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Serving a Stranger or Serving Myself: Alternative Breaks and the Influence of Race and Ethnicity on Student Understanding of Themselves and Others

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Abstract

Given the ever increasing numbers of Students of Color engaging in higher education, the importance of cross-cultural interactions for all students, and the evidence that White students and Students of Color may have vastly different experiences in higher education, there is a need to further explore the types of cross-cultural experiences that different college students have and the ways that those experiences facilitate learning and development. Using data from the National Survey of Alternative Breaks, the purpose of this study was to explore how one particular type of cross-cultural experience, participating in a service-learning based alternative break (AB) program, contributes to the racial understanding of White students and Students of Color. Findings point to the importance of considering the different experiences that White students and Students of Color have in ABs and other service-learning experiences.

Over the past three decades, postsecondary institutions in the United States have seen large shifts in the racial and ethnic composition of their student bodies. Between 1976 and 2008, undergraduate enrollment from all racial/ethnic groups rose, but the increases were most dramatic for Students of Color. For example, the total number of Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduate students grew nearly six-fold during that time (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). According to Aud and colleagues (2010), “White [undergraduate] enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment declined from 82% in 1976 to 63% in 2008” (p. 142), creating both new learning opportunities and new challenges for students and institutions.

This growing diversity in higher education provides an opportunity for all students to learn about people different from themselves. Primary and secondary schools remain highly segregated in the United States (Orfield & Lee, 2006), which means interactions among students from different racial/ethnic groups in college may be among their first and/or most intimate cross-cultural experiences to date. Moreover,

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students who engage in educational activities that facilitate cross-cultural interactions enjoy benefits such as higher grades, larger and more diversified social networks, and greater cross-cultural understanding (Chang, 2001; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004). Along these same lines, students who engage with peers from different ethnic/racial backgrounds in meaningful ways inside and outside of class are more likely to branch out from their communities and gain a greater appreciation for other cultures (Saenz, Nagi, & Hurtado, 2007).

In spite of these benefits of diversity and cross-cultural interactions, the increasing racial diversity on campuses also presents a challenge for institutions seeking to provide an inclusive, equitable college experience for all students. Research has shown that White students and Students of Color experience college in vastly different ways. Students of Color, for instance, are more likely to perceive prejudice and discrimination on campus than White students (Fischer, 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Rankin & Reason, 2005) and to believe that White interests are favored over other populations (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Conversely, White students are more satisfied with their social environments and many assume Students of Color experience college the same way (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Given the ever increasing numbers of Students of Color engaging in higher education, the importance of cross-cultural interactions for all students, and the evidence that White students and Students of Color may have vastly different experiences in higher education, there is a need to further explore the types of cross-cultural experiences that different college students have and how those experiences facilitate learning and development. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore how one particular type of cross-cultural experience, participating in a service-learning based alternative break (AB) program, contributes to the racial understanding of White students and Students of Color.

Learning About Race Through Service-Learning

One of the most frequently touted benefits of service-learning is gains in students' understanding of diversity (Holsapple, 2012). For example, service-learning has been found to increase students' positive orientation toward equality and social responsibility (Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012), reduce stereotypes (Espino & Lee, 2011), and help White students understand and come to terms with their own privilege (Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, & Davi, 2007). In a review of 55 studies on service-learning and diversity outcomes, Holsapple (2012) identified six primary diversity outcomes of service-learning experiences: stereotype confrontation, knowledge about the served population, belief in the value of diversity, tolerance of difference, comfort in and likelihood of engaging in future interactions across difference, and recognition of common ground with those different from oneself.

There are a variety of theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation for understanding how and why service-learning experiences facilitate students' understanding of diversity. One of the most commonly cited frameworks for understanding diversity interactions in higher education is that provided by Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002). Building on the work of Erikson, Newcomb, and Piaget, Gurin and colleagues identified the central role of identity development in college, which governs the decisions students make regarding their "permanent commitments to an occupation, to intimate relationships, to social and political groups and ideas, and to a philosophy of life" (p. 334). The authors argued that higher education provides an environment consistent with Erikson's idea of moratorium, in that the college environment is "a time and place in which [students] can experiment with different social roles" (p. 334), which is necessary for one to develop an internally and externally consistent identity.

