

The Impact of a Service-Learning Design Course on White Students' Racial Attitudes

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Abstract

This study examined the racial attitudes of White undergraduates ($N = 15$) enrolled in a service-learning design studio, in which students worked closely on landscape architecture projects with residents in a low-income African American community. Using a modified consensual qualitative research method, the authors analyzed a series of guided inquiry questions at three time points and a focus group discussion at the end of the studio. This resulted in the identification of themes linked to three domains: students' hopes and expectations prior to the service-learning design studio; their experiences during the semester-long service-learning project, and their reflections about the service-learning project upon its completion. Although some participants claimed enhanced awareness of their social location, students continued to blame community members for their living conditions. These themes are discussed with regard to central concepts in multicultural psychology and education, such as racial color-blindness and White privilege, and implications for future research and multicultural service-learning courses are offered.

Introduction

The call to teach through applied experiences has been a recurring discussion within higher education (*Campus Compact*, 2003; *Duckenfield & Madden*, 2000; *Jacoby*, 1996). Service-learning is one method that has emerged as an effective way to engage students in experiential multicultural education (*O'Grady*, 1998). Referred to by various names—service-learning, civic engagement, community-based learning, immersion studio (*Kendall & Associates*, 1990)—the general philosophy is to encourage a mutually beneficial partnership between students and a community group, with students providing needed services to a community that in turn provides rich professional and personal learning opportunities for students (*National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993*; *O'Grady*, 2000). According to Barber (1992), field experiences outside the classroom that provide students with opportunities to interact with the “diversity and plurality of American life [have]

the greatest likelihood of impacting student ignorance, intolerance, and prejudice” (p. 255). Although service-learning has the potential to positively influence students’ racial attitudes, evaluation of its multicultural learning outcomes often has been neglected. In one of the few studies addressing this topic, findings indicated that White students often approached service as an act of charity (*Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2011*). In the current investigation, we examined White students’ racial attitudes throughout their participation in a service-learning project to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of a long-standing, community-based service-learning course.

The site of investigation was a landscape architecture design studio, in which students made several trips to a low-income African American community throughout the year. Community-based design studios link the skills of a design department with the concrete needs of a community (*Boyer & Mitgang, 1996*). While students provide needed services to a community, they ostensibly gain an increased understanding of the community’s social and economic history. Most often, professional skill development is the focus of evaluation efforts; however, it is also important to evaluate community-based design studios with regard to multicultural outcomes.

Multicultural Service-Learning

Multicultural service-learning is a community-based service that is attuned to diversity, equity, and the social and economic context of community concerns (*Boyle-Baise, 2002*). It is intended to provide opportunities for students to gain knowledge about groups other than their own and to recognize strengths in cultural diversity (*Boyle-Baise, 2005*). According to Allport’s contact theory (1954), intergroup prejudice is reduced when members of different racial or ethnic groups are brought together under certain conditions, such as working toward a common goal. Certain empirical studies have shown that service-learning has been associated with positive outcomes such as lower scores on modern racism (e.g., beliefs that racism against Black individuals is no longer a problem in the United States; *Myers-Lipton, 1996*) and higher intercultural sensitivity (*Fitch, 2005*). Using a retrospective case study approach, Buch and Harden (2011) found that a service-learning project contributed to the development of students’ positive attitudes and a sense of civic responsibility toward homeless individuals. In a review of the service-learning literature, Eyster, Giles, and Grey (1999) argued that service-learning reduces stereotypes, contributes to cultural and racial understanding, and enhances civic responsibility.

Furthermore, research has indicated that community partners generally are pleased with service-learning projects (*Ferrari & Worrall, 2000; Schmidt & Robby, 2002*).

In contrast, critics have expressed skepticism about bringing White middle-class students to low-income communities of color, especially when benefits to the community are unclear (*Reardon, 1998; Thompson, 1992*). Hess, Lanig, and Vaughan (*2007*), for example, explained that service-learning is predicated on a “deficit model” whereby students view themselves as the advantaged providing a service to the disadvantaged (*p. 32*); this model may perpetuate students’ negative stereotypes of community members. Hill-Jackson and Lewis (*2011*) observed a similar deficit-oriented approach among White teacher candidates who participated in service-learning at a local African American museum. Reardon (*1994*) also emphasized service-learning students’ propensity to express paternalistic attitudes (i.e., treating community members as subordinates without agency) and negative stereotypes. Although service-learning may increase students’ feelings of self-worth and moral virtue, “It may contribute little to their intellectual and practical understanding of social justice and racial inequality” (*Reardon, 1994, p. 53*).

Although service-learning leaders cannot undo the power relationships between students and community members, it is possible to “make power relationships visible” (*Green, 2003, p. 296*). One way to make power relations visible is to encourage reflection upon constructs such as structural racism and White privilege. There are several challenges to discussing racial privilege with White service-learning students. Privilege can take both active visible forms and embedded forms, which dominant group members are taught to ignore (*McIntosh, 1988*). Moreover, White, middle-class students often believe that it is impolite to acknowledge race or class directly. Students may be hesitant to reveal or discuss negative biases or feelings in service-learning contexts (*Paoletti, Segal, & Totino, 2007*). Reflecting upon her experiences as a service-learning instructor, Green (*2003*) noted that White middle-class students feared that mentioning race would make them appear racist and thus avoided discussing race. Consequently, students’ racial attitudes were left unexamined. Whiteness is a critical yet often overlooked concept in multicultural education in general including multicultural service-learning (*Hill-Jackson 2007, 2011 & Lewis, 2011*).

