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# Ethnocentrism in Short-Term Missions: Time Spent Abroad and Its Effect on Cultural Attitudes

Rachel A. Hill

*Southeastern University - Lakeland*

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Ethnocentrism in Short-Term Missions:  
Time Spent Abroad and Its Effect on Cultural Attitudes

Rachel Hill

Southeastern University

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## ETHNOCENTRISM IN SHORT-TERM MISSIONS

### **Abstract**

This study examines the effects of time spent interacting with people of a different culture on ethnocentrism levels, within the context of intercultural short-term missions (STM). STM is defined as any international altruistic volunteerism lasting 11 months or less, and includes both spreading of Christianity and various poverty alleviation efforts. Data were collected by means of a survey measuring ethnocentrism levels, which was sent to the student body of Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. An ANOVA was conducted to analyze a possible relationship between the time spent in intercultural interaction (determined by length of trip) and ethnocentrism levels (determined by survey responses). The relationship between the two variables was not statistically significant, and possible reasons for this are discussed.

Suggestions for further research regarding ethnocentrism are presented. Information regarding the dangers of ethnocentrism and a specific application for Southeastern University and its missions program are both discussed in Appendix A. For Southeastern University readers who are unfamiliar with APA format of experimental research, it is recommended to read Chapter One (Introduction), Chapter Two (Literature Review), and Appendix A (Application).

*Keywords:* ethnocentrism, short-term missions, volunteer tourism, intercultural ministry

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Picture a group of American college students that takes a trip to a developing nation for one week to help build a school. Upon their return, they report how poor and desperate the people there are: their small houses have two rooms at most, they have no electricity or running water, their stores have a limited selection and their children walk an hour with no shoes on to get to school every day. Those who hear the stories are shocked and moved. “Those poor people,” they say. “We are so blessed to live in America.”

Cultural lenses cover the eyes of every person on earth; every human perceives the world through the schemas developed as a result of living in their specific society. These cognitive complexities of culture determine the way each person perceives foreigners and outsiders. Like the most popular students in the high school “caste system,” Americans often seem to think that everyone is watching and wishing they could be like them, when in reality they have a reputation for being egotistical and self-centered. These attitudes are sometimes explicit, but more often they are implicit, subconscious patterns of thought. Even those who desire to help others outside their own culture, like the college students in the opening example, are extremely influenced by these cultural lenses and display preference for their own culture’s values and way of life. This concept is best described in the term ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism is often defined as simply favoring the “in-group,” or the group that one belongs to, over other outside groups. However, this concept is as complex and multifaceted as the cultures that display it. Ethnocentrism can also be described as the use of one’s own culture as a tool to measure and rate all other cultures, and seeing other cultures only through the lenses of one’s own cultural worldview.

In the last ten years a strong trend towards short-term missions, or STM, has emerged within the Christian missions movement. Thousands of teams of Christians, often consisting of young high school or college-aged students, embark on journeys around the world, seeking to spread the Gospel, help alleviate poverty, and bless foreign ministries. While the enormous popularity of short-term missions has many benefits, both “Kingdom” and “earthly,” the nature of short-term ministry often creates an ideal environment for ethnocentrism, which can come accompanied by some hazardous cousins, such as paternalism, prejudice, and relative gratification (or RG, which is further discussed in Chapter 2).

It is vital for the church to understand the dangers of ethnocentrism in ministry and research possible ways to lower it. There is a possibility that, in short-term missions, spending greater amounts of time interacting with people from a different cultural background could decrease ethnocentrism (see Chapter 2 for evidence). This project seeks to explore the relationship between interaction with nationals during short-term altruistic overseas travel (short-term mission trips and volunteer tourism in an intercultural context) and measures of ethnocentrism.

### **Research Question and Hypothesis**

The question that this project seeks to answer or explore follows:

Does the time that STM participants spend interacting with people of a foreign culture during international short-term mission trips impact their ethnocentrism levels?

My hypothesis is that the time STM participants spend in cross-cultural interaction will lower ethnocentrism levels; as time spent interacting increases, ethnocentrism will decrease.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this experiment, *ethnocentrism* is defined as the tendency to see one's own culture as favorable, and applying one's own cultural values, practices, and thought to other cultures and evaluating them according to these. *Short-term missions (STM)* is defined as any international altruistic volunteerism lasting 11 months or less, and includes both the spreading of Christianity and poverty alleviation efforts. *Time spent in intercultural interaction* is defined by trip length, since it is likely that the longer an STM participant spends abroad, the more intercultural interaction they will experience.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Ethnocentrism: A Background

#### Defining ethnocentrism.

People tend to show a preference for those from their own culture or ethnic group. Even those who claim to appreciate different cultures in the same way they appreciate their own still demonstrate a certain partiality towards those from the same cultural background. These are the people they understand, and who understand them. Minds are molded to their own culture, and their ideas, claims, and perceptions are products of their specific group. It is said that anthropologist William McGee (1900) was the first to use the term “ethnocentrism” to describe this largely universal phenomenon and Sumner (1906) was the first to define it (Bizumic et al., 2009). Since then, the term has been studied repeatedly using many different measures and has taken on countless definitions; some studies equate the concept simply with favoritism towards ones’ own group (in-group favoritism), while others attach hostility towards other cultures (out-group hostility), racism, prejudice, and other similar concepts (Bizumic et al., 2009). Because of this, it is very difficult to pinpoint an exact or all-encompassing definition of this complex subject, let alone determine its precise origins or prevalence. However, it is possible to sort and somewhat categorize the large number of definitions of ethnocentrism.

Sumner’s original definition of ethnocentrism describes a “devotion to the in-group, which carries with it a sense of superiority to any out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group” (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2008, p. 437-438). Today a large number of studies have used the core of this definition—in-group favoritism—but have abandoned Sumner’s attached concept of hostility towards the out-group. This abandonment was brought about by much empirical research that has shown that favor for the in-group does

not necessitate hostility towards the out-group (Brewer, 2007; Cashdan, 2001). Cashdan (2001) provides the example of an ethnic group that together faces a life-threatening catastrophe, which brings them closer together and fosters loyalty among them. This does not require any development of dislike for an outside group. In fact, if this “in-group favoritism” is equated with ethnocentrism, one could claim that ethnocentrism can actually support high levels of cooperation within groups. From an evolutionary perspective, in-group favoritism can form to address safety, belonging, and survival needs. This favoritism fosters a tight-knit community with strong group cooperation (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). In-group favoritism has been shown through research to be a very normal aspect of group interactions throughout humankind. It does not necessarily stem from selfishness or self-elevation, but more likely from security motives, perceptions, and cognitive frameworks (Brewer, 2007).

Ethnocentrism, although it encompasses in-group favoritism, is not perfectly congruent to the concept. If ethnocentrism were simply favoring the in-group, it would not be seen by sociologists and psychologists as having “adverse effects on harmonious intergroup relations” (Bizumic et al., 2009, p. 872), since research has shown that favor for the in-group and hatred for the out-group are not inseparable. Ethnocentrism is widely regarded in terms of a more detailed definition, which holds that ethnocentrism is the tendency to both see one’s own culture as the favorable “center of everything” (Brewer, 2007, p. 729), as well as applying one’s cultural values, practices, and thought to other cultures and evaluating them according to these (Brewer, 2007; Friesen, 2004.; Soyombo, 2008). This definition better describes the phenomenon because it incorporates the belief that one’s culture is preferable (in-group favoritism), along with the practice of viewing all other cultures narrowly, through one’s own cultural lenses. This

preference accompanied by a sort of tunneled worldview, is the notorious “ethnocentrism” that is to blame for so much cultural conflict and misunderstanding (Soyombo, 2008).

A deeper understanding of ethnocentrism can be obtained by examining other terms often confused or equated with it. For instance, ethnocentrism is not, as many may think it is, the equivalent of xenophobia, the fear or hatred of all foreigners (Soyombo, 2008). Ethnocentrism is not necessarily described as the hatred of other cultures; it is more accurately described as the misunderstanding of other cultures. One helpful term to consider, one that is often regarded as the opposite of ethnocentrism, is cultural relativity. This concept holds that because culture is not universal, it is absurd to attempt to explain or assess all cultures using one method of measurement. That is to say, all cultures are relative to their people groups and the societies they spring from, and should be examined in relation to specific conditions. No culture is inherently “good” or “bad,” rather they all have certain strengths and weaknesses and must be assessed and understood from an accurate perspective (Soyombo, 2008). Ethnocentrism is, in many respects, the opposite of cultural relativity, in that where cultural relativity assesses each culture with different “tools,” so to speak, ethnocentrism uses one cultural frame of reference as a tool and applies it universally.

Clearly the attempt to define ethnocentrism is as complex and intricate as the human relations the term attempts to describe. Now that a basic foundation has been laid for what the concept of ethnocentrism most often entails, this review will examine research regarding those who are ethnocentric.

### **Complexities of the label “ethnocentrist.”**

It is perhaps not entirely accurate to refer to a specific person as an “ethnocentrist”—it is not as simple as checking a small box ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to indicate whether or not someone is

ethnocentric. Rather it is a characteristic so generally human in nature that, because every person has grown up in a specific culture or group of cultures and every person therefore has some sort of cultural framework by which to measure all other cultures, every person is more or less situated on the ethnocentrism continuum. Many studies examining ethnocentrism do not so much question what makes someone ethnocentric or not; instead they investigate the conditions under which people are most likely to exhibit ethnocentrism, and what type of people are more likely to score high in ethnocentrism levels. For example, a study conducted by Pratto and Glasford (2008) examines ethnocentrism (in the sense that it is a preference for the in-group) in action among American soldiers in combat in Iraq. They found that when the nations were not competing, the Americans valued Iraqi and American lives equally, but when they were competing, American lives were more valued (Pratto & Glasford, 2008). Also, they found that the number of lives at stake during the fighting mattered less to soldiers if they were enemy lives as opposed to co-nationals (Pratto & Glasford, 2008). This study shows that the situation, in this case war and competition between groups, has an influence on whether or not people demonstrate ethnocentrism.

It is not only the situation that determines the exhibition of ethnocentrism; the nature of human cognition predisposes every person, even from childhood, to think ethnocentrically (Kinder & Kam, 2009). Studies on cultural perception show that people develop patterns of thought specific to the culture they were brought up in. Sharifan (2003) discusses cultural conceptualization, which is best explained by first defining schematization and categorization, both of which are an individual's way of organizing thoughts about the surrounding world; individuals discard aspects of a concept that do not apply, solidify aspects of a concept that are important, and sort ideas into mental categories. The formation of schemas and categories tend

to form on an individual level, but largely on a societal level as well, which the author refers to as “cultural schemas” and “cultural categories.” These can be described as “patterns of distributed knowledge across the cultural group” (Sharifan, 2003, p. 190). This is the meaning of cultural conceptualization: the combination of cultural schemas and cultural categories. These patterns of thinking across cultural groups apply to everything from funerals to teachers, from ideas of love to perception of emotions (Sharifan, 2003). Cultural conceptualization has a large part to play in ethnocentrism; because people see that their own concepts of the world are also used by all those around them (others in their cultural group), they come to think that every human has these same cultural conceptualizations. This belief can lead to ethnocentrism in the sense that people measure all other cultures by their own cultural concepts. Since all people have specific cultural conceptualizations, it is easy to see why they are predisposed to exhibit ethnocentrism.