In considering the obligation of institutions of higher education to facilitate positive identity development, Gurin and colleagues (2002) argued that diversity experiences are key to facilitating development and commitment based on increased cognitive complexity and self-determination, rather than reliance on prior experience and authority. Such diversity experiences are particularly important for students in the United States who are likely to come from rather homogenous high school environments. As such, college may be the first time these students (both White students and Students of color) are able to engage with others different from themselves in consistent and meaningful ways. Moreover, research based on Gurin and colleagues' (2002) framework has identified the particularly important role of informal interactions with diversity in facilitating student development (e.g., Bowman, 2010, 2011; Denson, 2009).

ABs are one type of service-learning experience that may facilitate these informal diversity interactions and, in turn, foster student development. ABs are short-term, immersive service-learning experiences where small groups of students engage in community service during their academic breaks. According to Break Away (2014), a national organization that works with member campuses to promote best practices in ABs, an alternative break is

a trip where a group of college students engage in direct service, typically for a week. Each trip has a focus on a particular social issue with exploration and immersion in that issue beginning long before the trip itself. Students educate themselves and each other, then do hands-on work with relevant organizations. These experiences challenge them to think critically and compassionately—and to understand that there's no such thing as "not my problem." Upon return, participants are empowered to make more informed decisions and to take meaningful action that support community efforts. (para. 1)

Some ABs take place in the same location as students' colleges or universities, but most involve travel to a different city, state, or even country. Although most ABs are co-curricular in nature, many may be considered service-learning experiences because they emphasize learning about broader social issues through engaging in service. Similar to more general service-learning experiences, ABs have the potential to increase students' multicultural competence (Ferrence & Bell, 2004), knowledge of complex social issues and commitment to future service engagement (Bowen, 2011; Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, & Skendall, 2012), empathy for people different from themselves (Gumpert & Kraybill-Greggo, 2005; Jones et al., 2012; Sydnor et al., 2014), and understanding of their identities (Jones et al., 2012; Niehaus & Rivera, *in press*). Due to their intense, immersive nature, ABs may provide a particularly good context for promoting positive cross-racial interactions (Niehaus, 2012b).

ABs and other service-learning experiences promote understanding of race primarily by facilitating interactions with diverse others that challenge students' existing views of the world (e.g., Dunlap et al., 2007; Keen & Hall, 2009; Simons & Cleary, 2006). For example, Jones and colleagues (2011) found that students participating in short-term immersion programs (including ABs) deepened their understanding of social issues by interacting with community members and learning about their lived experiences with poverty, homelessness, and HIV/AIDS. These findings are consistent with research specifically using Gurin and colleagues' (2002) framework, which emphasizes the role of diversity interactions in providing the cognitive dissonance necessary for development. For example, Bowman and Brandenberger (2012) found that interactions with diversity helped students "experience the unexpected," which in turn led to changes in students' attitudes about equality and social justice.

Although much of the research using Gurin et al.'s (2002) framework has focused on how students develop an understanding of people different from themselves, the framework also focuses on students'

identity development. Helms (1993) defined racial identity as one's "sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3). A variety of perspectives inform an understanding of how students develop their racial identities. For example, from the individual psychological perspective, Renn (2012) described the centrality of Marcia's concepts of exploration and commitment: "achieved racial identity results from exploration or crisis related to racial identity and commitments made to having and expressing racial identity in particular ways" (p. 16). From a sociological perspective, however, racial identity development can be understood through a symbolic interactionism, which posits that, "individuals make meaning through microscale interactions with others... [T]hese meanings are formed about the self in relation to others who are perceived to belong to the same and other groups" (Renn, 2012, p. 17). From a social psychology perspective, racial identity development can be understood as the exploration of "possible selves," both those to which an individual might aspire and those that an individual might attempt to ignore (Renn, 2012).

It is important to note that racial identity development is applicable to White students as well as Students of Color. Everyone has a racial identity but that identity might be more or less salient for individual students depending on whether they identify with a dominant or targeted group (Jones & McEwen, 2000). In fact, the very process of identity development, and what an "achieved" racial identity looks like, is likely to vary between White students and students who identify as racial/ethnic minorities (Rowe, Bennette, & Atkinson, 1994). One major difference is that while "members of visible racial/ethnic minority groups have little choice concerning their awareness of racial identity, White Americans have the option of minimizing the impact of racial awareness by dismissing the issue in various ways" (Rowe et al., 1994, p. 138).