The Setting: East St. Louis Community Open Space Design Studio

In the current investigation, we examined the racial attitudes of White students enrolled in the East St. Louis Community Open Space Design Studio at a large predominantly White midwestern university. In the studio, landscape architecture students collaborated with community partners on design projects identified by the residents. During the time of the study, approximately 98% of the East St. Louis population was African American, and approximately 39% lived below the poverty level, as compared to the national average of 15.1% (*United States Census Bureau, 2010*). This design studio was, and continues to be, part of a larger, university-wide multidisciplinary service project engaged in technical assistance and action research. The primary objective of the design studio is to teach basic design and participatory processes. Although the design process was central to the studio, various pedagogical techniques were included to raise awareness about East St. Louis history and community development. For example, students were required to attend tours of East St. Louis to learn about its history. Although most course readings address aspects of basic design, some pertain to multiculturalism and open space (e.g., *Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995*). Students did not receive any direct instruction related to structural racism or White privilege.

The students and course instructor traveled to East St. Louis for three 2-day visits (i.e., outreach weekends) to conduct site analyses, meet with residents, attend community meetings, and participate in service projects. The first visit took place at the beginning of the semester, the second during the middle of the semester, and the final visit during the last week of classes. The instructor, an assistant professor of landscape architecture, facilitated lectures and supervised studio design. She accompanied students on all visits to East St. Louis. During outreach weekends, students worked with residents on park projects, such as designing a new plaza and revitalizing an existing park. Each project was structured as a participatory design process whereby the students proposed projects to the community, discussed residents' concerns, developed design alternatives, and then presented final plans to residents. Because many of the design projects were long-range and hypothetical, students also engaged in immediate service efforts, such as picking up trash in vacant lots or painting a community center.

Purpose and Rationale of the Present Study

With notable exceptions (e.g., Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2011), little prior research has focused explicitly on the racial attitudes of White students engaged in multicultural service-learning. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to explore these attitudes and related outcomes in one long-standing community-based design studio. Community-based learning has the potential to enhance students' sense of civic responsibility (e.g., Astin & Sax, 1998) and facilitate understandings of social justice (e.g., Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004); it also presents the possibility of reinforcing students' negative racial stereotypes (Hess et al., 2007; Reardon, 1994). Empirical investigation of this design studio has the potential to provide insight into similar community-based design projects and to enhance the benefits of multicultural service-learning for students and community members.

Method

A qualitative research approach is well-suited to examining relatively unexplored topics, especially those pertaining to multicultural issues (Ponterotto, 2010). To this end, in the current study we employed qualitative methods to examine students' experiences via two sources: (a) responses to open-ended survey items (i.e., guided inquiries) at three time points and (b) a focus group discussion at the end of the term. The research team used a modified consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005), which uses an inductive process to understand the data and relies on consensus among team members to reduce individual bias. The research team selected CQR on the basis of its effectiveness in the study of complex racial phenomena (e.g., Kim, Brenner, Liang, & Assay, 2003; Knox, Burkard, Johnson, Suzuki, & Ponterotto, 2003) and because it provides rich descriptions of phenomena during the initial stages of exploration (Hill et al., 1997). Similar to previous research, the method was modified to extend its use with data beyond individual interviews (e.g., Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, & Cabana, 2011; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008); the essential components of CQR (i.e., multiple perspectives and external auditor) were retained. In contrast to traditional CQR, we included themes in the current study that were expressed by only one or two students. These divergent perspectives represent important counter-narratives that offer a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomena of interest.

Participants

The sample included 14 self-identified White undergraduate students and one graduate student ($N = 15$; 9 men, 5 women, and 1 not-indicated). Ages ranged from 20 to 30 years ($M = 22.4$; $SD = 3.16$). All students self-identified as Christian, and all had completed at least one multicultural course at university. See Table 1 for demographic information. A subsample ($N = 5$, two women and three men) participated in a focus group discussion at the end of the semester.

Table 1. Student Participant Demographic Characteristics

| Participant Number | Gender | Age | Visit ESL | MC Courses |
|--------------------|--------|-----|-----------|------------|
| 101 | Male | 23 | Yes | Two |
| 102 | Male | 22 | No | Two |
| 103 | Female | 22 | Yes | One |
| 104 | Male | 21 | Yes | Two |
| 105 | Male | 21 | Yes | One |
| 106 | Female | 21 | No | One |
| 107 | Female | 30 | No | Three |
| 108 | Female | 20 | No | Two |
| 109 | Male | 20 | No | Two |
| 110 | Male | 23 | No | None |
| 111 | Male | 29 | No | Five+ |
| 112 | Male | 21 | No | One |
| 113 | Male | 21 | Yes | One |
| 114 | Female | 20 | No | Two |
| 115 | | | | |

Note. MC Courses = Number of multicultural courses student completed as an undergraduate student; Visit ESL = participant had visited East St. Louis prior to enrolling in the course. Where students did not provide an answer, responses are blank.