#### **Determinants of individual ethnocentrism levels.**

All people have, to some extent, a place on the ethnocentrism continuum, as illustrated above by the studies regarding in-group favoritism, situational factors, and cultural concepts and schemas. As with all continuums, there are some people who have greater ethnocentric tendencies than others, and research has done much to discover what factors influence this.

One early attempt to investigate the personality factors behind ethnocentrism is Theodor Adorno’s 1950 book *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al., 1950; Bizumic & Duckitt, 2008). The book argues that the person with an “authoritarian personality,” characterized by traits such as insecurity, rigid conventionalism, cynicism, and preoccupation with power, is likely to be ethnocentric. Empirical evidence has been found to support this claim, but Bizumic and Duckitt write that this explanation of ethnocentrism is not all encompassing (2008). One

shortcoming is that authoritarianism has been found to be more of a group of ideological and social beliefs, rather than a personality type, and because ethnocentrism itself is somewhat of an ideological or social belief, it is inaccurate to explain one belief by another when it appears they are simply correlated. A second shortcoming is that authoritarian personality research regarding ethnocentrism has followed the Sumner definition more strictly, which includes the assumption that in-group favoritism necessitates out-group hostility; this assumption has been shown untrue by numerous studies, as aforementioned (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2008). Nevertheless, studies have indeed shown some relation between authoritarian ideology and personality traits and ethnocentrism.

Another study examines one specific personality trait that Adorno et al. (1950) include as an aspect of authoritarianism: rigidity. Rokeach (1948) conducted research regarding the effects of a generally rigid personality on ethnocentrism. The experiment investigated rigidity by having participants solve a math problem using two groups: those low in ethnocentrism and high in ethnocentrism. That is, Rokeach assessed subjects' ethnocentric tendencies and separated them into two groups (high and low in ethnocentrism). Then, he had them solve math problems designed to expose the subjects' concrete versus abstract thinking. The reason for this is that studies have shown that people who tend to be more rigid think more concretely and less abstractly. One problem had only one complex solution, and the other problem had one complex solution and one direct and simple solution. Subjects that completed the second problem in the complex rather than simple way were considered rigid, and the results showed that people who scored high in ethnocentrism demonstrated this rigidity (Rokeach, 1948). This study shows that ethnocentric people may have a "general rigidity" factor; ethnocentric people are likely to be rigid in every area of life, not just in social issues.

An additional study by Pratto et al. examines social dominance orientation (SDO), which is an individual's degree of preference for inequality in social groups (1994) and briefly mentions SDO's possible relation to ethnocentrism. Pratto et al. state that SDO is correlated with "legitimizing myths," or ideologies that promote group inequality and are integrated into society well enough that a wide population of society sees them as "self apparent truths" (1994). This study states that SDO can predict ethnocentrism, which is, in fact, included here as a legitimizing myth. SDO and ethnocentrism seem to be correlated; in other words, people who tend to prefer social inequality among groups (SDO) also seem to rank high in ethnocentrism levels (Pratto et al., 1994).

It is clear, therefore, that average human methods of cognition are not the only explanations for the phenomenon of ethnocentrism—there are certain personality tendencies and individual ideologies (such as authoritarian traits and ideologies, rigidity, and social dominance orientation) that correlate with ethnocentrism.

### **Short-Term Missions**

#### **STM: a current trend in missions.**

Western Christianity has seen an extraordinary increase in short-term workers in missions in recent years: in 2003 it was estimated that one million Christians go on short-term missions trips (STMs) every year (Priest et al., 2006). Instead of people devoting their entire careers to cross-cultural efforts of poverty alleviation (whether it is spiritual, mental, or physical alleviation), there has been an increasing trend of participating in missions on a short-term basis; people will fly overseas with a team and stay for a matter of weeks instead of a matter of years. As it has become easier and cheaper to travel farther, and as communication technology has developed (Friesen, 2004.), it has become easier to pack up for a short amount of time and share

the Gospel overseas over a summer, and then return back to a secure job and affluent life in North America.

The short-term missions movement has allowed the average Western Christian to travel the world and see different culture(s). This type of service work is seen by some as the first step in “dethroning” the narcissist (Jordan, 2011). STM has also allowed participants to be a part of something greater than themselves by spreading the Gospel to those yet unreached, or by helping to alleviate poverty by participating in construction, manual labor, and even teaching. Besides being able to do some good overseas, short-term missionaries who return home after a few weeks can, theoretically, experience a sort of spiritual transformation that can in turn rejuvenate the hearts for cross-cultural ministry in their home churches (Priest et al., 2006).

#### **A note about volunteer tourism.**

The STM trend in Christian missions has a parallel trend in the secular world: volunteer tourism (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Volunteer tourism—travel with the intent to mutually benefit the traveler and the nation or culture travelled to—is essentially STM without the Gospel, and a lot of the discussion surrounding the benefits and hazards of STM also applies to volunteer tourism as well. For the sake of this project, both of these behaviors will be covered under the designation of short-term missions (STM), as they are both altruistic, tend to be intercultural or intergroup, and because STM tends to be all that volunteer tourism is (practical poverty alleviation) and more (spreading of Christianity).

#### **Motivations for intergroup altruism.**

Much motivation for participating in short-term missions is stirred by a belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ, who, in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28, verse 19, told his followers to “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and

of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (New International Version). Teachings such as this one combined with other spiritual or supernatural experiences within Christianity are a major motivation for missions in general, including short-term missions. While one can reason that a large majority of motivation for Christian missions is traced to the teachings of the Bible, it is important to examine other sources of motivation, since many STMs include secular humanitarian work in addition to proselytizing.

It is no secret that North America and many other Western cultures enjoy a level of prosperity that the rest of the world does not, and while many Westerners may remain naive to this fact, many others are driven to action. A study by Martin Kreidl organizes views of poverty and wealth in Western and post-communist countries into three different categories. First there is the merited view of poverty, which believes that poverty is brought about directly by an individual’s actions, or perhaps lack of action. Next there is the unmerited view, which believes that poverty is the result of external forces outside of the individual’s control, and lastly the fatalistic view, which believes that poverty is the inherent result of attributes and properties of the individual themselves (Kreidl, 2000).

Other studies examine the effects of such views of poverty on altruistic behavior or overseas aid. An experiment conducted by Carr and MacLachlan, for instance, looks into the “actor-observer” relationship in poverty; that is, wealthier Australians were considered the observers of poverty and Malawians were considered the actors, since Malawi has more of an issue with poverty than Australia. When the observers (Australians) believed poverty was dispositional (the intrinsic fault of the poor), they would withhold more overseas aid, whereas people who most strongly advocated charity donation tended to make the least amount of dispositional attributions (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998). The researchers also found, interestingly

enough, that Australians (observers) expressed more belief that poverty was the result of a situation, and Malawians (actors) were more likely to blame it on the poor's disposition. This is a somewhat surprising bias reversal, and is due to complex variables, including specific community beliefs, as well as education levels. Westerners who have received higher education, particularly in social science, tend to blame poverty on the system rather than on the person, whereas Malawians, although they have seen the problems firsthand, have less of an opportunity to receive education where they would develop this point of view (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998).

STM and other humanitarian aid can be motivated by emotional responses to being in an advantaged group. Advantaged groups have different emotional responses to inequality depending on their perception of inequality. When advantaged groups are focused on their own in-group and view the inequality as legitimate, the emotional result is pride, but when they view the inequality as illegitimate, the result is guilt (Harth et al., 2008). When groups are focused on the out-group and view inequality as illegitimate, the emotional result is sympathy (Harth et al., 2008). Because studies such as the 1998 experiment by Carr and MacLachlan, mentioned above, have demonstrated that people who participate in overseas aid (under which STM can be included) tend to see poverty as illegitimate, it is more efficient for the purpose of this literature review to focus on the emotional results of illegitimate views of inequality: guilt and sympathy.

Guilt and sympathy have been shown to be some emotional results of viewing inequality between groups as illegitimate (Harth et al., 2008). These emotions have also been linked to intergroup altruism, or prosocial behavior. Although people living in developed nations are not at fault for the conditions in undeveloped nations, they may still experience "existential guilt," which is guilt over the undeserved advantages that one has over another, and this can motivate individuals to participate in prosocial behavior (Thomas et al., 2009), such as STM. Sympathy is

not so much related to a sense of blame for another's plight, but rather a desire to alleviate another person's unfortunate situation, and this is yet another emotional experience that drives people to prosocial behaviors (Thomas et al., 2009).

Research shows that inter-group aid, altruism, or prosocial behavior can be linked to certain perceptions of poverty or other group inequalities, as well as certain emotions that result from these perceptions, but research also shows that motivations for such helping behavior are almost never clear-cut. A study by Clary and Snyder examines six common reasons people give for volunteering. With each reason they list a definition and a sample statement or belief: for instance, "values" is defined as "the individual volunteers in order to express or act on important values like humanitarianism," and the example given is, "I feel it is important to help others" (Clary & Snyder, 1999, p. 157). The study examines these motivations and how they surface in volunteers, and they found that multiple motivations are present in most. An interaction of person-based and situational factors is what influences the volunteer, rather than a single and simple personal decision (Clary & Snyder, 1999). This speaks heavily to the altruism-egoism debate, which concerns whether or not helping behavior can be completely selfless. These findings indicate that most people are motivated by complex factors, rather than pure selfish motives or pure selfless motives.

**STM: shortcomings.**

Short-term missions may be driven by good intentions, but this trend has not always brought the good it intends to bring. STM, when done without proper knowledge or methods may be counterproductive or even harmful (Priest et al., 2006). Teams flying overseas raise thousands of dollars to cover plane tickets, lodging, and other travel costs; in 2006 Americans spent an astonishing \$1,600,000,000 on short-term missions (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). It is

often argued that all this money could have done more good if it were just donated, rather than being spent on travel costs for volunteers (Van Engen, 2000). In addition, these volunteers often are unable to do as good a job on service projects (building, remodeling, gardening, and more) as local services could. Hiring locals to do these jobs instead of missions teams would even help to alleviate local poverty—painters, carpenters, and doctors who are in desperate need of employment could feed their families and likely do a better job than missions teams who are minimally trained (Van Engen, 2000). Service projects performed by teams are not the only aspect of STM argued to be a waste of time and money; evangelism by STM teams is sometimes considered ineffective, since the teams do not understand the culture or speak the language, making clear communication of the Gospel extremely difficult (Van Engen, 2000).

It is clear that the positive impact of STM on the host culture is debatable, but this is not the only claimed advantage of these trips: participants supposedly undergo a transformation during these experiences. However, researchers have discovered that these changes may only last for a short time after the trip. Participants' relationship with God, commitment to Christian community, and evangelism habits have been examined before the trip, directly after, and then at a later follow up (Friesen, 2004). The amount all three of these things were practiced went up directly after the trip but by the follow up they were lower than they were at the start (Friesen, 2004). Another positive change claimed to be instigated by STMs is giving to missions, and on first glance research seems to back this. However, a sample demographic of an STM trip shows that 83.5% of the participants are at an age during which discretionary income is rapidly increasing anyway, so increased giving could more likely be attributed to age and income, rather than the direct result of an STM experience (Priest et al., 2006).