Whether it be through exploring one's racial identity directly, exploring one's possible selves, or making meaning of one's racial self through interactions with similar and different others, developing an understanding of one's own racial identity requires the same types of cognitive dissonance necessary to promote the development of students' understanding of people different from themselves. Unsurprisingly, then, the existing research on ABs and other service-learning programs has shown that, in addition to learning about others, students who participate in these experiences often come to a better understanding of their identities (Mather, Karbley, & Yamamoto, 2012). For example, in a study of the long-term influence of a service-learning course on students' lives, Jones and Abes (2004) found that students discussed how the service-learning experience influenced their sense of self, commitment to service, and understanding of their own economic privilege.

The Role of Race in Service-Learning

Despite the clear importance of learning about racial diversity through service-learning, only recently has much attention been paid to the racial diversity of students participating in service-learning. As Butin (2005) pointed out, much of the service-learning research assumes students are White and privileged, and even when race is considered, studies tend to focus on differences between students and community members. However, as more Students of Color enter college, a higher number of service-learning participants will inevitably share the same racial/ethnic background of community members with whom they work. In light of these changing demographics, Butin (2006) queried, "service-learning is premised on fostering 'border-crossing' across categories of race, ethnicity, class, (im)migrant status, language, and (dis)ability. Yet what happens when the postsecondary population already occupies those identity categories?" (p. 482).

A growing body of research has begun to unpack the ways in which students with different racial identities participate in and experience service-learning. Findings on racial differences in participation in community service or service-learning programs are quite mixed. Cruce and Moore (2007), for example, found that compared to White students, students identifying with all other racial groups were more likely to volunteer during the first year of college, and among those who had not yet volunteered in college, Students of Color were more likely than White students to plan to do so in the future. In a separate analysis, however, Cruce and Moore (2012) found that White students were no more or less likely to have volunteered during the first year of college but were less likely to plan to do so. Gasiorski (2009), on the other hand, found that Asian American students were less likely than White students to engage in community service in college, Latino students were more likely than White students to do so, and there were no significant differences between White students and African American/Black or Multiracial students in their propensity to engage in community service. Marks and Jones (2004) found no differences in community service participation based on race/ethnicity, and Skendall (2012) found no significant differences by race in students who did and did not participate in short-term, service-learning immersion programs (like ABs).

Despite the lack of clarity about racial differences in propensity to participate in service, some researchers have identified how racial identity may influence why some students participate in service. Jones and Hill (2003) found that students who experienced marginalization (e.g., because of being a racial minority) or who had been the recipients of service themselves made sense of their motivation and experiences in community service through the lens of those experiences. Interestingly, they also found that many African American students were involved in their communities in a variety of ways that they themselves did not classify as “community service.” As Jones and Hill described, “giving back to the community is so much a part of how they see themselves and their cultural heritage that it was impossible for them to pull out that one aspect of who they are and hold it up for scrutiny” (p. 533). This finding was echoed by Gilbride-Brown (2008), who found that despite being enrolled in a service-learning course, the Students of Color in her study rejected the “service” label because they perceived service to be a “White do-gooder” activity.

Mirroring the perceptions of Gilbride-Brown’s (2008) participants, Mitchell, Donahue, and Young-Law (2012) argued that service-learning employs a “pedagogy of Whiteness” (p. 612) that, while well-intentioned, “marginalizes the experiences of Students of Color, while detracting from all students’ opportunities to learn” (p. 617). Seider, Huguley, and Novick (2013), for example, found that Students of Color participating in a service-learning program experienced lower feelings of community within the program than did White students. Along these same lines, other studies have found that Students of Color experience stronger feelings of discomfort and alienation than White students during the classroom component of service-learning experiences (Coles, 1999; Green, 2001). Such negative reactions are due in part to White students and faculty using “othering” language when referring to community members and assuming privilege on the part of all students within the service-learning program, sometimes at odds with the actual experiences of Students of Color (Mitchell et al., 2012; Seider & Hillman, 2011; Seider et al., 2013). Moreover, Students of Color may hesitate to participate in discussions about race within the context of service-learning experiences because they are often the only or one of a few Students of Color in the group and do not want to speak for their entire racial group (Novick, Seider, & Huguley, 2011; Seider et al., 2013). Students of Color may also hesitate to speak up on issues of race, even if other students make racially offensive comments, in order to avoid

being perceived as overly sensitive to racial issues (Novick et al., 2011; Seider et al., 2013) or to avoid offending White classmates (Guiffrida, 2003).