Researchers

The primary research team consisted of one White female assistant professor of counseling psychology, one White male counseling psychology graduate student, and one White female counseling psychology graduate student. An internal auditor, a White female assistant professor of landscape architecture and the instructor of the studio, was not involved in data collection nor analysis until the course was completed and grades were entered. An Iranian-Canadian female counseling psychology graduate student conducted an external audit of the preliminary data analysis. Team members primarily were interested in using an exploratory

approach to understand White students' racial attitudes. As recommended by Morrow (2005), team members openly discussed their collective antiracist bias at the onset of the study and throughout the investigation. All were aware of their assumptions that many White students at the university of interest did not understand the societal context in which the community was located and were unaware of institutional racism and White privilege in the United States. The research team remained cognizant of such bias to reduce its effects on the analysis. Consistent with CQR, team members discussed power differentials among them based on degree status, discipline, gender, and race (Hill *et al.*, 1997; Hill *et al.*, 2005). The team was dedicated to creating a respectful, egalitarian environment in which all members felt comfortable expressing their views.

Data Sources

Demographic form. A brief demographic form was used to collect information on participants' age, gender, number of undergraduate multicultural courses completed, and whether or not students had visited East St. Louis previously.

Guided inquiry questions. Guided inquiry questions have been used in previous research focusing on process (*e.g.*, Heppner, Rosenberg, & Hedgespeth, 1992) and learning (*e.g.*, Heppner & O'Brien, 1994). In the current study, guided inquiries (or open-ended questions) were designed to assess students' expectations for the course, knowledge of East St. Louis and its residents, and racial attitudes. Questions were developed through a review of the literature on White racial attitudes as well as discussions among the researchers about their prior experiences with undergraduate teaching; the internal auditor reviewed items and suggested minor changes. Students responded to different items relevant to racial attitudes and multicultural learning at each phase of data collection. In the first phase, students responded to five questions that focused on hopes and expectations (*e.g.*, "What do you expect to see in East St. Louis?" and "What do you think are the main considerations when designing the public landscape in low-income communities of color?"). In the second phase, students responded to six questions that emphasized the process of the service-learning project (*e.g.*, "What was the most meaningful part of your experience in East St. Louis?" and "Were you aware of your race while in East St. Louis? Please elaborate."). In the final phase, students responded to seven questions that required reflection on the semester-long experience (*e.g.*, "Did your involvement influence how you feel about the physical and social conditions in East St. Louis?" and "In what

ways, if any, have your views about racism changed as a result of your experience with the residents of East St. Louis?”).

Focus group protocol. As suggested by Krueger (1994) and Krueger and Casey (2000), focus group questions were designed to elicit deeper reflections on students' experiences in East St. Louis. Due to their interactive nature, focus groups are able to ascertain different kinds of information than guided inquiry questions (Krueger, 1994). In addition to stimulating deeper reflection, focus groups also may serve to triangulate findings from open-ended responses (Hill *et al.*, 1997). The semi-structured format consisted of several questions that pertained to students' (a) overall experiences in East St. Louis in comparison to their initial expectations (e.g., “How has your experience in the East St. Louis project compared to your expectations?”); (b) reflections on various aspects of the East St. Louis community and project (e.g., “How has participating in the East St. Louis project influenced your thoughts or feelings regarding the African American community?”); and (c) thoughts about their own racial attitudes and identity (e.g., “How has participating in the East St. Louis project influenced your thoughts or feelings regarding issues of race?”). The focus group protocol was developed with questions similar to the guided inquiries in order to elaborate on students' responses to the guided inquiries.

Procedure

The researchers obtained approval from the institutional review board where the data were collected. During spring semester 2005, they solicited voluntary participation for the guided inquiry questions at three time points. All students enrolled in the course completed the guided inquiries at all time points; they wrote their guided inquiry responses independently during class time. Participants completed the demographic form during the first administration. The phases of the research project are congruent with the timeline of the site visits. Two graduate students in the primary research team conducted all data collection. They administered paper and pencil guided inquiry survey packets to students on three occasions during class while the instructor was not present: (a) during the second week of class before students traveled to East St. Louis, (b) during the fifth week of class, after students' first visit to East St. Louis to work with community members, and (c) during the 16th and final week of class. Responses to open-ended questions were transcribed verbatim, and identifying information, except for gender and age of the participant, was removed. Code numbers were assigned to identify each participant during the remainder

of the investigation. The researchers did not analyze data from one African American student because the focus of the investigation was on White students' racial attitudes.

On the last day of class, students were invited to participate in a focus group, the purpose of which was to triangulate findings from open-ended responses and encourage deeper reflection. Five students expressed interest, and all were available to participate. The same graduate students who administered the surveys also conducted the focus group in a private location on campus. The audio-recorded focus group discussion lasted approximately 75 minutes. The recording was transcribed verbatim, and identifying information except for gender and code number was removed.

Data Analysis

Phase 1. During Phase 1 of the analysis, the primary research team (i.e., counseling psychology professor and two graduate students) worked collaboratively to achieve consensus on domains and common themes. First, the graduate students independently read the open-ended responses and focus group transcript several times to identify domains and common themes. Then, they presented the preliminary analysis to the second author (i.e., counseling psychology professor), who suggested several modifications. Researchers agreed upon topic domains but condensed or deleted certain themes within domains. After the design studio was completed and grades were entered, the last author (i.e., course instructor) reviewed the findings and provided feedback. The team incorporated her feedback and made minor modifications for clarity.

Phase 2. During the second phase of data analysis, the primary team presented the domains and themes to the external auditor, a graduate student who had no prior involvement with the project. She reviewed all the raw data to determine whether the domains and themes accurately reflected the data. Subsequently, she recommended deleting several themes, combining others, and revising some (e.g., clarifying the name of the theme). Upon arriving at a consensus, the team revised domain names, combined a number of themes to increase parsimony, and clarified subthemes to better reflect the data. Each investigator independently reviewed the audit and suggested minor modifications.