An additional detrimental effect of STM pertains to the participant; people who go on STMs may develop wrong conclusions about poverty based on lack of cultural understanding (Raymond & Hall, 2008; Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). One way that a lack of cultural understanding may lead to wrong conclusions about poverty is a misunderstanding of poverty's very definition. According to Bourgignon there are two ways to define poverty: absolute and relative (1999). Absolute poverty is when people have difficulty obtaining essentials for survival. Relative poverty is when people's standard of living is relatively lower than the society they reside in. Having these two definitions often causes controversy and debate in the field of economics, but both are adequate and appropriate for different situations (Bourgignon, 1999). Seeing poverty overseas can alter the perspective of an STM participant, but a lack of understanding the full situation may cause the participant to assign the wrong definition of poverty to the people they meet. People who grow up in prosperous, developed nations may believe the poverty they see is absolute (the people are not getting what they need to survive) when really it is relative (the people are actually able to provide for their survival needs, but are unable to achieve the level of wealth of someone in a developed nation).

A psychological phenomenon called relative gratification is applicable to this very situation. Relative gratification (RG) is the opposite of relative deprivation (RD), a theory that suggests that people's satisfaction is measured not objectively, but rather by their comparison for others' situation (Guimond & Dambrun, 2002). They feel less satisfied if they feel others are better off than they are. Relative gratification, then, occurs when people feel better off than others and are grateful to be in their own situation rather than the situation of a less fortunate group (Dambrun et al., 2006). Research has linked RD with prejudice in the past, but RG has been understudied (Guimond & Dambrun, 2002), with the exception of the work of S. Guimond

and M. Dambrun, which composes a large majority of empirical research on the RG theory. In one experiment, these researchers intended to explore the relation between both RD and RG and prejudice. They did two experiments in which they had groups of students perceive that they had better or worse job opportunities than the other group. They then examined reported feelings of RD and RG and measured amounts of prejudice expressed, and found that RG did in fact correlate with prejudice (Guimond & Dambrun, 2002). Other studies have shown this same result, and it appears that RD and its opposite RG are actually on a V curve in relation to prejudice (Dambrun et al., 2006). It is apparent that this phenomenon of relative gratification can occur in participants of short-term missions, “too often the students return home simply counting the blessing they have of being North Americans having gained little insight into the causes of poverty and what can be done to alleviate them” (VanEngen, 2000, p. 21). As STM participants develop conclusions about poverty based on a very short and limited exposure to it, they are in danger of developing relative gratification and perhaps, then, even prejudice against the very people they are attempting to help.

STM is often seen as a waste of money that produces no sustainable good, neither in the target nations, nor in the volunteers who participate, who often even develop wrong conclusions about poverty due to their narrow scope of exposure. Questions have also been raised about short-term missions and whether the trips feed ethnocentrism, which is already prevalent in Western societies (Friesen, 2004). STM done with ethnocentrism has been charged with being culturally imperialistic and practicing “benevolent paternalism” (Friesen, 2004). Participants in STM, having little background in intercultural interaction and limited understanding of the host culture will often take on the role of “teacher,” even if they have had no formal training in the task at hand. They seem to be acting on some belief that, because they are Western, they are

somehow culturally superior to the nationals they are serving or even partnering with (Raymond & Hall, 2008; McGavran, 1955; VanEngen, 2000). This ethnocentricity in missions can be extremely harmful to successfully bringing the Gospel to a people group (Brown, 2006; McGavran, 1955), or in effectively alleviating poverty (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). Missions, both long and short-term, can suffer when missionaries are ethnocentric, because this can lead to syncretism of Western culture and the Gospel. Syncretism comes in two forms: cultural, which is when elements from two cultures mix, and syncretistic worldview, which is the mixing of two worldviews. It is important to avoid both of these because dictating cultural aspects along with faith could hinder the movement of God in a nation. A church that adapts foreign music, dress, language, and other aspects of culture could be seen by non-believers as a “foreign intrusion” or a threat to their culture (Brown, 2006). Clearly, mixing culture with the Gospel can harm ministry, and just as developing a wrong view of poverty can harm attempts to alleviate it, even if the intention is benevolent (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). Mixing ethnocentrism and STM is dangerous.

### **A Possible Remedy for Ethnocentrism in STM**

Researchers and experts who comment on the shortcomings of the modern STM movement also write that there are possible preventative measures or “best practices” that can be employed to avoid the negative effects of ethnocentrism in STM (Friesen, 2004). In-depth cultural orientation, training, and debriefing after the trip have been shown to decrease rates of ethnocentrism and help participants maintain more of the positive changes they made on the trip (Priest, 2006; Friesen, 2004).

Another factor that has been suggested as a remedy for ethnocentrism in STM is more field-based cultural learning experience (Priest et al., 2006), that is, more time spent learning

directly from nationals. Many experts on the STM phenomenon believe that spending more time interacting directly with nationals may lead to more positive changes in STM, both on the target nation and on participants. They suggest that groups focus on learning from local people and partnering more closely with them, in order to better understand the host culture and develop relationships with them (VanEngen, 2000). Staying with a host family can also help to combat ethnocentrism because this interaction can create friendships and greater racial, cultural, and social understanding (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Studies show that more relationally focused trips induce a longer lasting change in participants; they also show that STM participants who have been multiple times retain more positive changes (they have spent more time interacting with nationals) (Friesen, 2004).

Research conducted by Brewer and Campbell in East Africa examines ethnocentrism and levels of attraction between groups, and found that groups who had more overall contact with each other were more attracted to each other. Even if the interaction was just limited to the history of their two ethnic groups, people were more drawn to those they were familiar with (Brewer & Campbell, 1976). Mere interaction between groups increases attraction and understanding, and reduces ethnocentrism.

My hypothesis, therefore, is that the time STM participants spend in cross-cultural interaction will lower ethnocentrism levels; as time spent interacting increases, ethnocentrism will decrease.

### Chapter Three: Method

#### Introduction

This research project seeks to study the relationship between the time STM participants spend interacting directly with nationals in an intercultural context and their ethnocentrism levels. The study seeks to answer the question: *Does the time that STM participants spend interacting with people of a foreign culture during international short-term mission trips impact their ethnocentrism levels?* The literature suggests that the more time that people spend interacting with people from a different culture, the less ethnocentrism they will demonstrate. I hypothesized that the time STM participants spend in cross-cultural interaction will lower ethnocentrism levels; as time spent interacting increases, ethnocentrism will decrease.

#### Original Research Design

Some minor changes had to be made to the original research method and design after the data collection began, due to a limited number of responses in one of the categories. The original research design follows:

I chose to use a quasi-experimental method in my design for this experiment, as I believed that this is the best choice for this particular study. In this original design, three groups were to be studied. The first group was the control group, which was to consist of students who had never been on an international short-term mission trip (those who have not been exposed to the independent variable of cross-cultural interaction). The second group was Experimental Group 1, or EG1<sub>o</sub>, which was to consist of students who, within the last year, had been on an international short-term mission trip for 3 weeks or fewer (those who have been exposed to the independent variable for a shorter amount of time). The third group was Experimental Group 2, or EG2<sub>o</sub>, which was to consist of students who, within the last year, had been on an international

short-term mission trip between 3 and 6 weeks (those who have been exposed to the independent variable for a longer amount of time). Breaking the sample into three groups in this way intended to highlight differences between students who had never gone, students who had gone for shorter amounts of time, and students who had gone for longer amounts of time, in hopes of exposing whether or not ethnocentrism was more prominent in those who had gone for a shorter amount of time and less prominent in those who had gone for a longer amount of time.

### **Encountered Issue: Limited Data**

After about 75% of the total collected data had come in, a threat to the original design arose. While looking over the data, it became clear that there were a very limited number of responding students who fit the criteria for EG2<sub>o</sub>. A significant number of students reported participating in STMs longer than 3 weeks, but less than 5 of these were *within the last year*. My original design had specified that in order to fit the criteria to be in either EG1<sub>o</sub> or EG2<sub>o</sub>, students had to have gone on an STM in the past year. Because so few responses were categorized as EG2<sub>o</sub> and a sufficient number of responses in each group were required for the statistical procedure, I would not be able to adequately address the research question as specified in the original design. In addition, because the research question seeks to investigate whether *longer* STM experiences resulted in decreased ethnocentrism, analyzing the differences between the control group and EG1<sub>o</sub> alone would not answer the same research question; comparing the control group and EG1<sub>o</sub> would simply show whether or not participating in STM in general impacted ethnocentrism, or, if the relationship was of a curvilinear nature (ethnocentrism going up with a little exposure and dropping with longer exposure), this particular comparison would make these details impossible to detect.

**Revised Research Design**

In response to this issue, after consultation with research faculty, I decided to change the criteria for each group. The revised research design follows:

In the revised design, four groups are studied. The first group is the control group, which consists of students who have never been on an international short-term mission trip (those who have not been exposed to the independent variable of cross-cultural interaction). The second group is Experimental Group 1, or EG1, which consists of students who have been on an international short-term mission trip for a lifetime total of 2 weeks or fewer. The third group is Experimental Group 2, or EG2, which consists of students who have been on an international short-term mission trip for a lifetime total of over 2 weeks but no more than 4 weeks. The fourth group is Experimental Group 3, or EG3, which consists of students who have been on an international short-term mission trip for a lifetime total of over 4 weeks.

**Setting**

The experiment is set at Southeastern University in Lakeland Florida via an invitation email sent out to students.

**Participants**

The population studied is college students at Southeastern University (SEU), a private Assemblies of God University in Lakeland, Florida. Participants in the study were recruited by an email invitation sent to the entire student body of SEU. A copy of this invitation may be found in Appendix B.

The criteria for participants consist of:

- SEU students who have been on at least one international short-term Christian mission trip in a culture different than their own.

OR

-SEU students who have never been on an international short-term Christian mission trip, but have wanted/tried to go in the past or plan on going in the future.

The criteria for volunteers were not listed in the invitation email or the informed consent, in order to avoid discouraging interested participants. Data of participants who did not meet the criteria were discarded in post. I excluded any person who has been on a trip to one location for more than 11 months, as it exceeds the operational definition of “short-term” missions.

However, in the case that the participant had been on more than one STM, I added their time spent on each trip to calculate a total number of weeks spent in cross-cultural interaction.

Southeastern University students were chosen as the target population because they were the population most easily available to the researchers, and because STM is a popular and widely esteemed activity among this population.

### **Instruments**

The instrument used to measure ethnocentrism was adapted from a survey developed by Boris Bizumic et. al, for use in their research and subsequent journal article, “A cross-cultural investigation into a reconceptualization of ethnocentrism.” Bizumic personally gave me permission to use and adapt his measure for this project. I developed my adaptation by going through Bizumic’s survey and adding a few extra items I found relevant according to the literature review, re-wording a few items to make them more applicable to this project, and adding a number of distractor items. These distractor items were related to experiences on the mission field, the impact these experiences had on the participant, and the participant’s ideas of the church’s role in poverty alleviation. While these items seemed on-topic within the context of the rest of the survey, they were not predictors of ethnocentrism and were weighted as “0” on the

survey. I included distractor items so that participants would believe that they were responding in a survey about their worldview in relation to missions, as opposed to ethnocentrism, in order to avoid having participants purposefully answering questions in ways they believed they should be answered.

In addition to these adaptations made to the specific items themselves, I also added questions to help me divide the participants into the control and various experimental groups. Students who answered “I have never been on a short-term mission trip to a different country, but I have attempted to go on a trip in the past” or “I have never been on a short-term mission trip to a different country, but I plan on going in the future” were placed in the control group. Students who answered, “I have been on a short-term mission trip to a different country” were then taken to a page that asked them about where, when, and for how long they went on mission trips. This information helped me sort those participants into the three experimental groups. Responses from students who chose, “I have never been on a short-term mission trip, and I have no interest in participating in one” were removed from the data pool.