Not only are there different experiences in service-learning classrooms, but White students and Students of Color are likely to experience the actual service component of service-learning programs differently. White students tend to perceive community members in terms of differences in privilege, while Students of Color are more likely to identify with community members (Espino & Lee, 2011; Green, 2001; Seider et al., 2013). Other studies, however, have pointed to the tendency for some Students of Color to distance themselves from communities being served and resist drawing parallels between their experiences and that of community members (Espino & Lee, 2011).

Multiple studies suggest that students' different perceptions of their relationships with community members are likely to lead to different learning outcomes for White students and Students of Color. For example, Bowman and Brandenberger (2012) argued, "if students' interactions with diversity are not seen as novel or 'surprising' in some way, then these experiences are unlikely to contribute to their development" (p. 192). These reactions to their experiences may in part explain some of the differences between how White students and Students of Color experience service-learning. As Jones et al. (2011) found, Students of Color experienced less dissonance and angst than did White students when crossing cultural and social borders through an AB experience, likely because the Students of Color crossed more borders in their daily lives. Such experiences may also be why Green (2001) found that conversations about race in service-learning courses are generally more challenging for White students than Students of Color. As Mitchell and colleagues (2012) argued, the assumption that service-learning provides real-world experience that students do not already have (usually in Communities of Color) positions the experience as one for White students, not Students of Color.

Purpose and Research Questions

Considering the potential for ABs and other forms of service-learning to contribute to students' understanding of racial diversity, along with the clear emerging evidence that White students and Students of Color may have vastly different experiences in these programs, we argue that there remains a need to better understand the differential influence of service-learning programs on students' racial understanding. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which White students and Students of Color perceived changes in their racial understandings as a result of one particular form of service-learning, ABs, when they volunteered in communities they perceived as being racially similar to or different from themselves. Specifically, this study sought to address the following three research questions:

1. To what extent do students participating in AB experiences report that their experience influenced their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity?
2. To what extent do students participating in AB experiences report that their experience influenced their understanding of people from different racial/ethnic groups?
3. Does the extent to which students participating in AB experiences report these influences differ based on whether students volunteer in communities that are racially similar to or racially different from themselves and between White students and Students of Color?

Method

Data for this study came from the National Survey of Alternative Breaks (NSAB), a longitudinal, multi-institutional study of students who participated in alternative breaks during the spring of 2011. Students were asked to fill out an online survey immediately after returning from their 2011 AB experience, and then were asked to fill out a second online survey approximately one year later, during the spring of 2012. The first survey asked students to report on a number of background and demographic variables and to provide detailed information about the AB experience. The follow-up survey asked students about their experiences during the intervening year (e.g., did they volunteer, engage in advocacy, participate in an internship, etc.) and also asked students about the influence of the AB experience on a variety of attitudes and values. Both surveys were developed based on the existing literature on alternative breaks, domestic and international service-learning, and study abroad. The initial drafts of the surveys were reviewed by content and survey methodology experts to ensure face validity and were piloted by a smaller group of alternative break participants during the winter of each year prior to the main survey administration. The pilot tests allowed for the reduction of the total number of survey items, and open-ended questions regarding the experience of completing the survey allowed for the refinement and clarification of individual items. See Niehaus (2012a) for more information on the survey development and validation.

Participants

Sampling for the initial survey occurred at two levels. First, a random stratified sample of institutions with AB programs was drawn in order to ensure a wide array of institutional types in the final sample. Institutions with large AB programs were over-sampled in order to ensure an adequate final sample size. All students who participated in an alternative spring break program at selected institutions were invited to participate and at the end of the survey were asked to provide an e-mail address if they would be willing to complete a follow-up survey the next year. The next year, all students who had provided an e-mail address on the first survey were sent a link to complete the second survey.