Trustworthiness. Data analysis addressed standards of trustworthiness via four criteria (*Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005*): credibility (e.g., examining codes that supported or contrasted

with main themes, using multiple sources of data collection, and involving multiple investigators); transferability (e.g., providing detailed descriptions of the context); dependability (e.g., using auditors); and confirmability (e.g., including participants' quotations to support researchers' conclusions).

Findings

The researchers identified three overarching domains: (a) Hopes and Expectations, (b) Experiences Throughout the Service-Learning Process, and (c) End of Year Reflections. See Table 2 for an overview of the domains and respective themes. The three domains correspond with the three time points of data collection. Within each domain, several themes emerged. Although each theme is distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. As noted above, certain counter-narratives expressed by only one or two participants are included. The participant's code number and gender follow each quotation (e.g., 101, M). Occasionally, retrospective data from the focus group are included to augment guided inquiry responses. When focus group data are featured, the participant's gender and code number (e.g., Focus Group, F1) are provided. Efforts to uphold confidentiality precluded researchers from matching focus group participants to those from the guided inquiries. In this section, we report and thematize participants' responses, whereas in the following section, we discuss and interpret the findings.

Table 2. White Students' Racial Attitudes: Domains, Themes, and Definitions

| Theme | Definition |
|--|--|
| <i>Domain 1: Hopes and Expectations (Prior to service-learning)</i> | |
| Theme 1: Gain a "real world" experience | Students identified applied professional experience as their primary motivation. |
| Theme 2: Expectations about community and its members | Students anticipated observing negative East St. Louis media representations and stereotypes they had learning previously. |
| Theme 3: Fixing East St. Louis | Students expected to solve the city's problems through service. |
| <i>Domain 2: Experiences Throughout Service-Learning Process (during service-learning)</i> | |
| Theme 1: Confirming environmental expectations | Students' negative expectations about the environment often were confirmed. |
| Theme 2: Feeling conspicuous as White person(s) in East St. Louis | Students felt noticeable on account of their Whiteness in East St. Louis. |
| Theme 3: Expressing negative emotional responses to the experience | Students expressed fear, sadness, pity, and anger. |

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|--|--|
| Theme 4: Making meaning through collaboration with community members | Students identified connecting with and learning from community members as the most meaningful part of their experience. |
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Domain 3: End of Year Reflections (after service-learning design studio)

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|---|---|
| Theme 1: Denied influence of design studio on racial attitudes toward people of color | Students stated that service-learning did not influence their racial attitudes. |
| Theme 2: "It's not my fault!" Blamed community members | Students held community members accountable for the state of East St. Louis. |
| Theme 3: Gained perspective and/or awareness of social identity | Certain students gained awareness of their social location. |

Hopes and Expectations

In the broad domain of Hopes and Expectations, three themes represent what students anticipated prior to engaging in the service-learning design studio.

Theme 1: Gaining a “real world” experience. When asked about their motivation for enrolling in the design studio, the majority of students identified applied professional experience as their primary motivation. For example, one student noted, “I chose this studio because we are going to work with the public and with the people of the community with which we are designing for. I like to interact directly with people who want the design and change” (107, F). Another participant explained:

I feel it will give me the experience of a real life project in which I am allowed to see every aspect of it. For example, I will interact with the community and then design for their needs. It will offer practical client relationships. (106, F)

Linked to the “real world” component of the design studio, students wanted to serve others and hoped to grow personally and professionally. For example, one student stated, “I think it [working in East St. Louis] will open my mind up to a larger awareness of humanity” (114, F). Another noted, “I could not only contribute my knowledge about the area, but learn new things, meet new people, and help better my community” (105, M).

Theme 2: Expectations about the community and its members. The majority of students had negative expectations about East St. Louis and its members. Students anticipated seeing “a lack of interest by the community” in general and only “a few hard-working people trying to turn things around” (109, M). They

expected to witness conditions that were consistent with media representations of East St. Louis and previously learned stereotypes. One student noted, “I expect to see what I see in pictures. Burned buildings, boarded-up houses, garbage, crime, unclean streets and neighborhoods” (108, F). Another student expected to see “lots of vacant, run down buildings and homes” (101, M). Referring to a previous experience in East St. Louis, a student reported, “I have always heard a lot of violence taking place. . . . My high school basketball team played at [a high school in East St. Louis] and were escorted into the building by guards” (102, M). Reflecting back during the focus group discussion, students likened their earlier expectations of East St. Louis to portrayals in National Lampoon’s *Vacation* (Ramis & Simmons, 1983). More specifically, they recalled a dangerous characterization of East St. Louis where the White, middle-class Griswolds were robbed when they stopped to ask for directions.

In contrast, three students expected to witness community members who took pride in their community. For example, despite her expectations to “encounter many people living below the poverty line and many dilapidated structures,” one student also anticipated “a strong sense of community” (103, F). Another expected to see “a lot of people whose optimism and spirit belongs to a better urban environment than that in which these qualities currently reside” (110, M).

Theme 3: Fixing East St. Louis. Most students demonstrated a desire for “rehabilitating” (103, F), “improving” (108, F), and “fixing” (Focus Group, F2) what they perceived to be a “misguided and unfortunate” (109, M) community. For example, one student wrote, “It would be a good learning experience to find solutions to issues [East St. Louis community members] face” (101, M). Students saw the studio as “an opportunity to improve human aspects of life” (114, F). Another student explained, “I chose this studio in order to learn strategies for turning around a misguided/unfortunate community. I want to learn how parks can help rehabilitate rundown communities” (109, M). Recalling her earlier sentiments, a focus group participant stated:

I kind of came in with this idea of how great would it be if I could solve all of East St. Louis’ problems. Not really knowing what they were, but expecting that something that I did would actually matter and make sense, and just hoping that I could accomplish something out of the studio other than just learning how to draw better

and how to communicate better, but actually finding some way to fix the problem. (Focus group, F2)

In this way, students held paternalistic notions of expecting to identify solutions for a subordinate community plagued by poverty.