A copy of the measure can be found in Appendix D.

## **Procedures**

### **Recruitment.**

Participants were recruited using an invitation email sent out through the Academic Affairs office to the students of Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. The email did not contain any criteria for participating, but the informed consent at the beginning of the survey stated that by taking the survey, students are certifying that they are a consenting participant, at least 18 years of age, and a Southeastern University student. A reminder email was sent to students through Student Life after 2 weeks.

**Data collection.**

Data was collected using an online survey using Survey Monkey. The survey first had an informed consent page (a copy of which can be found in Appendix C), then a page that gathered information about the participants' past missions experience. Then the survey items (created from a version of Boris Bizumic's ethnocentrism measure and revised with permission) followed, with each item being either an indicator of ethnocentrism (15 items), contrait (13 items), or distractor (15 items). Ethnocentrism items were weighted: Strongly Agree (2), Agree (1), Disagree (-1), Strongly Disagree (-2), and N/A or unsure (0). Contrait items were weighted in reverse. Distractor items were weighted "0" for each possible response. 152 participants began survey responses, and 125 (82%) finished the survey all the way through, and unfinished responses were removed from the data pool.

**Data analysis.**

Data was exported to an Excel file and participants were grouped by hand into the control (represented by 0), EG1, EG2, and EG3 groups, based on the cumulative length of time students reported spending on the mission field, and the criteria listed for each group in the "Revised Research Design" section. Unfinished responses were removed; in addition, one response was removed because it was ambiguous regarding how much total time the participant had spent on the field, making it impossible to accurately place the response in an experimental group. Responses to weighted items were added for a raw score for each participant and matched with the corresponding group. Using IBM SPSS Statistics (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), data was analyzed using an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance).

**Ethical considerations.**

To assure that experimental ethics were upheld and privacy of the participants was respected, collected data was completely anonymous and responses could not be linked to the individual. Individual responses were never published or presented in any way. Survey participation was completely voluntary, and the informed consent stated that by taking the survey, the participant indicates that they consent to participate, they are at least 18 years of age, and they are a student at Southeastern University.

Deception was not technically used, although information about the true nature of the experiment was withheld; participants were told the experiment was to learn more about how short-term missions trips impact participant worldviews. This is not untrue, although the experiment actually specifically measured ethnocentrism. In the invitation email, students were informed that they could request a copy of the results if they desired. Those who are interested will receive a copy of the final product.

To avoid invasion of students' email inboxes, the invitation email contained a CAN-SPAM statement, which provided students with an option to not receive any additional emails regarding the experiment. No students requested to be removed from the list.

## Chapter Four: Results

### Descriptive Statistics

After unfinished and ungrouped responses were removed from the data pool, there were a total of 124 responses to the survey. Because of the design revision (explained in Chapter 3), there were sufficient responses in each of the four groups.

In the control group, “0”, in which participants desired to go on a mission trip but had never been on one, there were a total of 42 participants. The mean raw score for Group 0 was -22.50, and the standard deviation was 9.064.

In EG1, in which participants had been on an international short-term mission trip for a lifetime total of 2 weeks or fewer, there were a total of 40 participants. The mean raw score for EG1 was -22.45, and the standard deviation was 13.334.

In EG2, in which participants had been on an international short-term mission trip for a lifetime total of over 2 weeks but no more than 4 weeks, there were a total of 21 participants. The mean raw score for EG2 was -28.00, and the standard deviation was 11.640.

In EG3, in which participants had been on an international short-term mission trip for a lifetime total of over 4 weeks, there were a total of 21 participants. The mean raw score for EG3 was -26.33, and the standard deviation was 10.214.

For the total sample of 124 responses, the mean raw score was -24.06 and the standard deviation was 11.312.

An “ideal,” a non-ethnocentric response would yield a raw score of -56. So, the group EG2 had the least ethnocentric response (closest to the “ideal”) at a mean of raw scores of -28. The group with the most ethnocentric mean of raw scores was EG1, at -22.45.

**Data Analysis: ANOVA**

The data were analyzed using an ANOVA (analysis of variance). The type of statistical test was an F test. The analysis compared the means of the four groups and examined the variance between the bell curves compared with the variance within each curve (variance between treatments/variance within treatments).

The ANOVA produced a test statistic of  $F=1.697$  (df between groups=3, df within groups=120). These results were not statistically significant; the p value (sig) was 0.171 ( $p>0.05$ ), whereas ideally it would be .05 or less ( $p<0.05$ ). In other words, there is a 17.1% chance that these results would have surfaced by chance, and in the field of experimental psychology, results are considered significant only if there is less than 5% chance that results occurred by chance. The hypothesis was not upheld.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### Possibilities for Error and Limitations

My hypothesis was that time spent interacting directly with nationals would negatively impact ethnocentrism in participants—as time spent on a trip went up, ethnocentrism would go down. The results of this experiment did not reveal such a trend. The means of the raw scores of EG2 and EG3, those who spent more time overseas, were overall less ethnocentric than those of EG1 and the control group, but these results were not statistically significant enough to have not happened by chance.

There are a number of factors in this experiment that may have had an effect on the outcome, possibly preventing this experiment from finding accurate results. Firstly, the experiment design may have not been sufficiently sensitive to detect certain information, which in turn may have affected the data. The survey was set up to gather information from participants regarding their most recent mission trip. However, because of the issues surrounding my original design (see Chapter 3 for details), I decided to group participants according to their lifetime total of intercultural missions experience, rather by their experiences within the last year. There was nothing on the survey that said to report only the most recent trip, but there was also no instruction to report every trip that participants had ever been on. Because the decision to alter the method of grouping participants was made after responses were collected, the survey did not specifically instruct participants to report their total lifetime experience in missions. Therefore, there is a possibility that a few participants reported only a portion of their total missions experience. From the appearance of the responses, most participants reported their total experience, but some participants who only reported one trip may have been on others, but reported one trip because it was most recent. The survey did not

instruct participants either way. The lack of responses I had that met the criteria for my original EG2 (3-6 weeks within the last year) caused a limitation that left me with no reasonable option but to alter the criteria for EG1, 2, and 3. Perhaps repeating the experiment using a larger sample with a greater response rate, so that the original EG2 could be used, would yield different results. Another way to solve this is to repeat the experiment using the revised design, but using clear instructions in order to ensure that participants accurately reported their entire intercultural experience history accurately.

Another limitation that this experiment may have arises from the assumptions of the variable term “time spent.” Originally, I would have liked to have missions participants keep a log of time they spent interacting directly with people of a different culture during their trip. This would have ensured a more accurate measure of how much time was actually spent interacting interculturally. Because I was limited on time, resources, money, and willing participants, I was unable to conduct the experiment in this manner. Instead, I reasoned that the longer the STM lasted, the more time the participant likely spent interacting with nationals. This is a reasonable assumption; however, there is a definite possibility of inaccuracy, since not all STMs are “created equal.”

Hypothetically speaking, for instance, one person may have been on STMs for a total of 3.9 weeks, which would place them in EG2, and another person may have been on STMs for a total of 4.1 weeks, which would place them in EG3. Based on the report of trip length, I assumed that the person who went for 3.9 weeks (meeting EG2 criteria) spent less time interacting with nationals than did the person who went for 4.1 weeks (meeting EG3 criteria). There is a possibility, however, that the person in EG2 obtained a greater number of intercultural interaction hours than the person in EG3, due to specific trip factors. One of these factors may

include “free days.” Many STMs include “free days,” on which missionaries spend time touring the country with their American team, and some trips naturally have more free days than others. Because the survey did not ask participants to report how many free days they had, nor did it ask for an estimated number of hours of intercultural interaction, it is possible that the person in EG2 had more overall hours of intercultural interaction than did the person in EG3. In addition to free day factors, other variables may influence the actual number of hours spent. For example, imagine a team stays in Western-style hotel, whereas another team stays with a number of national host families. If these two teams stay in country for 3 weeks each, they will certainly not have the same amount of intercultural interaction; the team staying with the host families will be likely to accumulate more hours than the team staying in the hotel. In this way, longer trips may be deceiving—they may allow for fewer hours of interaction with nationals than shorter trips, simply due to trip specifics. For this study, I had limited access to detailed information about trip specifics and exact data concerning the number of hours spent in intercultural interaction. It would not be unfruitful to conduct a similar study using a different way of measuring “time spent interacting directly with nationals.”

### **Factors That May Impact Ethnocentrism**

This experiment is inconclusive in regards to trip length impacting ethnocentrism levels in STM participants. The study did not yield a statistically significant relationship between the two. However, this certainly does not indicate that ethnocentrism and time spend overseas are unrelated. In addition, many factors other than trip length and time spent interacting with nationals are likely to impact ethnocentrism. When considering factors that could decrease ethnocentrism in STM, it is important to consider and investigate these factors as well.

**Specific amount of time spent.**

The length of STM trips does not necessarily convey the accurate number of hours spent in intercultural interaction. Some trips may last for a longer amount of time, but may contain fewer hours of intercultural interaction than shorter trips, due to specific trip factors. These factors may include room and board situations, hours spent doing ministry per day, the type of ministry, the size of the team, the number of free days, and the way in which free time is spent.

Issues of room and board were discussed in the previous section; many STM living situations allow for more intercultural interaction than others. Also, some teams may spend only 2 or 3 hours per day doing ministry among nationals, whereas others may spend 8 or more hours per day. In addition, some teams may participate in service projects such as building, painting, gardening, or cleaning with other members of their missions team; these service forms of ministry often do not include as much intercultural interaction as other forms of ministry, such as Bible studies, English teaching, door to door evangelism and prayer ministry, or children's programs. The size of the STM team is also a factor that may influence "time spent." Larger teams often spend less one-on-one time with nationals because there are so many social relationships developing within the American team, which can become a priority over or a distraction from developing intercultural relationships. Smaller teams tend to build stronger and more personal relationships with nationals. The concept of "free days" was also previously discussed. Some STMs may take more free days than others, as some tourism sites are further from the site of ministry and require more travel, or because some nations have more tourist attractions than others. The more free days a trip has, the less time the team is likely to spend in intercultural interaction. Regarding free time, there are many varying ways STM teams spend free time after a day of ministry. Some may spend this time socializing only with their team,

while others might spend this time playing with national children or socializing with national ministry partners or translators. All of these variables (and more) have an influence on the total number of hours spent interacting with people of a different culture, and cannot be measured by simply examining trip length.

In addition to these factors regarding time spent on the mission field, this study only examined short-term missions experiences lasting less than 11 months. There is a possibility that a decreasing trend in ethnocentrism could be seen as a result of longer-term missions (over 11 months). Additional studies are necessary to investigate these specifics.