The response rate for the initial survey was approximately 35% (2,187 total respondents). Data for this study came from the 558 students (25.5% of the original respondent group) who responded to both surveys. Students responding to both surveys attended 84 different colleges and universities and participated in 281 different AB trips. Sample demographics (including gender, race/ethnicity, class level, trip location, and institutional type and control) are available in Table 1. Although there are no available data on the total population of students who participate in ABs each year, the demographic make-up of the NSAB respondents is similar to Skendall's (2012) description of a national sample of students who participated in short-term service immersions, including ABs, from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership. A comparison of the two samples indicated that the NSAB might have a slight over-representation of students who identified as White and female.

Dependent Variables

Of primary interest for this study were four items on the follow-up survey: students were first asked to compare themselves at the time of the survey to before their AB experience, on a scale of 1–5 (1 being “much less than,” 5 being “much greater than”), with regard to their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity and their understanding of people from different racial/ethnic groups. Later in the survey, students were asked to indicate

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Gender	Male	19.3%
	Female	80.7%
Race	White	76.5%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	8.5%
	Multiracial	7.3%
	African American	4.9%
	Hispanic	1.8%
	Other	0.8%
	Arab	0.2%
Class Level	First Year	25.2%
	Sophomore	29.7%
	Junior	26.2%
	Senior	15.3%
	Graduate Student	2.7%
	Other	1.0%
Trip Location	Domestic	82.5%
	International	13.8%
	Local (same city/town as your college or university)	3.7%
Institutional Control	Public	62.1%
	Private Religious	23.3%
	Private Non-Religious	14.6%
Institutional Type	Associates	1.0%
	Baccalaureate	15.6%
	Masters	24.7%
	Doctoral/Research	58.6%

the extent to which they felt that their AB experience influenced their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity and their understanding of people from different racial/ethnic groups (on a scale of 0–4, with 0 being “not at all” and 4 being “quite a lot”). These four items were each used as a separate outcome for this study and were labeled understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity (growth), understanding of people from a different racial/ethnic group (growth), understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity (AB influence), and understanding of people from a different racial/ethnic group (AB influence).

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this study are students’ racial identification and whether they volunteered in communities that they perceived as being racially similar to or different from themselves. On the first

survey, students were asked to report a variety of demographics, including their race/ethnicity. Students were able to “select all that apply,” and answer options included African American/Black (not of Hispanic origin), Asian or Pacific Islander (includes the Indian sub-continent), Arab/Arab American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic/Latino (Spanish culture or origin), White/Caucasian (Persons not of Hispanic origin, having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East), and race/ethnicity not included above. Due to the relatively low number of participants who identified as anything other than “White/Caucasian,” two separate variables were created for this analysis—White, which included all students who only selected the “White/Caucasian” option, and Students of Color, which included all other students.

On the first survey, students were also asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived that the community members with whom they interacted were different from themselves. Community members were defined for students as “those people who were the recipients or beneficiaries of the service provided by you or the community agency with whom you worked.” Students who answered anything other than “not at all” were asked to indicate the ways in which they perceived that community members were different from themselves, including options such as race/ethnicity, religion, political views, language, and culture. For the purposes of this study, all of those students who checked “race/ethnicity” were considered to have volunteered in a community racially different from themselves, and all of those who did not check “race/ethnicity” were considered to have volunteered in a community racially similar to themselves.

Data Analysis

To determine the extent to which participants reported that their AB experiences influenced their racial/ethnic understanding, simple frequencies were calculated on the four items described above (students’ reports of change in and the influence of the AB experience on their understanding of their own racial/ethnic identity and on their understanding of people from different racial/ethnic groups). Next, to explore the interaction of students’ racial identification and whether they volunteered in racially similar or racially different communities, we conducted a 2-by-2 factorial ANOVA for all four-outcome measures. As we were only interested in the interaction of these two variables and not the main effects, we only noted whether or not there was a significant interaction effect in the results. Due to the vastly different cell sizes in the factorial ANOVA, we also paid close attention to Levene’s test for equality of variance, as ANOVA is generally considered robust to violation of the assumption of equality of variance unless the cell sizes are different.

