May 15th, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Social Privilege and International Volunteering

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Social Privilege and International Volunteerism

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Definitions

Social Privilege: Conferred dominance and unearned advantage due to personal identities (McIntosh, 1988)

Oppression: The actions of imposition and deprivation that allow social privilege to exist

Intersectionality: All identities reify each other and are non-hierarchal in significance

- **Institutionalized Social Privilege:** Societal systems that create disparities in access to material, goods, and power
- **Self-Mediated Social Privilege:** The active oppression of others that is believed to be normal, fair, and logical
- **Internalized Social Privilege:** Overestimating the merits of the self and privileged group, unexamined identity

International Volunteerism: Voluntary action in which participants cross international borders to benefit others with donated time and effort

Theory, Method & Data Analysis

Ten semi-structured face-to-face interviews (*Total running time: 11hrs. 15min.*)

Participants: International service learning students traveling to Cambodia and Thailand

Researcher: Participant observer, maintained in-group relationships

Grounded Theory: Constant Comparison method

Findings: How was social privilege revealed in participant discourse?

Internalized
- Experience used for identity development with few social consequences

1) To face oneself
"it's like anything to not be alone in my own head."

2) To break norms of social stratification
"just doing something so out of what I was used to and out of my bubble"

3) To feel inspired
"I don't want to be the stereotype of the ignorant American"

4) To let go of control
"I feel like I'm now willing to take more chances and take more risks"

Self-mediated
-not fully challenged by experience

Stereotypes of Exaggeration
Before: *"you're going to India and Thailand, that don't like, have running water in some places?!"*
"[they are] so cool and exotic."

After: *"I respect the way they live and act."*

Stereotypes of Marginalization
Before: *"delightful village people"*
"not as technologically advanced"

After: *"[I want to] find some child, bring them to America and give them opportunities so they can do the things they want to do just like I am"*

Institutionalized
- Was not challenged

- Volunteering internationally is a privilege and opportunity
- Alternatively, not being able to volunteer internationally is a **deprivation of benefits**

Major determinates of receiving volunteering benefits:
- Class   *(recognized by all participants)*
  - Education
  - Wealth
- Race   *(not recognized by participants)*
- Religion   *(recognized by some participants)*
- Ability

(not recognized and never mentioned by participants)

Implications: Why it matters

International volunteering programs serve to reinforce the U.S. social structure especially if the student volunteers' potential is not fully realized within a diverse learning community.

Support is needed after the program to fully internalize experiences and knowledge
-Open sharing and group discourse
-Guided critical reflection
- directly question issues surrounding power, history, and agency
-Focus on integration and learning from LOCAL groups of diverse identities
- greater personal risk gains greater social consciousness
- The diversity of knowledge on campus is *undermined* when student clubs and community centers are not institutionally supported.

Work is needed to create truly egalitarian relationships defined by recipient community members
- as signified by the preservation of marginalization stereotypes in participant discourse