Experiences Throughout the Service-Learning Process

In the broad domain of Experiences Throughout the Service-Learning Process, four themes emerged that captured students' experiences during the semester-long service-learning project.

Theme 1: Confirming environmental expectations. Several students reported that their visits to East St. Louis confirmed their negative expectations of the environment. One remarked, "There were many burnt, vacant, or boarded up homes, and many empty lots" (101, M). Another stated, "It was similar [to my expectations] in the fact that the population was mostly African American. It was also similar to expectations in the fact that the city was rather run down in certain areas" (113, M). Students primarily perceived East St. Louis as a dilapidated city, which matched their initial expectations. One student, however, was surprised that despite his negative expectations, "The parks were in better condition than [he had] thought [and] the new commercial area was really nice" (102, M).

Theme 2: Feeling conspicuous as White person(s) in East St. Louis. Almost all of the students reported feeling noticeable and out of place on account of their Whiteness. Students were aware of being the numerical minority for the first time in their lives. For example, one expressed, "I was one of 13 other White people. It was pretty noticeable we were the minority" (114, F). Furthermore, students felt they were noticeable to the community members. For example, one observed that "a lot of people were curious as to what we were doing just as I had expected, because we stood out as a big group of Whites" (101, M). Another student described, "The only other race I saw while I was there, besides our group, was a White mail carrier. I felt like an outsider" (103, F). Notably, two students also reported a change in perceptions of prejudice toward White people. They exclaimed, "I feel less racist, but am more aware of racism toward Caucasians" (105, M) and "I found out that racism is a bigger issue than I had expected. When we visited a couple different neighborhoods, the residents felt as if we were in their territory" (112, M). Students' perceptions of prejudice toward White people are problematic and will be reflected upon in the discussion.

Despite an overall heightened awareness of their minority status, the majority of students did not reflect further on this topic.

Theme 3: Expressing negative emotional responses to the experience. Students expressed a range of negative feelings throughout the design studio. Most often, they discussed fear and concern about their safety in East St. Louis. For example, one student shared, “I felt safe with the group [of students], but when I wandered away for a minute I did feel a little uncomfortable when a group of three young Black males approached” (101, M). A focus group participant provided a specific example of a time when she felt fearful during the service-learning experience. She said, “When we went over to Lincoln Park for the first time, there was a group of people drinking. They were being drunk and hanging out. They were people you’d be nervous of” (Focus group, F2). In a unique case, one student expressed that after “talking with residents about their hopes for their community”, he went from “fearing East St. Louis to feeling connected” (105, M).

Other students expressed feelings of sadness, pity, and anger toward East St. Louis residents. For example, one student felt sad that “people . . . are living like this at such a large scale rather than as just a segment of the community” (104, M). One student expressed anger that he “had to come in and clean up their mess, just so they could trash it again and not care” (105, M). In contrast to the breadth and depth of negative emotions, one particular student felt “really good and useful in the efforts of bettering/revitalization of parks/open space” (112, M).

Theme 4: Making meaning through collaboration with community members. Notably, the majority of the students made meaning of their experiences through personal connections with community members. Students reported that interacting with the residents was the most meaningful part of the design studio. One explained, “Learning from [community members] how they think we could help was a great experience” (101, M). More specifically, some students identified their most memorable experience as meeting a particular family and restoring a fountain in honor of their deceased mother. Students presented their individual projects to 20 family members, who then selected some for further development.

Students reported that they learned more about park design by engaging with community members. Focus group participants provided a specific example of what they learned from community members throughout the service-learning experience. For

example, one reported that she learned that community members prefer walking paths around the perimeters of park areas as a safety measure and described this as “unique because we’re usually taught to put walking paths through parks” (Focus Group, F2). Students reported that community members “provided more insight than just a map and statistics could” (115, gender not indicated).

End of Year Reflections

The final broad domain was composed of three themes that represented students’ thoughts and feelings at the end of the year.

Theme 1: Denied influence of design studio on racial attitudes toward people of color. When asked directly whether the community-based design experience influenced their perceptions of racism, almost all participants stated that it did not. Some students noted having always treated all people equally. One asserted, “My views [on racism] have not changed, I still view everyone as equals” (113, M). Another remarked, “I don’t feel like my views on racism changed during the course. I was always raised to treat people with respect and fairly no matter who they are” (101, M). Moreover, students did not believe that race was a factor to consider regarding the role of parks in East St. Louis. A few students felt that other factors such as “income” were more pertinent than race to discussions of the East St. Louis environment. A focus group participant reported, “The experience made me think about income” (Focus group, F2). Racial color-blindness, discussed in detail below, permeated student responses to a guided inquiry question about whether the role of parks changes in the context of a low-income community of color. One student stated, “No. People are people. All want the same things” (110, M).