Finally, where we found a significant interaction effect (i.e. the effect of volunteering in a racially similar or racially different community varied between White students and Students of Color, or vice versa), we conducted a post-hoc analysis to identify specific group differences. Because there is no direct post-hoc analysis for factorial ANOVA, we instead conducted a one-way ANOVA on all four groups of students in the analysis. White students who volunteered in racially similar communities (those who had not selected “race/ethnicity” as a way in which community members differed from themselves), White students who volunteered in racially different communities (those who had selected “race/ethnicity” as a way in which community members differed from themselves), Students of Color who volunteered in racially similar communities, and Students of Color who volunteered in racially different communities. There were 226 White students who volunteered in racially different communities (WD), 169 White students who volunteered in racially similar communities (WS), 46 Students of Color who volunteered in racially different communities (SD), and 40 Students of Color who volunteered in racially similar communities (SS). We conducted both an omnibus ANOVA and post-hoc analysis of all pairwise

comparisons using the Tukey HSD correction for the family-wise error rate. Effect sizes were calculated for the overall factorial ANOVA using the partial eta-squared, and for the individual significant pairwise differences using Cohen's *d*.

Results

Compared to before their AB experience, 74% of students reported that they had a better understanding of people from different racial/ethnic groups, and 40.2% reported that they had a better understanding of their racial/ethnic identity. The majority of students (62.5%) indicated that their AB experience had a substantial influence on their understanding of people from different racial/ethnic groups (answering 3 or 4 on the scale of 0–4), while just over one third (34%) indicated a substantial influence on their racial/ethnic identity.

The means and standard deviations for all four outcomes for each group of students are presented on [Table 1](#). The factorial ANOVA showed that there was a significant interaction of students' own racial identification and whether or not students volunteered in racially similar or racially different communities for three of the four outcome variables. The fourth, the extent to which students reported that the AB influenced their understanding of people from a different racial/ethnic group, also failed Levene's test for equality of variance ($F = 5.706$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.001$), which can also lead to an increase in Type I errors. As such, no further analysis was conducted with this outcome. For the remaining three outcomes, Levene's test showed that the variances were statistically equivalent across all four groups.

[Table 2](#) details the results of the factorial ANOVA and post-hoc analysis for the remaining three outcome measures. There was a significant interaction of the effect of students' racial/ethnic identification

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

	Descriptives by Group				
		White—same	White—different	SOC—same	SOC—different
Understanding of people from a different racial/ethnic group (growth)*	N	148	202	33	38
	Mean	3.80	4.04	4.03	3.79
	s.d.	0.728	0.683	0.770	0.704
Understanding of people from a different racial/ethnic group (AB influence) **	N	135	183	30	34
	Mean	2.36	2.85	2.60	2.56
	s.d.	1.225	0.971	1.192	1.236
Understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity (growth)*	N	147	201	33	39
	Mean	3.36	3.48	4.00	3.54
	s.d.	0.651	0.664	0.750	0.756
Understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity (AB influence)*	N	135	183	30	33
	Mean	1.75	2.03	2.63	1.85
	s.d.	1.201	1.143	1.245	1.228

*equal variances (Levene's test, $p > 0.05$)

**unequal variances (Levene's test, $p < 0.05$)

Table 3

ANOVA results

	Factorial ANOVA			Post-hoc		
	Interaction			Pairwise difference	<i>p</i>	<i>D</i>
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2_{partial}$			
Understanding of people from a different racial/ethnic group (growth)*	6.820	0.009	0.028	WD > WS	0.009	0.286
Understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity (growth)*	4.944	0.001	0.056	SS > SD	0.021	0.530
				SS > WS	< 0.001	0.765
				SS > WD	< 0.001	0.618
Understanding of your own racial/ethnic identity (AB influence)*	14.950	0.001	0.039	SS > SD	0.043	0.701
				SS > WS	0.001	0.796
				SS > WD	0.049	0.549

and whether the students volunteered in racially similar or different communities on the extent to which students reported growth in their understanding of people from a different racial/ethnic group ($F = 6.820$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.009$), growth in their understanding of their own racial/ethnic identity ($F = 4.944$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.001$), and the influence of the alternative break experience on their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity ($F = 14.950$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.001$). However, although students' understanding of their racial/ethnic identity and of people from a different racial/ethnic group seemed to vary based on the student's race and the racial-ethnic similarity of community partners, the variance explained by these differences was small; the overall factorial ANOVA only explained between 2.8 and 5.6% of the variance in each outcome (see the $\eta^2_{partial}$ values in Table 2).

