

Doing Missions Together: How to Build a Supportive Environment for the Flourishing of Diverse Mission Teams

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Abstract

The face of missions is becoming increasingly diverse. The number of missionaries from racial and ethnic minority communities in the United States is growing, contributing to the racial diversity of missionaries from the U.S. serving in international contexts. Because missionaries of color (MOC) tend to face unique challenges on the field, this workshop seeks to equip individuals, teams, and churches to support the flourishing of missionaries from diverse communities on the field.

Background of Research Study¹

While teaching at Biola University in the Cook School of Intercultural Studies, I completed a research study where 16 interviews were conducted with long-term missionaries of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The purpose of my study was to better understand the experiences of diverse missionaries on the field, and based on those findings, to provide practical applications for missionaries, mission teams, and mission agencies.

Summary of Major Findings of the Research

- Race shapes MOCs relationships with mission organizations, teammates, and host communities in a variety of ways.
- MOCs tend to adapt their behavior to fit into predominately white teams and organizations.
- Interactions with others related to race and/or culture give MOCs opportunities to reflect on their own identity.
- While MOCs may experience fatigue from the unique challenges they face due to their race, many have developed strategies that contribute to their resiliency on the field.

Implications for Missionary Care

1. Mission organizations would do well to include in their pre-field training topics related to working with diverse teams (intercultural competence and cultural humility), as well as prepare MOCs with information about the racial dynamics specific to the communities where they will serve.
2. Missionary care to MOCs should be intentional, informed, and culturally sensitive. Mission organizations should seek to develop a network of MOCs within their organization to give mutual support.
3. Second-generation immigrants may have unique potential as missionaries due to their experience navigating two or more cultures.

¹ The findings and implications of the study presented here were published in two different academic journals: Huang, L. A., & Blandón, N. J. H. (2023). "You Hide Pieces of Yourself": Navigating White Spaces as US Missionaries of Color. *Transformation*, 02653788231165784 and Huang, L. (2023). Racialized Experiences with Host Nationals: The Experiences of US Religious Cross-cultural Workers of Color. *Mission Studies*, 40(3), 433-454.