interaction takes place in what Bourdieu (1984) calls, fields. Fields contain dominant and subordinate groups that harness their economic, social, and cultural capital to pursue their own interests. It is in these social spaces where power differentials are imposed and contested.

The concept of the racial habitus is a relevant model for applying Bourdieu's theory of the habitus to race (Horvat and Antonio 1999; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Emerson 2006; Perry 2012). Furthermore, this concept will be extended to consider its applicability for an "ethnic habitus" as well. The theoretical framework of the habitus is helpful in understanding how an individual's racial and ethnic identity is formed, and also how it may be malleable based on certain social forces such as contact with people of different cultures through short-term mission trips.

Perry (2012) seeks to integrate Bourdieu's concept of the habitus with Aristotle's perspective that the habitus included moral dispositions. By referring to a "racially-constituted"

habitus, Perry is referring to a habitus “produced by the structural and cultural conditions associated with an actor’s location within the racialized social system of the United States” (2012:106). According to his analysis, differing racial habituses produce conflicts over moral standards within interracial religious organizations. Secondly, Perry argues that these conflicts tend to be resolved by the inculcation of white cultural norms and that this reinforces white hegemony.

Similarly, Michael Emerson, in his book *People of the Dream* (2006), attributes conflict in multiracial churches primarily to the existence of different habituses. He says that habituses go beyond what is consciously recognized and lie deeper than mental cognition. Therefore, what may seem like conflict over a minor issue is in fact conflictive due to the divergent expectations, tastes, patterns, experiences, feelings, and interpretations among different racial and ethnic groups. Because habituses are racially or ethnically influenced, when there is a misuse of power, the divergent habituses result in the promotion of a certain groups’ interest over other groups. Similarly, Horvat and Antonio (1999) discuss a racialized organizational habitus which tends to institutionalize and promote the white habitus in predominately white organizations over non-white habituses through symbolic violence. As a result, minority members must make social and cultural sacrifices in order to receive the benefits from the organization. Likewise, Bonilla-Silva refers to a “white habitus” which is defined as “a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites’ racial tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters” (2003:104). The result of a white habitus is a promotion of in-group solidarity among whites and negative perceptions of nonwhites.

The normalcy of whiteness could be a part of one’s habitus, which makes them immune to awareness regarding privilege based on race and the exercise of power based on race, and therefore contributes to the aforementioned racial hegemony. Furthermore, if Bourdieu’s habitus can be extended from class to race, perhaps it can be extended to ethnicity as well.

Racial and Ethnic Identity Theories

A basic understanding of racial and ethnic identity theory also helps frame the discussion for this present study. Two major points should be considered here. First, research shows that as age increases, so do individuals’ self-awareness of their racial and ethnic identity (Clark and Clark 1947; Hraba and Grant 1969; Annis and Corenblum 1987). Second, interracial contact also influences individuals’ awareness of their racial and ethnic self-identity (Clark and Clark 1947; Hraba and Grant 1969; Cross 1978; Annis and Corenblum 1987; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). These points are supported by the literature and are discussed in more detail below.

Scholars agree that self-awareness regarding one’s racial identity begins at a young age. In Clark and Clark’s (1947) classic study on racial identification and racial preference among black children, they found that as the children’s age increased, so did their identification with

the brown doll. These results led them to conclude that racial attitudes begin around four to five years of age. This study was replicated with some minor adjustments in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1969 by Hraba and Grant. They also found that age was a factor in racial identity formation (Hraba and Grant 1969). Annis and Corenblum (1987) also conducted a test similar to that of Clark and Clark among Canadian First Nations children. Their results corresponded with those of Clark and Clark in that the older children more accurately identified their racial identity than younger children. Conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on racial identity formation, Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) also conclude that racial identification is related to one's age and cognitive development.