Theme 2: “It’s not my fault!” Blamed community members. Despite learning from and connecting with particular community members, students predominantly described them as irresponsible, apathetic, and lacking pride in their neighborhood. One noted, “I feel like many residents in East St. Louis are content with the living conditions because they lack the want or the motivation for change” (103, F). Another expressed, “Because these parks are in poor condition, residents of ESL don’t seem to appreciate and/or recognize their purpose” (102, M). A focus group participant explained:

The problem is that, I don’t know what East St. Louis was like when everybody was there, but I’m pretty sure that all the trash that is there now probably did not come and sit there from like way back when. . . . That

came from people just being irresponsible and that has to do with how much pride you have in your own community. I can understand where money does affect a lot of things, but responsibilities that you have just as a person living in a community aren't affected by income. (Focus group, F2)

Focus group participants reacted defensively when a minister in East St. Louis brought racial disparities to the forefront of their experience. Upon reflection on the minister's comment that White people contributed to the current conditions of East St. Louis, students reported that the minister's comment was inappropriate. One student perceived the minister's comment to be accusatory. A focus group participant explained:

I felt like "Why are you telling me this?" Especially to a group of . . . twenty-one-year-old college kids . . . it's not our burden or fault that this is the way things are. . . it made me feel like he was trying to pass off the blame to us, as White people, and I didn't feel like I deserved any blame for what was going on down there. (Focus group, M1)

In response, another participant elaborated:

[East St. Louis community members] were not that active or responsible. . . . It took us to go there and start cleaning some stuff up for them to kind of chip in and do their part. I know my mom goes on walks and takes a garbage bag with her and picks up trash when she walks around the neighborhood to try and make the neighborhood look a little better. (Focus group, M2)

Students approached service-learning as a form of charity and considered simple acts such as picking up trash on leisurely walks as a commodity that all people share equally. In contrast to the above comments, one student expressed the following: "I knew from news that the area was not in the best physical and social condition. I realize now that a lot of people don't want it to be like that but it's very hard for them to make a difference" (101, M). Overall, the majority of students held East St. Louis community members accountable for the state of East St. Louis without considering the sociohistorical context of the partnering community or the larger context of institutional racism in the United States.

Theme 3: Gained perspective and/or awareness of social identity. By the end of the semester, a few students became aware of some of the lived realities of East St. Louis community members. For instance, one stated, "I feel like I've gained a view on something unfamiliar to my life. I grew up in a middle class suburb and [have] never really seen poverty this bad before" (108, F). Focus group participants became aware of their perception of safety within their own communities and, at times, linked perceptions of safety to their racial group identities. For example, one focus group participant said, "Safety is something that [East St. Louis residents] always think about when they go to the parks. . . . And being White, I don't know if that has that big of an effect on it, but in my community I guess I feel safe going to a park" (Focus group, M2). Another focus group participant added, "I feel sheltered. I haven't been exposed to feeling unsafe in a park and having to have a police escort to do everyday things. . . . It was just a lot of things I haven't come across before being the majority race" (Focus group, F1). In sum, by the end of the design studio, certain students began thinking about their own social location.

Discussion

By examining White students' racial attitudes throughout one landscape architecture service-learning design studio, findings from the current study add to the literature on multicultural service-learning. Despite previous findings that service-learning enhances students' racial understanding (*Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler et al., 1999*), the multicultural learning outcomes in the present study were more nuanced and complex. Although students reported making certain professional gains because of the "real world" context of service-learning and exposure to a diverse setting that few had visited before, findings suggest that this particular service-learning project did not necessarily lead to enhanced racial awareness or multicultural sensitivity.

Throughout the design studio, the majority of students blamed residents for community conditions and did not consider the larger social, political, and economic context. These findings make sense in the context of a predominantly White university, in which students rarely have an opportunity to discuss power, privilege, and oppression. To frame the discussion of students' racial attitudes and offer recommendations to university personnel, the authors feature three key concepts that were expressed across domains: reinforcing negative stereotypes, exhibiting color-blind racial attitudes, and conveying paternalistic notions of helping.

Reinforcing Negative Stereotypes

As described in several themes, students' "negative expectations about the community and its members" stayed the same or were reinforced throughout the semester. The majority of participants expected that they would witness conditions consistent with negative media representations (e.g., dangerous and dilapidated). Almost all students reported that the project confirmed their negative environmental expectations: That is, they continued to perceive East St. Louis as a broken-down city. Many students identified East St. Louis as a dangerous environment and feared for their safety. Consistent with previous literature (*Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Darley & Gross, 1983; O'Grady, 1998*), students interpreted their experiences in ways that confirmed their hopes and expectations prior to the service-learning experience as opposed to challenging or contextualizing them.

Despite intentions to promote social justice and foster societal benefits, service-learning programs can inadvertently have harmful effects by perpetuating negative stereotypes. Scholars in urban studies argue that unless Black community members are of equal or higher social status, interracial contact does not lead to a reduction in stereotypical attitudes for Whites (*Ihlanfeldt & Scafidi, 2002*). According to Allport's (1954) intergroup contact hypothesis, positive effects of intergroup contact occur only in situations with four crucial conditions: equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom. For the most part, students in the current study did not perceive Black community members to be of equal status, and their negative stereotypes were reinforced.