### **Quality of time spent.**

One variable that may influence ethnocentrism levels in STM participants is the fact that not all “time spent” is of equal value. Depending on the type of ministry, STM participants on one team may spend their time with nationals in very different ways from other STM teams. Simply being in the presence of people of a different culture may not have the same influence on participants’ perspectives as spending higher quality time with them. For instance, many teams may spend time playing games with children, hugging the younger ones, playing hand games with older ones, and organizing sports. Many times these children do not speak English, and so communication is limited. Oftentimes, even when the games are fun and even when a true connection is made between the missionaries and children, missionaries leave without even knowing the names of the children they were interacting with. This situation poses a stark difference from a team who organizes a program for children whom they see every day, utilizing translators, learning the children’s names, and building relationships. It seems likely that the second situation would provide higher quality time, and may possibly have a different impact on ethnocentrism than the first situation. Language barriers and quality of the time spend with

nationals would be an important variable to investigate. When communication is limited due to language barriers, there is only so much new and fresh cultural understanding that can arise. Because ethnocentrism is a factor that is found in connection with misunderstanding and false assumption, socializing with people sans language barrier would no doubt lead to a higher level of understanding and therefore a possible lowering of ethnocentrism, as opposed to the alternative of language-blocked communication, which may not lead to the same increased understanding. Additional studies examining how the quality of the time spent with nationals impacts ethnocentrism would be beneficial.

**Pre-existing attitudes.**

Participants' pre-existing attitudes toward other cultures and motivations for participating in STM may have an influence on the measured ethnocentrism levels. STM participants may begin their missions experience with ethnocentrism levels that are higher or lower due to pre-existing attitudes that result from past experiences and personal background. In addition, motivation for joining an STM team may be an influencing factor, and reasons for participating in any volunteer work vary greatly from person to person. Studies on the motivations for volunteering have revealed that people rarely volunteer (or participate in STMs) purely out of altruistic motivation. More often, there exists a combination of selfish and selfless factors in volunteering (Clary & Snyder, 1999). The particular combination of motivations for each individual will vary, which indicates that this motivation-combination may have an impact on ethnocentrism levels. For more information on motivations for volunteering, see the "Motivations for Intergroup Altruism" section on page 11. These variables—pre-existing attitudes and motivations for volunteering—may have influenced the measured ethnocentrism

levels of participants in this study. Likewise, studies regarding these factors and their resulting influence on ethnocentrism levels may yield significant results.

### **Personality factors.**

As discussed in Chapter 2, personality traits have been empirically shown to have an impact on ethnocentrism. People who are categorized as having “authoritarian personalities,” particularly the trait of “rigidity” tend to be more ethnocentric than others who do not display these traits (Adorno et al., 1950; Rokeach, 1948). Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) in personality is also a possible predictor of ethnocentrism (Pratto et al., 1994). Although personality is not completely to blame for the existence of ethnocentrism, it has been shown to be an influencing factor. Individual STM participants’ personalities are likely to play a part in creating the overall ethnocentrism score of the individual. Because of this, it would not be wise to ignore the variable of personality while analyzing results of any study regarding ethnocentrism. Conducting a study regarding STM participant personalities and how they may correlate with ethnocentrism levels may be fruitful.

### **Team attitudes and culture.**

Each STM team is composed of individuals who are brought together for some common purposes, but one STM team will look very different from another. Leaders of STM trips often foster a certain “team culture” among their participants. This team culture may encompass many things, from the purposes the team agrees to work towards, to the type of interaction that is encouraged or not encouraged among team members, to strategies for ministry. Because different STM teams will naturally create different team cultures, some cultures may promote ethnocentric attitudes more than others. This ethnocentrism-within-team-culture might be instigated or perpetuated by the either leader of the group, the organization sponsoring the trip,

or the attitudes of the individuals themselves. Studies regarding ethnocentric attitudes within STM team cultures would be likely to yield important results. The team culture variable may have certainly impacted the ethnocentrism of participants in this study as well.

#### **Location visited.**

The location the STM team visits may also be a variable when looking at ethnocentrism. Teams that work in countries or cultures that are similar to their cultural background (for instance, American teams working in Canada, Ireland, or the UK) may experience fewer challenges to their worldview. Naturally, Canada, Ireland and the UK have cultural aspects that differ greatly from the United States, but these differences are arguably fewer and less impactful than the differences between the United States and an Eastern country like India. Students in this study who visited cultures that were radically different from their own may have different ethnocentrism levels than those who visited cultures that are more similar to their own. Further research regarding this variable would be worthwhile.

#### **Training and debriefing.**

Training and debriefing are important tools in STM. Many teams undergo intensive, multi-day cultural and ministry training before embarking on a trip overseas, while others have a meager 2-hour session to brief them on cultural taboos and ministry tools. Cultural and ministry training no doubt have a significant impact on ethnocentrism as well. If participants were taught to think critically about their own culture perceptions and social constructions, perhaps they would be more likely to experience a lowering of ethnocentrism over the course of their expedition. In addition, quality pre-trip training helps STM participants to more effectively deal with culture shock they experience upon entering the field, and helps them avoid making mistakes as a result of this culture shock. Some STM programs offer training like this, while

others offer the minimum. Certainly the depth of training that the participants in this study received may have been a variable that affected their ethnocentrism levels, and this particular experiment did not include a mechanism to assess this.

Debriefing, another important STM concept, helps teams to process what they have seen around the world, and to take the things they learned about ministry and apply them to their everyday lives at home. Spiritual benefits set aside, debriefing has the potential to play an important part in preventing ethnocentric ideas from solidifying post-trip. Many individuals' reactions to the poverty they see overseas is limited to a feeling of gratefulness that they do not have as little as the poor people they saw on their trip. Participants may go through life with a stronger sense of gratefulness and resistance to taking blessings for granted, but this attitude can turn sour when it turns to Relative Gratification (RG), a mental practice that has been shown to positively correlate with prejudice. Proper debriefing could help participants to process the poverty they saw in a healthier, less ethnocentric manner, which could help prevent development of RG. For more on the dangers of RG and various studies regarding the concept, see Chapter 2.

Training and debriefing are both strong variables that may have affected ethnocentrism levels in the participants. Further study regarding training and debriefing and how much they impact ethnocentrism, as well as how they can be used effectively to prevent or lower ethnocentrism, would be beneficial.

### **Summary: Furthering This Research**

This specific study did not yield significant results, and this could be due to limitations on the study, the complexity of ethnocentrism as a concept, or a combination of both. There is a possibility that the length of the trip really does not have any impact on ethnocentrism, but because previous studies do indicate that time spent interacting with the out-group helps to lower

ethnocentrism (see Chapter 2), this conclusion should not be drawn until this study has been repeated or modified. This discussion has covered both the limitations of this study and the complexity of ethnocentrism and the variables that may influence it. It has also described possibilities of replicating or expanding upon this study. In summary, here is a list of ideas for research that could effectively replicate or expand on this research:

- Repeat this study, but ensure that participants are reporting the full extent of their missions experience.
- Repeat this study, but instead of using a survey, have participants record the exact number of hours spent interacting (to get a more accurate “time spent” variable, instead of simply “trip length”).
- Conduct a study that examines variables such as room and board specifics, size of team, and number of free days and how these things affect “time spent.”
- Conduct a study that examines the quality of the “time spent”—i.e. severity of language barriers, the type of interaction, or the depth of the intercultural relationships—and how this may or may not affect ethnocentrism.
- Conduct a study that examines pre-existing attitudes, how they impact ethnocentrism, and how they may or may not change as a result of STM.
- Conduct a study that examines motivation for participating in STM and if this correlates with ethnocentrism levels.
- Conduct a study regarding different STM participant personalities and how they may correlate with ethnocentrism levels.
- Conduct a study that examines team culture and how ethnocentrism may be perpetuated through team attitudes and attitudes of team leaders.

- Conduct a study that examines whether locations visited on an STM (radically different culture versus similar culture) have different effects on ethnocentrism.
- Conduct a study regarding training and debriefing and how much they impact ethnocentrism, as well as how they can be used effectively to prevent or lower ethnocentrism.

Replicating and expanding upon this study is vital because ethnocentrism can be harmful when combined with ministry, and it is important to know how to lower ethnocentrism levels when conducting short-term missions and poverty alleviation efforts. This study has demonstrated that simply going on longer short-term trips does not necessarily positively impact ethnocentrism in participants. It seems there are many more factors involved.

## Appendix A: Application

### **The Limit of Good Intentions: The Need to Lower Ethnocentrism for Effective Ministry**

Short-term missions (STM) have exploded in popularity within the Western Christian church movement, and the phenomenon is here to stay. Many positive outcomes may result from STM when they are conducted strategically and wisely, but likewise there are many hazards to unwise conduct in STM. It is very possible that the people behind STM will not only hurt the people they want to help, but also hurt themselves. One obvious factor is the millions of dollars American church members spend on STMs—an astonishing \$1,600,000,000 in 2006 alone (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). If this money is used unwisely in STM, then the church is wasting precious resources, despite our calling to good stewardship. However, there are other ways in which ethnocentrism in STM can hurt participants as well as the target ministries.

In their book *When Helping Hurts*, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert discuss very real issues with the West's poverty alleviation tactics, which often fail due to a misunderstanding of what poverty really is. The monetarily blessed people of the world tend to define poverty as a simple lack of materials. The poor around the world do not see their predicament in this way. They express feelings of uselessness to society, helplessness to change their situation, a loss of meaning, and social despair. Poverty reaches far beyond just a lack of material wealth—it permeates every area of life, creating poverty of spiritual intimacy, poverty of being, poverty of community, and poverty of stewardship (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009). Each of these categories may result in material lack, but this lack is just a symptom, not the underlying disease. Unfortunately, many Western poverty alleviation efforts are propelled by this misdiagnosis, and they begin to treat the wrong disease. They are using their own cultural understanding to measure and evaluate situations in other cultures: the very definition of ethnocentrism.

Paternalism, an attitude that sometimes accompanies ethnocentrism, is important to avoid in both missions and general humanitarian aid. This is vital for effective outcomes. This avoidance of paternalism is defined by Corbett and Fikkert as not doing things for people that they can do for themselves. There are many types of paternalism that are often seen in cross-cultural ministry, and one of these is labor paternalism, which is seen extremely frequently in shorter STMs. Corbett and Fikkert give this example of labor paternalism:

“I remember going on a spring break mission trip...I will never forget the sick feeling I had as I stood on a ladder painting a house while the young, able-bodied men living in the house sat on the front porch and watched. I did so much harm that day. Yes, the house got painted, but in the process I undermined these people’s calling to be stewards of their own time and talents. It might have been better if I stayed home for spring break, rather than to have gone and done harm” (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009).

When we go on STMs and do for people what they could do themselves, we diminish their own sense of usefulness, worth, and competency, thus worsening their poverty (by the true definition), thus doing harm to them and to ourselves, and wasting our time, money, and resources. When we bring outside material goods to the poor, we take business away from the shopkeeper down the street who is also trying to dig himself and his family out of poverty. So then, are we really helping the community, or are we further destroying hope?

### **Learning From Past Mistakes**

Understanding the true definition of poverty is just one of many ways to begin to avoid ethnocentrism in STM and poverty alleviation. Learning from the mistakes of past ministries is another important way to avoid repeating the same mistakes in current situations.