Moreover, when race is considered a social construction, it should be no surprise to see that interracial contact influences an individual's racial and ethnic identity formation. In contrast to Clark and Clark's (1947) findings that black children preferred white dolls, Hraba and Grant (1970) found that black children preferred black dolls. While there are many possible explanations for this, Hraba and Grant argue that the black children in their study had high levels of black pride due to positive interracial contact, which in turn caused them to choose the black dolls over the white dolls.

While increased interracial contact encourages self-awareness of racial identity, the literature also supports the idea that the reverse is true in that a lack of interracial contact also results in a lack of self-awareness about racial identity. This is most common among whites who are the dominant racial group in the United States, and among racially isolated groups. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) found that the literature supports that Anglo adolescents that lack interracial contact are more likely than minority adolescents to pre-maturely "foreclose" or stop their racial identity exploration. However, minority adolescents who have strong ties to an ethnic enclave or community may be likely to do the same. Perhaps it could be concluded that in situations like these, individuals experience a "stunted" racial identity formation due to their homogenous communities. Nonetheless, if these individuals are placed in an environment where they are a numerical minority, perhaps it would be an opportunity for them to further develop their racial and ethnic identity.

In addition to racial identity formation, ethnic identity formation can also be examined. Nagel (1999) and Gans (1999) both discuss the construction of ethnic identity in similar terms as the previous authors discuss the construction of racial identity. Both racial and ethnic identities are greatly influenced by "internal and external opinions and processes." However, Nagel (1999:59) strongly leans towards the external social forces as having the main influence. For ethnic minorities in the United States, ethnic boundaries and identities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed due to the dynamism of culture and the influx of new immigrants (Nagel 1999). However, whites do not have the same opportunity due to the prevalent cultural stereotype of white as the norm or white as American (Andersen 2003; Doane 2003; Roediger, 2009). In regard to white ethnic identity, Gans (1999:422) maintained

that ethnicity was still important to whites in terms of “symbolic ethnicity,” which refers to a “nostalgic allegiance” to one’s immigrant roots. While Gans’ argument may have been true for earlier generations, it is problematic to assume that present day whites, as well as all ethnic minorities, would have the same emotional attachment to ancestral ethnic identities.

Whiteness Studies

The body of literature on whiteness studies adds to the previous discussion on theories of racial and ethnic identity by considering how white racial identity is constructed. Whiteness scholars call attention to the social construction not only of the racial identity of minorities, but also of the dominant white group. The origins of the social construction of whiteness can be found during the time of slavery in the United States. At that time skin color was used to distinguish between white indentured servants and black slaves. Since then, as Lipsitz (1995) argues, whites have constantly worked to maintain possession of “whiteness” and therefore have established structures that reinforce their investment in whiteness. Possessing “whiteness” confers an advantage. As Brodtkin (1998) contends, groups previously considered as “nonwhite,” such as the Irish and the Jews were able to pass through the “whitening process” through different social advantages awarded them, and today are considered white. Whiteness scholars also call attention to the fact that to be white is to be “the norm,” “mainstream,” and “American” (Andersen 2003; Doane 2003; Roediger, 2009). The normalization of whiteness leads to the invisibility of whiteness as a socially constructed racial category, which also leads to the invisibility of institutionalized racialized norms based on white culture.

Supporters of whiteness theories believe that by exposing whiteness as a social construction, white hegemony will be acknowledged, and will aid in countering the colorblind perspective, revealing white privilege, and in exposing institutionalized racism. According to Peggy McIntosh white privilege is “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (1998:164). Packed into this short description are two very powerful observations (Johnson 2014:13). One, white privilege provides whites with numerous advantages that enable them to succeed in society on a daily basis. Two, the strength of white privilege lies in that these advantages are “invisible,” and that they are passed down to future generations unconsciously. White privilege is dangerous because it supports the status quo, which means it supports social institutions and social systems that favor whites over those who are not white, thereby perpetuating whites as the dominant group.