Post-hoc analysis of all pairwise comparisons showed that when it came to understanding people from a different racial/ethnic group, White students who volunteered in communities racially different from themselves reported significantly more growth than did White students volunteering in racially similar communities ($p = 0.009$) with a relatively small effect size ($d = 0.286$). When it came to understanding one's racial/ethnic identity, Students of Color who volunteered in racially similar communities reported significantly greater growth and influence of the AB experience than did students in any of the three other groups. The effect sizes here were all medium to large, ranging from 0.530 to 0.796 (see Table 3).

Discussion and Implications

The findings from this study reinforce existing research that service-learning experiences like ABs can help students learn about people from different racial/ethnic groups and, to a lesser degree, learn about their racial/ethnic identities (e.g., Bowman & Brandenberger, 2012; Dunlap et al., 2007; Holsapple, 2012; Jones & Abes, 2004; Mather et al., 2012). This study builds on this existing literature, however, by exploring the interaction of students' racial identity and their perception of racial similarity or difference in the community. Generally, the results of this study point to a small benefit to White students volunteering with racially different communities and a much greater benefit to Students of Color volunteering in racially similar communities.

This study provides some limited support for the typical narrative around ABs and other service-learning programs, focusing on how these experiences provide opportunities for students to cross borders and interact across difference. Participants in general reported quite a lot of growth in this area and a fairly strong influence of their AB experience on this outcome. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Jones et al., 2012; Niehaus, 2012b), ABs can provide a context that facilitates the informal interactions with diverse others necessary for student development (Bowman, 2010, 2011; Denson, 2009; Gurin et al., 2002).

For White students, this learning about difference may come from interacting with racially different community members, as supported by the finding that White students who volunteered in racially different communities were more likely to report growth in this area than White students who volunteered in racially similar communities. The findings that there were no significant differences between White students and Students of Color and no differences between Students of Color who volunteered in racially similar and racially different communities, however, point to the possibility that what Students of Color may be learning about racial differences may be coming from another source than the community. As other research on service-learning and ABs has found, often students learn just as much, if not more, from the other student volunteers as they do from community members (e.g., Jones et al., 2012; Niehaus, 2012b). As most Students of Color were likely volunteering in student groups that were predominantly White (evidenced by the vast majority of respondents who were White), this may have been the source of their learning about racial differences. White students and Students of Color can and do learn about racial diversity through ABs, but the racial composition of the community being served seems to matter less for Students of Color than it does for White students.

With regard to learning about one's racial identity, however, there were many more differences based on students' racial identification and the racial composition of the host community. Students of Color who volunteered in racially similar communities were more likely than all other groups to report both growth in their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity and in the influence of the AB experience on their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity. Volunteering in racially similar communities may provide Students of Color with opportunities to explore their racial identity, make meaning of their identity "in relation to others who are perceived to belong to the same" racial group (Renn, 2012, p. 17), and explore multiple "possible selves," all of which may facilitate racial identity development.

Although one might expect to see a similar trend for White students volunteering in racially similar communities, as these experiences would provide the same opportunities to promote racial identity development, the fact that White students reported that they had experienced less growth in their racial identity and less influence of the AB experience on their racial identity is likely due to the invisibility of Whiteness in the United States. As Rowe and colleagues (1994) explained, White Americans can much more easily ignore race than can Students of Color, so volunteering in a predominantly White community may make issues of race appear irrelevant, at least in the eyes of White students in the AB. Although unsurprising, then, the fact that White students volunteering in racially similar communities are gaining less than other students in their racial identity development points to a missed opportunity for growth and development in ABs.