**The Azusa Street Revival.**

Ethnocentrism can take a fruitful ministry started with good intentions and cause it to lose its effectiveness, or not reach its full desired effect. One example of this can be seen in one of American Christianity's most paramount revivals, the Azusa Street Revival. William Joseph Seymour was the pastor of the Azusa Street Mission of Los Angeles, California, and the revival made its so-called "public debut" on April 18, 1906 (Robeck, 2006). Seymour was the son of African American slaves, hailing originally from southern Louisiana. The historical context of the Azusa Street Revival was one still very much soaked in racism; it began during the era of segregation, a mere forty-one years after the last shot of the Civil War was fired. At first, however, racism did not seem to show its face at the revival: "the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the black and the white, male and female" all gathered together to seek the presence of God (Robeck, 2006). People of all races, "blacks, whites, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians" were all touched at the revival (Woodley 2001). The multi-ethnic, multi-racial nature of Azusa Street gave the revival strength and credibility. However, if this was God's way of giving the American church a chance to "lift the curse of racism and ethnocentrism from our land" (Woodley, 2001), then the church missed it. Some of the clergy involved, such as Charles Fox Parham, did not support mixing of races at Azusa Street. Leaders like Parham and others were the cause of division in the Azusa Street Mission, and this damaged the unity and freedom experienced during the revival. Many factors contributed to the "cooling of the fire" on Azusa Street, but many believe that ethnocentrism and racism were major contributors (Woodley, 2001). The Azusa Street Revival was, despite these issues, successful and it birthed the American Pentecostal movement, but it was negatively affected by ethnocentric attitudes of a few who were not comfortable with a mixed-race atmosphere. The Pentecostal movement may

have begun with racial and cultural unity, but it did not stay that way for long. If it had, even more good would no doubt have been accomplished by that unity.

While the Azusa Street Revival may have lost effectiveness due to ethnocentrism, other ministries may not reach their desired effect. Many times ethnocentrism can hold back well-intentioned efforts, weakening what, in theory, was a strong cause. Trying to solve a problem ethnocentrically is like trying to attack an enemy from only one angle; the attack may work in some ways, but it is not likely to be fully successful.

### **Kony 2012.**

On March 5, 2012, an American non-governmental organization called Invisible Children Inc. launched a social media movement that spread rapidly across the globe, reaching over 100 million hits in just six days (Mayeda, 2012). The movement, known as “Kony 2012,” began as a 30-minute Internet film, which went viral within two days after the campaign was launched. The purpose of Kony 2012, as well as Invisible Children, is to raise awareness about, and ideally end the violent conflicts in central Africa and Uganda caused by a rebel group known as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Invisible Children desires to see freedom for child soldiers and safety for civilians tormented by the LRA in central Africa, and the purpose of the Kony 2012 campaign is to make Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, “a household name.” Anyone who has been involved in activism and human rights movements of any kind will know that awareness is one of the most powerful tools in ending atrocities...or is it?

The Kony 2012 video is extremely well made, emotionally stirring, and strategically filmed. The talent of those involved in the film-making is undeniable—images of hurting children and mutilated faces are carefully and tastefully placed, the conflict is explained in a simple and straightforward manner, and footage of creator Jason Russell and his young son

Gavin is dispersed throughout, creating a personal appeal to Americans that says, “this little American boy is just like these little African boys. If you care about your American children, should you not care about children in Uganda?” Young Gavin expresses a “clear” understanding that Joseph Kony is evil, and he must be stopped. If the evil of the LRA is so obvious to Gavin, it ought to be obvious to “Kony” viewers as well. The film calls upon these viewers to “make Kony famous,” and to spread his name across the nation in order to stir up interest to stop the LRA and free the child soldiers. The emotional appeal of the film is pure genius. Invisible Children did all the right things to stir up American emotions—they used popular songs, personal appeals, good humor, cute kids, and horrific images. But if anything is to change in Uganda, it must be remembered that human rights issues are not just about emotions, and they are certainly not just about Americans.

Only a few weeks after “Kony 2012” was released on the Internet, civilians in northern Uganda had still not seen the film. A screening was organized in a town called Lira, and many Ugandans came to see what all the commotion was about. As they watched, they responded at first with puzzlement. The film began with information about technology and social media, and the personal stories of the Russell family; Ugandans were not sure, at first, what the film was even about. Soon enough the film revealed its purpose, and the Ugandans were even more confused. Joseph Kony had not been active in northern Uganda for five or six years now. Soon their puzzlement turned to anger. The crowd began to throw stones at the screen, yelling, and then dispersed. Reporter Malcolm Webb comments, “Kony 2012 may be the most watched video on YouTube this year, but it clearly doesn’t resonate with many of the people it claims it’s meant to help” (Webb, 2012).

Many Americans may be shocked and confused at this reaction from Ugandan people. The West has heard their cries, they are ready and willing to help, and they will “stop at nothing” as they fight to end the war, so why are Ugandans angry? Americans react this way because *Kony 2012* was made for them; it was made by Westerners, who created it to appeal to and stir up Westerners. The film was made for a Ugandan cause, but it was not made for Ugandans. “[*Kony 2012*] does not open with content focusing on Ugandans. Instead, the video opens with roughly four minutes of life from an overwhelmingly Caucasian point of view. And although the video reframes focus from time to time, presenting Ugandan voices, it maintains a strong western perspective,” writes David Mayeda (2012). Jason Russell and *Invisible Children* are good people who care genuinely about Africa and the struggles that people are facing there. Russell undoubtedly knows a lot about the LRA, since he has devoted his life to fighting their evils. However, no matter how pure and good the filmmakers’ intentions are, and no matter how emotional Americans get after viewing *Kony 2012*, the campaign is riddled with ethnocentrism.

The purpose of *Kony 2012* was to raise awareness about child soldiers, the LRA, and the wars in central Africa, and it most certainly did in the sense that Kony has indeed become a household name and a known villain. However, the campaign had “simultaneous success and failure...in raising awareness” (Wilkerson, 2012), due to the fact that it only presented one side of the conflict in Uganda—the American side. The *Kony 2012* video stirred thousands of Americans to action, bringing attention to the issue and directing action towards central Africa, but saying that it truly raised awareness may be a stretch of the truth. The war in Uganda—which has already moved to Central African Republic, Sudan, and Democratic Republic of the Congo—has been raging for years. A war raging for years means that many of the child victims of the LRA, who are presented as “the good guys” in the film, have grown up, and they have

now become the bad guys. Kony 2012 fails to draw attention to this complexity. Sending kidnapped children home is not the “finish line” of this cause. The kidnapped children have grown up, and they are the new LRA, and are now kidnapping other children to become soldiers. A war raging for years also means that the Ugandan government has been active in their efforts to stop the violence for over 25 years (Wilkerson, 2012), and has not simply been sitting back and crying, hoping for a hero to come in and save the day. They have been working diligently, using extensive knowledge and expertise from their own context—as opposed to a foreign one—to stop the LRA. But Kony 2012 implies that Ugandan expertise is not good enough, and that Uganda needs a hero, “and who are the heroes? The ‘white knights’ with all their privilege coming in to save the day are westerners” (Mayeda, 2012).

Despite a truly noble cause, and an undoubtedly strategic game plan, Invisible Children presented a helpless Africa in Kony 2012. Rosebell Kagumire is a blogger from Uganda. A few days after Kony 2012’s release, she posted a video blog on YouTube discussing her personal response to the video. Hearing from Kagumire is perhaps one of the clearest looks a Westerner can take into the minds of those Ugandans who threw stones during the showing of the film in Lira that day. She points out the complexities behind the conflict involving the LRA: “The war was more than just an evil man killing children. The war is much more complex than just one man called Joseph Kony” (Kagumire, 2012). The LRA has moved on to other, lesser known nations such as Central African Republic, which the film does not mention, sacrificing accuracy in order to avoid distraction from their pitch (Wilkerson, 2012). In fact, the LRA has not been active in Uganda in years, and the situation has greatly improved there (Kagumire, 2012); the Kony 2012 film came about 5 or 6 years too late, but admitting this in the film would have distracted from the sense of urgency that the filmmakers attempted, and succeeded, to create.

Kagumire's video also draws attention to local initiatives to end war. Ugandans have not been sitting cluelessly for years wondering what to do; this war is not being ignored in Africa, and just because the West is ignoring something does not mean that the whole world is. The classic portrayal of "helpless Africa" is hurtful and harmful, and a tragically ethnocentric point of view that so many good-hearted and well-meaning charities fall into time and time again. Kagumire has sobering and convicting words on this subject: "How you tell the story of Africans is much more important than what the story is. If you are showing me as voiceless, as hopeless, you have no space telling my story. You shouldn't be telling my story if you do not believe I also have the power to change what is going on" (2012).

Focusing on the power of the outsider to magically come in and change Uganda completely ignores, disempowers, and undermines longstanding Ugandan efforts to end a war that, after all, they know much more about. Invisible Children was not wrong to start the Kony 2012 campaign. They were not wrong to attempt to raise awareness about the issue. But if raising awareness is the goal, it should be done accurately and holistically, not ethnocentrically. Ethnocentrism never helps, and in the worst case, it hurts. Invisible Children's website provides a summary of a lot of good that has been done in the year 2012, so to say the campaign was a failure would not be accurate. However, no matter how much "progress" has been made thanks to the United States, if the tool Americans used to make this progress happen was rooted in ethnocentrism and presents Africans as helpless and therefore inferior, then they are not really partnering with Uganda in the end. In the end, Americans who believe their way of life is superior and love feeling like heroes often patronize others, while Ugandans throw rocks at our images of pride. And in the end, Joseph Kony and his army are still out there, and the war in central Africa rages on.

## Summary

Experiencing compassion and empathy is a part of what makes us human. When people from a wealthier and more privileged community become aware of the sufferings and oppressions that affect people in a poorer community, they feel the urge to help change the situation. Without these impulses to help one another, the world would contain even more pain and suffering than it already does. As Christians, we desire that all people experience the hope and joy we find in Christ, and we seek to be a tool that God uses to further and strengthen the spiritual experiences of the people around us. If we did not desire to share this love with others, then we surely do not possess any love for these others in the first place. Both the desire to share faith and the desire to alleviate poverty and suffering are important factors in the Christian experience.

When we conduct these activities cross-culturally, however, some dangerous dynamics arise. Many times, people who believe they are helping are actually causing detriment to others due to their cultural misunderstandings and prejudices. This is ethnocentrism: seeing the world through only one cultural lens, and using one's own culture as a frame of reference to assess, measure, and judge all other cultures. Though ethnocentrism can lead to harm rather than good, this is not to say that intercultural helping or faith sharing should be avoided—on the contrary, intercultural experiences may indeed help to lower ethnocentrism, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Whether we are participating in short-term mission trips or are devoting our lives to a long-term calling of living overseas, being aware of ethnocentrism and working hard to develop an understanding of the cultural context we are working in is vital. In the past, ministries and humanitarian aids have not reached their full potential of positive impact due to ethnocentrism. The Azusa Street Revival, despite a mighty move of God, was brought to a close partially by

ethnocentrism and racial divisions. Invisible Children's Kony 2012 campaign, despite sincere intentions, angered a lot of Ugandans and did not accomplish its true goal because it only approached the issue from one, very Western, angle. From these examples, it is clear that in any intercultural helping effort, sincerity is not sufficient for success. "Sincerity is a most seductive sentiment. To claim 'we meant well' is no excuse because sincerity is not enough. People are often sincerely wrong," writes Cedric Mayson (2010). Many STM participants use sincerity as a foundation for all they do during their short time overseas. "We built relationships," they argue. "We loved on the people and their kids. We grew in our faith." Meanwhile, much damage may actually be dispensed under this sunny surface. This vision of intercultural missions is simply not big enough. If we are going to be spending \$1,600,000,000 per year on short-term missions, we need to conduct ourselves with integrity, we need to be effective, and we need to have strategy.