Nevertheless, critics of whiteness studies believe this body of theories only shifts the focus away from the prejudice and discrimination that racial minorities experience, which could be detrimental to progress towards racial equality (Andersen 2003). Furthermore, it is believed that whiteness studies focus on changing the individual rather than groups or structures, thus

arguing that any real societal change is not possible (Lipsitz 1995). Simply deconstructing whiteness as a racial construction will not make racial problems go away (Andersen 2003). Furthermore, even though individual whites may recognize their privilege, a simple acknowledgement of this, or even a change in attitude, is not sufficient for achieving racial equality. Action through political means is necessary if change promoting racial equality is to be pursued. This is not surprising since other literature has pointed to the fact that being white in and of itself is a privilege, because whites are not reminded of their race as often as blacks (McIntosh 2002).

Nevertheless, Twine and Gallagher (2008) are optimistic about recent developments in whiteness studies. They say that the third wave of whiteness studies expands on previous waves which focused on the problem of whiteness – white privilege and a racialized society – by now examining the mechanisms and structures of racial domination and subordination. Therefore, while scholars may not agree as to whether whiteness studies are a positive contribution to race theory, it is important to consider how these theories reveal how whiteness is constructed and how it maintains racial hegemony. This is an important aspect for the present study, because, as mentioned earlier, participation in short-term mission trips may affect individuals' racial and ethnic attitudes, and additionally, their self-awareness of their racial and ethnic identity.

The race and ethnic theories presented above shed light on what influences the development of an individual's racial and ethnic consciousness and self-identity. Below, a discussion is dedicated to how these theories may be applied to whites' participation in short-term mission trips. By examining this issue through various theoretical lens, insight can be gained as to the potential for short-term mission trip participation to impact the racial and ethnic consciousness of whites.

Discussion

Implications from Racial and Ethnic Identity Theories

Short-term mission trips may challenge participants to think about their racial and ethnic identity. Although racial identity is formed at an early age, and most short-term mission trip participants are teenagers and older, interracial/interethnic contact with host communities may provide an opportunity for participants to recognize their racial and ethnic identity. Furthermore, since many of the participants in these short-term trips are white, and quite possibly the majority of churches that they come from both racially and ethnically homogenous, contact with a different culture may provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on their own racial and ethnic identity. This would help whites from racially homogenous communities who "foreclosed" early on their racial and ethnic identities (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990). As was seen in study abroad programs, students were often challenged to consider their

national identity once they were outside of the United States. In a similar way, it can be argued that when placed in a different racial and ethnic group, white participants in short-term mission trips may also be challenged to further develop their own racial and ethnic identity.

Nevertheless, at the same time, an important difference between study abroad and short-term mission trips is that in study abroad, participants go as learners whereas this aspect is not emphasized much, or at all, among short-term mission participants. This may result in short-term mission trip participants being ignorant of this opportunity to further develop their racial and ethnic identities.

Also interesting to consider is to what extent symbolic ethnicity may be at play here. Often, short-term participants are asked about their ethnic heritage. Therefore, further reflection on participants' ethnic roots may also occur. Nevertheless, it is likely that this reflection is limited only to remembering a distant point in their family history, such as when their ancestors immigrated to the United States, rather than on a deep reflection of the individual's current ethnic identity and culture.

Implications from Whiteness Studies

It is also important to consider the implications from whiteness studies. It is evident that short-term mission participants hold a level of privilege that is not unlike McIntosh's (1998) description of white privilege. As noted, participants mostly come from a relatively privileged position in U.S. society, and usually travel to economically challenged areas. Not only that, but they carry a U.S. passport and speak English, markers of privilege in a globalized society. Furthermore, the roles that guide the interactions between the participants and the local community also indicate a power differential. Participants have come to *help* or *serve*, whereas the local community is expected to *receive*. The power of this privilege rests in its invisibility to those who possess it. Therefore, it is unknown whether contact with people from the majority world will challenge whites to recognize their privilege, or if the imbalance of power in these roles will strengthen the invisibility of this privilege. Nevertheless, even if participants become more self-aware of their own privilege, it does not mean that they will become politically committed to racial equality abroad, or even in their own communities. For the few individuals that do have that type of life-changing experience, the numbers may not be enough to be able to change social structures and the attitudes of complete social groups. Moreover, it has been indicated elsewhere that there is little potential for short-term mission trips to reduce the prejudice of participants for various reasons, including the level of privilege that participants carry with them (Johnson 2014).