Another possible missed opportunity is evidenced by the fact that both White students and Students of Color who volunteered in racially different communities were less likely than Students of Color volunteering in racially similar communities to report growth in and an influence of the AB on their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity. This finding may reflect the narrative of "crossing borders" mentioned earlier, whereby ABs and other service-learning programs are framed in terms of going into

communities of “others” to engage in service. The “othering” language often present in service-learning programs that other studies have discussed (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2012; Seider & Hillman, 2011; Seider et al., 2013) may lead to a dynamic where issues of race and diversity are discussed only in relation to the “other,” not in relation to students themselves. Interestingly, the findings from this study may imply that this dynamic is not just the case for White students involved in service-learning but also for Students of Color volunteering in communities with which they do not directly identify.

The findings from this study point to a number of important implications for practice in both ABs and in other forms of service-learning. The narrative of border crossing and interactions across difference may be telling only part of the story of what is and should be happening in these programs. This narrative may be discouraging Students of Color from participating in ABs because it may position ABs as “White do-gooder” activities, as the students in Gilbride-Brown’s (2008) study discussed. Practitioners working with AB programs should consider how to balance the very powerful border crossing narrative with new narratives focusing on self-exploration and engagement with one’s communities. This shift in narrative may also establish a better foundation for continuing to learn about difference through ABs and for learning about oneself. Practitioners should consider how to engage students in conversations throughout the experience (e.g., through pre-trip orientation meetings, speakers and educational sessions during the AB trip itself, reflection activities, and post-trip reorientation sessions) that include an emphasis on understanding one’s racial identity in addition to learning about difference. These conversations can benefit all students involved, but practitioners should also be sensitive to the different experiences that White students and Students of Color may be having vis-à-vis their identification with the community and should be prepared to provide differential challenge and support depending on different students’ developmental needs.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The findings from this study contribute to the broader literature on the importance of considering racial dynamics in service-learning experiences, and the limitations of the current study point to a number of directions for future research in this area. First, this study employed a post-test only design with no comparison group, so we were unable to isolate the effect of the AB experience on student outcomes. Rather, we relied on students’ self-reports of both growth in and the influence of the AB experience on these outcomes. Student self-reports are of course limited (see, for example, Bowman & Seifert, 2011) but can be useful measures when exploring affective dimensions of students’ experiences (Bowman, 2014) and when exploring group differences (Cole & Gonyea, 2010). Similarly, we had no control over the assignment of students to particular alternative break programs. In some cases, students may have been assigned by program leaders, but in many cases, students self-selected (entirely or at least by indicating preferences for particular programs) into their particular AB program. Future research should unpack what relationship might exist between students’ motivation to participate in an alternative break (or in similar programs) and outcomes from the experience.

Second, due to relatively small numbers of participants falling into any specific racial/ethnic group other than “White,” we were unable to disaggregate our results beyond comparing White students to a broad group of “Students of Color.” This aggregation naturally masks the diversity of racial/ethnic identities within both the group of Students of Color and within those students identifying as White. Similarly, another limitation of the available data was that we were unable to look at other factors that would likely interact with race in influencing students’ experiences (e.g., social class). However, as

described in the literature review, there is strong support for the importance of exploring racial differences in students' experiences in ABs. This study was not meant to robustly model all of the predictors of the extent to which students report learning about race through their AB but rather to explore the differences in students' AB experiences and outcomes based on their own racial identification and the race of the communities in which they served.

Third, as the NSAB was a comprehensive survey and not focused solely on racial identity and awareness, the outcome measures for this study were relatively simple and based on single survey items. Although this limitation prevents us from exploring issues of student development in more depth, the measures and exploratory analyses nonetheless provide meaningful information about students' experiences in ABs. Future research designed specifically to explore how ABs and other forms of service-learning influence students' racial understanding could build upon this study by developing deeper, more nuanced measures of these outcomes. Similarly, this study only focused on racial diversity and outcomes related to learning about race. Future research should explore other dimensions of identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) and other outcomes to more fully understand different students' experiences in service-learning. Finally, although the differences between and among groups were significant, overall only a small amount of variance in the outcomes was between groups. There was still a large degree of within-group variance. More research should investigate how and why AB programs influence students' understanding of race and how those influences may differ for White students and Students of Color.

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