### **Missions at Southeastern University: A Call to Integrity, Effectiveness, and Strategy**

Southeastern University (SEU) in Lakeland, Florida, is a truly dynamic institution. Over the course of just four years spent at the school, it is clear that there is movement, direction, and change for the better. One change that has recently been made is the enormous growth of our missions program, DestiNATIONS. The program used to just be a small club of students who were passionate about missions, but it has grown into a campus-wide phenomenon, thanks to the staff and students' value of missions, and fantastic and highly driven leadership. In the past years, hundreds of students have gone out all over the world to aid local ministries and proclaim the name of Christ. Each year there seems to be more and more growth of interest in missions on Southeastern's campus. Because of this rapid growth, it is vital that Southeastern students are

aware of the potential dangers of ethnocentrism, and the staff, the missions program, and the spiritual leaders must guide students into upright, effective, and strategic missions work.

**Integrity: Helping others is not a means to our end.**

There is a limit to what can be accomplished on a short-term mission trip. Just because a trip takes less time does not mean it takes less careful consideration; on the contrary, because STM trips are so short, they ought to require a tremendous amount of planning and focus. Southeastern seems to embrace a good guideline for STM purpose: the bettering of self and the bettering of others. In other words, the goal of an STM is to a) grow in our own ministry abilities, spiritual walk, and relationship with God, and b) help the target people to grow in these ways as well. This seems simple, but in light of all that has been discussed about ethnocentrism, it is not as easy as it sounds. The biggest trouble lies with part “b,” the betterment of others, because ethnocentrism often barges in and assumes that it knows what will better others, when actually these assumptions are ignorant at best and harmful at worst. Because it can be difficult to determine what will truly better the people we seek to help, we often focus our attentions on part “a,” bettering ourselves. Certainly this is the part that Southeastern as an educational institution is most invested in. Southeastern’s ministry is to its students primarily, and so if sending them on STMs will strengthen their faith and ministry capabilities, then the more STMs the better. This approach alone, however, demonstrates an unintentional lack of integrity. When we do short-term missions to grow in our own faith but we sacrifice the good of others in the process, we are surely missing the mark.

***What supporters hear is what supporters get.***

The reason why a singularly focused goal of STM—betterment of self—is so dishonest is because of the way students are raising support. Students do not send letters to their friends and

family that say “I want to see a different part of the world and grow in my relationship with God. Will you donate to my trip to Germany?” They do not speak at churches and say “I have always wanted to see the Alps, and by donating to my trip, you will provide me the opportunity to accomplish this dream, while spending quality time in prayer and worship with my teammates.” They do not speak in chapel and say “We are headed to Germany in order to develop a stronger ability to witness to unbelievers.” This is absolutely not how students raise funds, but this is what many of them would be saying, if they were telling the whole truth. Instead, they write letters that say “the people of Germany have abandoned their faith and their churches stand empty. Our goal is to prove to the people of Germany that Christ is still relevant. Will you donate to my trip?” They speak at churches and say “God has been stirring my heart for the people of Germany. My team and I are going to work with a youth group there and build relationships with the kids.” They speak in chapel and say “Europe is in great need of a spiritual revival. Help our team get to Germany so we can witness to a people who no longer believe that they need God.”

Every student who goes on a trip overseas desires to see another country, spend time with teammates, grow in their relationship with the Lord, and experience a grand adventure. These things are not wrong in themselves. The point at which these things become wrong is the point where they become our singular focus for missions, but we tell supporters the opposite. They become wrong when we accomplish our own personal travel goals at the expense of the people of Germany, and at the expense of the people who donate \$3500 for us to fly over there and have a grand time for a week and then fly home. It is vital, therefore, to maintain a dual focus in STM, in which we seek to better not only ourselves, but others as well. Students must be honest with their supporters about what they actually plan to do on the trip, and why they desire to go.

Even more importantly, students must develop a true desire to help and minister to the people they are visiting. By honestly examining our hearts, seeking to develop a love for the target people group, and communicating our honest and true intentions for our STM to our supporters, we are behaving with integrity.

***What ministries need is what ministries get.***

If short-term missionaries travel out of a desire to better themselves, but the ministries they partner with are expecting that a team that is interested in bettering their ministry and the native people, there is a potentially fatal miscommunication. Many STM teams plan to work with local missionaries or ministries, and until they are there in the flesh, these ministries are unaware that the teams are only coming to better themselves by growing in their own faith, having a good time, and touring a different country. These ministries are expecting hard workers, and sometimes they get a bunch of complainers, or people who are more interested in flirting and joking with other team members than they are in building intercultural relationships. Long-term missionaries are often extremely frustrated by this, because it takes a lot of work to house a visiting team, and many times they are hoping for a lot to be accomplished, when in the end it is minimal. If short-term missionaries themselves are changed for the better, but the long-term missionaries are hurting worse when they leave than they were before they got there, the STM has failed miserably. Short-term missionaries who raise support by focusing on all the good they will do but end up becoming a burden to their host contacts are not behaving with integrity. It is vital that Southeastern students understand this. In other cultures, Americans are often perceived as loud, overpowering, self-centered, and fast moving. The last thing a foreign ministry needs is a gigantic American typhoon whipping through their establishment, leaving

behind some good but taking a lot of good away with them. We need to behave honestly with our foreign contacts by actually blessing them when we tell them we plan to bless them.

***Doing good and not harm.***

In STM, we must be sure that we do not use other countries, missionaries, and ministries as a means to our own end. Coming in and steamrolling a ministry with an American brigade of egocentrism and then leaving them with no more good done than harm is not honorable, no matter how much more “spiritual” our students have become or how much closer to God they have gotten. Hurting others in order to further our own spirituality is not acting with integrity, even if we are hurting people by accident. This also pertains to bigger-picture poverty alleviation strategies. Leaders of STM trips must ensure that their trip fits within a larger framework of spiritual growth and aid for their target nation or people group. For instance, a trip focused on bringing material goods to a small village in Africa does not fit within the larger framework of helpful aid to Africa. The shoes that are being brought to the villagers for free by the team are actually putting the poor shoe salesman down the street out of business. His family will now go hungry. When planning an STM, we must not only avoid doing harm during our ministry, but we must also examine our ministry tool of choice, ensuring it is sustainable and not short-lived, supplemental and not detrimental, helpful and not harmful, culturally aware and not ethnocentric. One way to do this effectively is by partnering with quality, long-term, local ministries.

**Effectiveness: Making a lasting difference beyond our campus.**

***Building partnerships.***

In order for short-term missions to have a long-term effect, teams must partner with ministries that remain in the target country permanently. The advantages of this are endless.

First, STMs who partner with long-term ministries will have a system for discipleship already in place. Because following Christ is a journey, not a single decision made on a single day, discipleship is essential for effective ministry and lasting positive impact. Working with churches and local missionaries that already have discipleship opportunities available will ensure that the people the team ministers to receive continued guidance and spiritually enhancing relationships once the team leaves. Without discipleship, many of the accomplishments of the STM team will dissolve with time due to a lack of follow-through.

Second, partnering with long-term missionaries or local ministries will help to avoid ethnocentrism in ministry, because the people who live on the field year-round will naturally have a deeper understanding of the cultural context they work in, and can guide the STM team in their ministry. Most long-term efforts have a stronger grasp on concepts related to poverty alleviation because they see the effects of well versus poorly planned efforts all around them. They understand the culture they work in, so they know what evangelism approaches work or do not work within the context. Partnering with quality local ministries is advantageous because as STM participants follow the local ministries' lead, they will avoid making mistakes that they may have otherwise made.

Returning to aid the same nation and the same ministry repeatedly would be ideal for an institution like Southeastern, because students can then have an opportunity to maintain the relationships they built on past trips. If students return to the same nation and the same people repeatedly, this will help the students to grow in their understanding of the particular nation and ministry, causing them to minister more effectively each time, as they apply what they have learned from previous trips. It is also meaningful for the people of the target nation, because seeing the same missionary returning indicates that the relationship they built on the previous trip

meant something to the missionary. Friendship evangelism is extremely effective, but it is only effective when there is enough time for a friendship to be built. The more a team returns to the same place, the higher the relationship quality will be. Southeastern's missions program cannot ensure that students will return repeatedly to continue their relationships, but they can provide encouragement and opportunities for students to do so. Long-term ministries may also greatly benefit from a lasting partnership with Southeastern teams; sowing seed into the same ministries year after year will make a greater impact than scattering efforts sparsely across the globe.

*Screening trips.*

DestiNATIONS is a program that has experienced rapid growth in a short amount of time. Much progress has been made in expanding the scope of the ministry and the number of people involved, as well as developing organizational structures that ensure effectiveness. As DestiNATIONS grows, it is important that as a school we maintain our focus on both goals of STM: bettering ourselves and bettering others. In a program so large that is growing so quickly, it can be easy to lose sight of these goals, especially the second one, since maintaining such a massive missions program takes a lot of manpower, and leading a trip abroad takes so much hard work and logistical planning. Student leaders who begin with a desire to serve the people of a nation may find this desire drowning in the mountains of paperwork, the endless meetings, and the fundraising challenges. On top of these challenges, there remains the need to have integrity, effectiveness, and strategy in ministry, and this may be far too overwhelming to worry about when the most pressing issue is getting the plane tickets purchased. This can be frustrating for both trip leaders and student participants who desire to maintain a focus on the goal of the trip, but become lost in the details of planning. In other words, many times in a sinking ship of STM

planning, something needs to be thrown overboard, and oftentimes the focus on ministry strategy and effectiveness goes first.

DestiNATIONS undoubtedly inspects trips carefully before approving them, and this issue of avoiding ethnocentrism and striving for maximum effectiveness calls for a continued practice of screening trips; it may even call for an even greater measure of organized and careful inspection. There is far more at stake than just Southeastern students' safety and spiritual well being. Southeastern is and should continue to be a school that conducts itself in an honorable, Christ-like manner, and ensuring that ministry efforts do not cause more harm than good is an important part of continuing on this path. Student leaders are busy focusing on trip planning and logistics, as well as leading their team members in team-building activities, prayer, and fundraisers. In the process of completing these important tasks, they may put the concern for developing a helpful and not harmful ministry tool on the back burner. This is why solidifying these things before approving and sending a trip on its way abroad is so important. By guiding students through the process of leading a trip and ensuring that they have a sound plan for beneficial ministry, Southeastern's missions program can ensure that the importance of avoiding ethnocentrism in ministry is not lost in the details.

### ***Training and debriefing.***

The importance of training and debriefing was discussed in Chapter 5, and these are definitely tools that Southeastern's missions programs already make use of, and could always use even more of. Training students specifically regarding the issue of ethnocentrism would be incredibly helpful, because one of the most important ways—in fact, one of the only ways—to combat ethnocentrism is simply to be aware of its presence. If students are trained to think critically about their own cultural background, and if they have discussions about which beliefs

are raw Gospel and which beliefs stem simply from American church culture, then paternalism, self-centered “ministry,” and intercultural prejudice can possibly be evaded. It is difficult—even impossible—for a person to remove themselves completely from their cultural assumptions, but becoming aware of them is one of the best and easiest ways to ensure that these assumptions do not hinder ministry. Implementing thorough training programs for teams going out on STMs will help us to meet the goal of bettering others, and ensuring that team members receive a chance to debrief from their experience, in order to process what they have learned and apply it to their lives at home, will help to meet the goal of bettering ourselves.