Furthermore, it must be recognized that participants of color likely experience acceptance by, and interaction with, host communities differently from their white teammates. Host communities have their own racialized perspectives, which may affect how they think of, and treat participants of color. On the other hand, if white participants learn that their

teammates are treated differently based on race, this may contribute to whites' racial consciousness and visibility of privilege. It may further challenge the normalization of whiteness. More research is needed on the experience of people of color on short-term mission trips.

Implications of the Racial and Ethnic Habitus

Most important to consider are the implications of the main guiding theory of this paper. While research is growing regarding the racial and ethnic habitus, few scholars have explored its malleability. It is unknown to what extent age and interracial contact can bring awareness of one's dispositions, and how these influence behavior. Furthermore, it is doubtful what, if any, effects participation in short-term mission trips may have on the racial and ethnic habitus. On one hand, meaningful interaction with other racial and ethnic groups may raise the consciousness of one's racial identity. Furthermore, it may reduce one's ethnocentrism by exposing participants to different ways of doing things. Nevertheless, as mentioned, scholars doubt the ability of short-term mission trips to have any long-term effect on participants overall (Ver Beek 2006; Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009). It could be that short-term trips only produce short-term effects. It could be that the racial and ethnic habitus is manipulated due to such interracial contact, but then quickly returns to its original state soon after the trip. More research on the intricacies of the racial and ethnic habitus would need to be conducted in order to explore this further.

Since the habitus creates dispositions of which people are unaware, it is possible that white mission leaders are unaware of the inculcation of white cultural norms in their organization and missionary activity. This is problematic because as the literature strongly indicates, differing racial and ethnic habituses contain divergent expectations and interpretations (Emerson and Smith 2000), which when brought into contact most likely result in conflict. When such conflict occurs, the white habitus is likely to prevail and use its white privilege to dominate. Such a perspective can be especially helpful for research that is sorely needed on the group dynamics and conflicts that may arise between white mission participants and local community members, as well as among interracial and international staff.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of short-term mission trips is expected to continue to grow. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that more research be conducted regarding the impact of these trips on participants and on the host communities. While it cannot be concluded that short-term mission trips directly affect the racial and ethnic habitus, at least in the long-term, this is fertile ground for exploration. If by participating in short-term mission trips white Christians become more aware of their own racial and ethnic identity as well as the racial

stratification that exists both in the United States and abroad, perhaps Sundays at 11:00 a.m. will no longer be the most segregated hour of the week. If done well, short-term mission trips could be an opportunity for white Christians to become committed to racial equality and to improving race relations upon returning to the United States. As can be learned from the study abroad literature, this would require that participants approach these trips more purposely with the attitude of a learner. Unfortunately, this is a highly optimistic view that in reality may not be feasible. It seems more likely that the racial and ethnic habitus would not be easily malleable to the social forces that are present in short-term mission trips. And even if it is, the effects, like the trip, may be short-term.

Nevertheless, although this paper has shown that it could be likely that differing racial and ethnic habituses may result in conflict between the different groups involved in short-term missions, particularly between national ministry leaders and American short-term mission staff, it is with these groups that there exists perhaps more potential for improving race relations. If American short-term mission staff become aware of their power and privilege, and the invisible ways in which white American norms may penetrate their organization, and if they consciously and intentionally embrace ways that counter these tendencies, then more equal partnerships with national ministry leaders, communities, and international staff is possible. With the continued expansion of the short-term missions trend, more research needs to be conducted in order to equip American Christians, churches, and short-term mission organizations with a better understanding of the impact of these trips on host communities, and on trip participants themselves.

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