Color-Blind Racial Attitudes

Color-blind racial attitudes encompass denial, distortion, and minimization of individual and institutional racism (*Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000*). Color-blind racial attitudes inadvertently encourage racism by maintaining the belief that race does not influence one's lived experiences (*Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Neville & Awad, 2014; Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001*). Despite "feeling conspicuous as White persons in East St. Louis," several students identified race as irrelevant to their service-learning experience and to the experience of community members. Previous literature posits that when White individuals experience being a numerical minority, they may become more self-conscious of their Whiteness and consequently develop a critical understanding of

racism (McKinney, 2005). Students in the current study “blamed community members” for the conditions of their environment and some decried claims of reverse racism (i.e., the perception of racism toward Whites; McKinney, 2003; Pincus, 2003). For example, a student reported that he gained awareness of “racism toward Caucasians” at the end of the service-learning design studio. Claims of reverse racism focus solely on individual prejudice rather than structural racism, deny societal power and privilege, and maintain racial segregation (Cabrera, 2012).

Also linked to color-blind racial attitudes, the majority of students explained that they have always treated everyone equally and respectfully despite their race. White individuals’ recognition that people of color are human beings with human abilities, personal characteristics, and so forth is an important step in dismantling stereotypes as long as it is not “extended to a belief that every group’s experiences are the same, in terms of opportunities and power” (McKinney, 2005, p. 54). Most students claimed to see Black community members as equals and consequently argued that race should not and does not matter. The role of parks and open space does not change in the context of a low-income community of color because all people want the same things. Students may have been reluctant to reveal negative perceptions or feelings and thus applied a color-blind framework to their experience (Irvine, 2003; Paoletti et al., 2007). In the current study, students’ racial color-blindness was linked to their identification of racial issues as irrelevant throughout the design studio.

Focus group participants, in particular, elaborated on their color-blind racial perspectives through their encounter with an East St. Louis minister. During this encounter, in which the minister explained that White people were responsible for the abject poverty in East St. Louis, focus group participants were appalled. Being unable to understand how White supremacy and structural racism had an impact on the city, focus group participants responded defensively and disengaged with the minister. With the exception of two focus group participants who identified a possible link between their Whiteness and sense of safety in their communities, the majority of students maintained color-blind racial attitudes throughout the service-learning experience. In seeing race as irrelevant to the East St. Louis community and its members, student participants may have unintentionally prevented opportunities to engage with the reality of societal oppression, their White privilege, and the pertinence of racism to the lived experiences of East St. Louis members.

Where students in the focus group “gained perspective and/or awareness of their social identity,” the focus most often was on social class. This is consistent with scholarship that asserts that White individuals may deflect or avoid analyses of racism by maintaining that classism is the primary discriminator in society (*Green, 2003; Roskelly, 1998*). Students in the present study began reflecting on their privileged upbringing, never having experienced such extreme poverty. Focus group participants attributed their heightened concern for safety in East St. Louis and sense of safety in their respective communities to their middle-class social status. Some students were able to consider their social class privilege with respect to East St. Louis and similar low-income communities. As participants reflected on social class privilege, they continued to identify race as irrelevant to their service-learning experience.

Paternalistic Notions of Helping and Missionary Zeal

Students approached the community-based design studio with a profound sense of professional responsibility to serve diverse groups and address community concerns; however, their relationships with community members were also paternalistic. At times, students’ relationships with community members were linked to paternalistic notions of helping and exacerbated power differentials between community members and students (*Boyle-Baise, 1998; Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004*). For example, students expected the residents to appreciate them as “do-gooders” who can and will “fix St. East Louis.” Students engaged with the service-learning program as professionals commissioned to help a community in need (i.e., as “pro bono” work instead of a collaboration with partnership; *O’Grady, 1998*); their form of engagement reflects missionary ideology (*Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000*).

In addition to paternalism, students’ experiences were guided by a missionary ideology, which refers to a group’s attempt to impose ideas upon another group while neglecting that group’s belief systems (*Price, Toole, & Weah 2007*). When guided by missionary ideology, service-learning is about delivering a product at the neglect of personal development (*Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2011; Price, et al., 2007*). Students hoped to implement solutions used in their communities (e.g., picking up trash on leisurely walks) to solve East St. Louis’s problems. Although the service-learning project was introduced as an opportunity for collaborative learning, consistent with multicultural service-learning literature on missionary zeal

or missionary ideology (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004; Novek, 2000), certain students appeared to have confused service with charity.

Racial color-blindness, stereotyping, and paternalistic assumptions are central to the concept of "silent racism," a contemporary form of racism that conceptualizes how well-meaning White people who do not view themselves as racist can perpetuate racism (Trepagnier, 2010). Although students did not see themselves as racist, some of their comments insinuated forms of silent racism. For example, the concept of silent racism might explain students' anger that they had to clean up the "mess" in East St. Louis, despite what they perceived to be the residents' unwillingness to leisurely pick up trash, so that residents could apathetically "trash" it again. As described in the findings, students did not consider multiple explanations for poverty and blamed individuals for their plight (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004). Thus, students would have benefited from critical discussions, including leisure time as a commodity that not all persons in the United States share equally. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Endres & Gould, 2009; Hess et al., 2007; Reardon, 1994), some students positioned themselves as superior to community members without considering systemic oppressions targeting low-income communities of color. In sum, most students justified the irrelevance of race to the community-based design studio through racial stereotypes of East St. Louis residents as lazy and apathetic, color-blind racial attitudes, paternalistic attitudes, and by identifying social class as a more salient factor.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Findings from the present study contribute uniquely to the literature on multicultural service-learning; however, several limitations must be noted. The participants were predominantly from one limited geographical region, at one predominantly White university, in one particular service-learning project. Consequently, the findings may not be transferable to different types of White students (e.g., those from multiracial urban settings) and White service-learning students at universities with large populations of students of color. Future research should examine the racial attitudes of different White service-learning students in different learning environments. The particular community-based design studio under examination was only one semester; thus, future research should examine changes over time. Further, the design studio was structured around professional design; thus, future research should examine White students' experiences in service-learning projects

with explicit multicultural learning objectives and tactics for preparation and reflection.