**Strategy: The practical organization behind effectiveness.**

DestiNATIONS is driven by the passion and energy of a student body that is ready and willing to serve the world in the name of Jesus. Many amazing changes are already underway. A fantastic number of trips are going out over the summer and each school break. Missions experiences are at the fingertips of every SEU student, and those who have gone have returned radically changed. Strategy is what will take this passion and energy and harness it for effective use. In order to continue on in serving God on the mission field, here are some strategic methods that may help the program to thrive.

***Training manual development.***

As Southeastern students develop lasting relationships with ministries around the globe, the collective knowledge gained about each nation and each ministry is tremendous. If Southeastern missions teams begin to return to the same ministries again and again, investing time and energy into particular efforts in particular nations, a great deal of information will be gathered by the participants and trip leaders. A possible way to harness this knowledge and put it to use is the development of cultural training manuals for each nation that Southeastern returns

to, which DestiNATIONS could use to train future teams. For example, if SEU teams continue to return repeatedly to Zambia, Africa, each team can contribute what they learned about Zambian culture to a collective, constantly growing manual about Zambia, developed by Southeastern students. Perhaps a team may write in the manual, “avoid wearing cloth or rope bracelets during ministry in Zambia, because in Zambian culture these represent a token from a witch doctor, and we want to encourage the people to put their full faith in Christ.” Or perhaps they could write, “while praying for people in Zambia, be sure to invite other villagers to join you in prayer. Many Zambians feel that Jesus is the white man’s god and that they themselves cannot minister to people, because that is the missionaries’ job. Inviting them to pray with you demonstrates that they too have the power of the Holy Spirit living within them.” In this way, Southeastern students can help one another to conquer ethnocentric attitudes and avoid cultural blunders, as this would provide training material for future teams. It is also a great way to debrief from a trip; writing often helps deepen our understanding of our own experiences.

***Staff involvement.***

Universities shift and change because the student body shifts and changes. Students enter a university and then four years later they graduate and leave. The faculty, however, remain behind. This is a potentially powerful way to impact the missions program at Southeastern University. If professors became more involved in DestiNATIONS, this could be a great way to combat ethnocentrism during future trips. If one professor returned to India multiple times and gained insight about Indian culture, this is something they could share with students on future trips. The more stability and organization we have, the more strategy we can implement. Professors and other SEU staff provide stability, because as the student body shifts, the staff remains more or less fixed. The role of a professor is not only to teach, but also to provide

personal and spiritual guidance, leadership, and a Christ-like example for students. By becoming involved in the missions program, professors can do all of these things—provide leadership, wisdom, knowledge, and guidance, as well as building relationships with students on the STM team. Many professors also have extensive missions experience themselves, and this wisdom is often shared only with students who take a missions class. If professors became more involved in the missions program, this wisdom could be shared with all students who are interested in STM, whether missions is a part of their academic curriculum or not.

***Promoting further research.***

Universities are often home to groundbreaking research. As discussed on pages 37-39, there is much more research to be done regarding ethnocentrism in short-term missions. At a school like Southeastern that has such a large and thriving missions program, it would be ideal to continue this research in order to further ensure that our ministry is worth the enormous amounts of time, money, and energy we are investing into it. Research helps to stir up knowledge and awareness, and so researching about ethnocentrism in missions may draw much-needed attention to the issue.

***Supporting long-term efforts.***

Short-term missions has become a major focus at Southeastern University, but long-term missions is sometimes ignored. It is vital that we give adequate attention to the importance of long-term missions, because after all, STM is meant to supplement LTM. STM trips can do a lot, but without LTM, these efforts are not sustainable and will eventually dissolve with time. LTM ensures that the time, effort, and money poured into STM are used wisely. LTM may also act as a sort of buffer between the people and STM participants—local and long-term ministries

can aid STM participants in their culture shock and help them to harness their efforts for effective ministry.

With such a strong focus on STM, and a not so strong focus on LTM, the true identity of missions as a whole can be lost. Missions is more than a short trip overseas. For many people, it means great sacrifice as they devote their entire lives to ministering cross-culturally. Without these long-term missionaries and their diligent work, the importance of STM would be eliminated. Including long-term missions in the campus' missions culture will help students to develop a holistic understanding of cross-cultural missions. Interviewing long-term missionaries in chapel and giving students an opportunity to support them, for example, would be an effective way to draw attention to the need for long-term ministry. Even giving students a chance to monetarily bless Southeastern graduates who move overseas long-term would help broaden student perspectives of missions. Perhaps DestiNATIONS could have Southeastern alumni who are long-term missionaries speak about their ministry at Exposure or other campus events and seminars. Southeastern produces many strong, Christ-like leaders who would be of great use on the long-term mission field, and developing a greater campus focus on long-term missions in addition to short-term missions would encourage some of these graduates to commit their lives to the bigger picture of missions: a life of servitude, sacrifice, and immense joy.

### **Conclusion**

Ethnocentrism and short-term missions often come hand in hand, but they do not always have to. Becoming more aware of our own ethnocentrism and thinking critically about our own cultural assumptions can help combat this dangerous attitude and set us on the right track—the track to missions conducted with a sense of integrity, effectiveness, and strategy. At Southeastern University, a strong missions program called DestiNATIONS is growing even

stronger. The strength and ingenuity of DestiNATIONS' leadership have stirred up a terrific movement on this campus toward a global and God-glorifying ministry. Within this ministry, we must always remember the importance of understanding the perspectives of the people we are seeking to help, whether we aim to meet their physical or their spiritual needs. It is through cultural understanding that we can develop an authentic love for God's many people groups across the globe, and it is through this love that we can change the world.

**Appendix B: Invitation Email**

Dear Southeastern Students,

Do you have a heart for missions? You are invited to participate in a research study that looks at the effects of intercultural short-term mission trips on college students' worldview. Everyone is invited to participate, even if you have not been on a mission trip yet!

Please click the link to take the survey:

[link]

The survey is completely anonymous. By clicking on the link and taking the survey, you provide us permission to use your anonymous responses in our research project on worldview and missions.

Thank you so much for your help! Your feedback will help us learn more about how to improve both your missions experience and the impact you make around the world!

~Rachel Hill~

Note: If you do not wish to receive further communication about this survey, email [rahill@seu.edu](mailto:rahill@seu.edu) and type "unsubscribe" in the subject line. If you prefer to call, you may call Dr. Goodrich at 863-667-5164.

### **Appendix C: Informed Consent**

#### Information and Consent to participate

This survey is designed to gather information for a research project conducted by Ms. Rachel Hill as part of her honors thesis. The principal investigator at SEU is Dr. Rosalind Goodrich, Psychology professor in the College of Behavior and Social Sciences.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of time spent doing intercultural short-term missions on aspects of college students' worldview. This research will help us learn more about the effect of short-term missions (STM) on the how participants see the world, therefore helping us to better understand what creates positive change in the lives of STM participants and giving us the ability to create a more improved STM experience.

This survey should take only about 5 to 10 minutes of your time and will help further understanding of effective short-term missions. Please respond as truthfully as possible to the survey questions. Your individual responses will remain completely confidential and will be used and displayed only for reporting grouped results in the honors thesis.

By taking this survey, you certify that you are a Southeastern University student who is 18 years of age or older and that you consent to participate.

If you have any questions related to this survey, please feel free to contact Ms. Rachel Hill at 505-412-5121 or rahill@seu.edu and/or Dr. Goodrich at 863-667-5164 or rsgoodrich@seu.edu. If you would like a copy of the results of the study once it is finished, please email Ms. Hill to request.

Thank you so much for your participating in this important research project! This would not be possible without your help. You are much appreciated!

### Appendix D: Survey Items

#### Missions and Worldview Survey (adapted with permission from Bizumic)

The following survey deals with your worldview and attitudes in regard to ministry, your own culture, other cultures, and world missions.

Please begin by filling out the following:

I have never been on a short-term mission trip to a different country, but I have attempted to go on a trip in the past.

I have never been on a short-term mission trip to a different country, but I plan on going in the future.

I have been on a short-term mission trip to a different country.

Where did you go? \_\_\_\_\_

When? (mm/yy)\_\_\_\_\_

How long were you there for, in weeks? (do NOT include travel days)\_\_\_\_\_

Now, please mark each item with one of the following responses:

#### Response options

-2: Strongly disagree

-1: Disagree

0: Unsure/neutral

1: Agree

2: Strongly agree

Try to be as honest as you can. Remember that all survey responses are completely anonymous.

1. My experience on the mission field will change the way I live day-to-day life.
2. I would probably be quite content living in a cultural or ethnic group that is very different to mine.
3. In general, other cultures do not have the inner strength and resilience of American culture.

4. I would be willing to go on a/another mission trip to a place very different than America.
5. My experience on the mission field has changed how I look at the world.
6. I feel a very personal connection to the problem of poverty in the world.
7. I would love to have a large number of friends from completely different cultures than my own.
8. I could be disloyal to my cultural group if I disagreed with their actions.
9. It is important to limit influences from other cultures on American culture.
10. I find it difficult to be around people from very different cultures.
11. I like the idea of a society in which people from completely different cultures, ethnic groups, and backgrounds mix together freely.
12. I have observed that the American lifestyle provides more opportunities for happiness and fulfillment than the lifestyles found in many other groups around the world.
13. Life in America is of higher quality than life in other countries.
14. There is no “right” way to organize a society.
15. The majority of the world’s problems would be solved if other countries modeled themselves after American values.
16. Arranged marriage, even when the marriage is not abusive, is cruel and should not be practiced in this day and age.
17. It is the Christian church’s job to bring an end to poverty.
18. Americans could learn a lot of positive things from other cultures.
19. We should always put our interests first and not be oversensitive about the interests of other cultures or ethnic groups.
20. I would feel very uncomfortable if I felt like I smelled unpleasant.

21. It is simply not true that our culture and our customs are any better than other cultures and other customs.
22. I would be fine with being the only person from my culture in my neighborhood.
23. Americans tend to have a better moral code than other cultures and nationalities.
24. If people living in other countries could truly understand the American lifestyle and culture, most of them would want to live in American culture.
25. I think it is unnecessary to be completely and unconditionally devoted to one's cultural or ethnic group.
26. We should focus all our energy on trying to develop a greater sense of unity, community and solidarity among Americans.
27. It is not reasonable to believe that my way of life is superior to others.
28. American values, way of life and beliefs must be preserved whatever the sacrifices.
29. I would consider myself a picky eater.
30. I don't think I have any particular preference for my own cultural or ethnic group over others.
31. I do not feel that there is a ministry calling on my life.
32. We should always show consideration for the welfare of people from other cultural or ethnic groups even if, by doing this, we may lose some advantage over them.
33. If I don't get a chance to conduct my daily hygiene routine, it throws off the rest of my day.
34. In dealing with other cultures we should always be honest with them and respect their rights and feelings.
35. The world's poverty will never be completely solved no matter how hard anyone tries.

36. I would be willing to eat unfamiliar or unappetizing foods if not doing so would be considered rude.
37. People from other countries need to observe American culture and learn from it.
38. It's in an American's best interest to marry another American.
39. We need to do what's best for our own people, and stop worrying so much about what the effect might be on other peoples.
40. I feel comfortable with not showering every day.
41. I would consider home ownership a priority for my future.
42. The problems of injustice in the world are, for the most part, impossible to solve.
43. I enjoy trying new things.

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