In line with a constructivist approach (*Morrow, 2005*), the authors recommend that other types of qualitative research be conducted to obtain richer data and provide more insight into students' racial attitudes throughout the service-learning design course. For example, researchers could conduct individual interviews to gain deeper insight into students' racial attitudes throughout their service-learning projects. Furthermore, although the focus group provided an additional data source and thus was a strength of the overall research design, participants noted that they wished the focus group discussion had come earlier in the term. Students reported that they would have benefited from a space in which they could discuss thoughts and emotions throughout the studio. Data might have been richer if an additional focus group had been conducted in the middle of the semester or if the researchers had used multiple focus groups throughout the term. Only in the focus group did the researchers learn of complex topics such as students' experience with the minister who explained that White people contributed to the community conditions.

The racial demographics of the community-based design studio in this study included a White instructor and 16 students, 15 of whom were White. Notably, in empirical investigation of a service-learning class with greater racial diversity, Boyle-Baise and Langford (*2004*) observed that racial differences between students strained the group dynamic. Students of color perceived service-learning as stereotypical and degrading, worried about White peers' deficit view of communities, and would have liked to hear more about the strengths of the community. Further, previous multicultural courses did not influence students' racial attitudes in the present study. Because the details of these courses were not ascertained, future research should explore the depth and nature of prior multicultural instruction to aid curriculum development.

Implications for Practice and Teaching

Findings suggest that multicultural learning is not inherent in service-learning projects and must be the explicit focus of such programs (*Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; O'Grady, 1998*). The structure of the targeted course, including its short-term duration and intense focus on design instruction to improve professional knowledge and skills, limited what the instructor was able to facilitate in terms of broader multicultural learning. Although students benefited from

exposure to a diverse setting while gaining a certain degree of reflexivity, their personal racial attitudes went unexamined because explicit multicultural training related to racial attitudes was lacking. To counter students' previously learned negative stereotypes, avoid paternalistic attitudes, and foster critical racial self-awareness, students must engage with structured multicultural education beyond the design process. Immersion in a low-income community of color in and of itself is insufficient to foster racial understanding and sensitivity. To challenge their tendencies to consider service-learning as an act of charity, students must become aware of how they benefit from the experience beyond professional development (King, 2004).

Perhaps due to the emphasis on collaborative learning, students in this particular service-learning project acknowledged "making meaning through collaboration with community members" to design practice. They identified interacting with community members as the most meaningful part of their experience. However, the difference between an act of charity and collaborative community engagement was not always explicit. O'Grady (1998) recommended that students engage in discussions to increase their understandings of structural oppression prior to service-learning. Without the necessary context for multicultural education, students may not perceive important differences, and instead demonstrate color-blind racial perspectives and reinforce negative stereotypes (O'Grady, 1998). Buch and Harden (2011) found that service-learning students made positive gains when attitudes and civic responsibility toward homeless individuals were specific goals. Student participants in the current study could have benefited from explicit discussions and exercises focused on racism and classism.

Interestingly, the best resource for personal reflection in this study was the research investigation itself, which provided students with an opportunity to reflect upon their thoughts and feelings without the presence of their course instructor. It seems unlikely that design instructors could take on an additional role as multicultural educators, as doing so would require additional training, de-prioritize the course focus on design, and create dual relationships that might interfere with students' engagement. However, programs could implement dialogues led by trained facilitators to engage issues of race and racism, which could provide students with opportunities to debrief their thoughts and feelings throughout service-learning.

As noted by previous scholars (e.g., Bell et al., 2007), service-learning requires high levels of support to avoid the unintentional

perpetuation of stereotypes and develop more critically engaged forms of service-learning. Stater and Fotheringham (2009) found that greater university resources led to the most positive benefits for community partners. Thus, universities intending to make positive community impacts should consider carefully the resources allotted to service-learning programs. The current findings indicated that interaction with community members has the potential also to be very meaningful to students. Perhaps service-learning programs can devote more time to this part of the process by inviting community members to campus to help frame the service-learning experience. Therefore, we agree with O'Grady (2000) that an institutional commitment to social justice provides a critical context in which service-learning can add an experiential component to multicultural education that can help students feel empowered to engage with social justice efforts.

Conclusion

As one of the first empirical investigations to focus on White students' racial attitudes during service-learning, this study offers empirical support for what multicultural educators have long known (O'Grady, 1998). The service-learning experience in and of itself is not enough to positively influence White students' racial attitudes; in fact, it may be harmful and perpetuate stereotypes. Students obtained an understanding of conditions in East St. Louis, gained perspective on their social identity, and perceived collaboration with community members to be very meaningful. However, because the context necessary for engaging with multicultural service-learning (e.g., instruction) was missing, the service-learning experience reinforced students' negative stereotypes. Students typically approached the design studio with paternalistic and color-blind racial attitudes that inhibited opportunities for multicultural learning, self-reflection, and limited their ability to learn from community members. As a practical matter, it is likely that one instructor cannot do it all. Landscape design faculty, for example, may not have the training and expertise needed to address students' racial attitudes effectively. In addition to understanding critical contextual material, findings suggest that instruction must address students' reactions and emotional responses throughout the service-learning experience. Furthermore, community members' perceptions of service-learning and their level of engagement with the students are critical factors in multicultural outcomes.

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