From Barriers to Bridges: Effective Strategies for Multicultural Youth Ministry

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I have no known conflict of interest.

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Abstract

This basic qualitative study, through a constructivist lens, sought to understand and describe how youth leaders in Europe perceived the effectiveness of their youth ministry in engaging teenagers from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds. Using what Dzubinski (2017) termed technology-assisted qualitative data collection (TAQDAC), data were collected from 24 participants in 14 countries through semi-structured interviews. Each interview, approximately an hour in length, was recorded, transcribed, and imported into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis tool. The data were coded using initial and focused coding. The data revealed barriers youth leaders faced to effectively engage ethnoculturally diverse teens, including prejudice and discrimination, limited missionality, language barriers, and ignoring or minimizing cultural differences. However, the data also revealed that youth leaders could intentionally bridge these barriers by developing ethnoculturally diverse teams, developing cultural awareness, empowering teens, leveraging language, and creating safe spaces.

Keywords: Youth Ministry, Multicultural Youth, Ethnocultural Diversity, Cultural Awareness.

Introduction

One of the joys of research is exploring new concepts, ideas, and frontiers. Much like the characters from popular science fiction, we are privileged to explore "strange new worlds." Occasionally, during our explorations, we discover something totally unexpected. Such were the findings in the first part of this study presented in 2023 at the Association of Youth Ministry Educators Conference and subsequently published in The *Journal of Youth Ministry* on church models that increased or decreased ethnocultural diversity in youth ministry (Gryskiewicz, 2024). The findings that follow, while not as unexpected as the first findings, were nevertheless enlightening.

The data revealed youth leaders in Europe faced significant barriers when engaging youth from different cultures and ethnicities. These barriers included prejudice and discrimination within the church and national culture, limited missionality, language barriers, and ignoring or minimizing cultural differences. Yet the data also revealed that youth leaders who were intentional about reaching ethnoculturally diverse adolescents overcame or mitigated these barriers by building bridges. These bridges included developing ethnoculturally diverse teams, developing cultural awareness, empowering teens, leveraging language and translation, and creating safe spaces. In this paper, I will explore these barriers and bridges and offer a discussion of the data presented. The paper will conclude with implications for practice and suggestions for further research.

Problem Statement

Since World War II, Europe has become increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse (Raymer, 2016). The 2015 influx of immigrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the recent wave of Ukrainian refugees from the Russo-Ukranian War have introduced many individuals of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds into Europe, with a significant number being under 18 years old (DeSilver, 2015; Eurostat, 2020; Raymer, 2016). Although there is extensive cross-national research on adolescent health and psychological well-being, there is a notable lack of research focused on understanding and describing youth leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of their ministries in engaging multicultural teenagers in continental Europe.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand and describe how youth leaders perceive the effectiveness of their youth ministries in engaging multicultural teenagers in continental Europe.

Research Question

The central research question for this study was: How do youth leaders describe their youth ministry’s effectiveness engaging multicultural teenagers in continental Europe?

Scope

This study was confined to continental Europe, with 24 participants from 13 European countries. The participants were chosen from or near cities with large populations and a higher concentration of ethnic minorities and immigrants.

The study concentrated on Protestant Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches in continental Europe. This focus was driven by denominational differences in youth ministry practices. Kageler's (2018) research on Baptist and Anglican churches revealed small but

significant differences in youth ministry approaches between churches that practice infant baptism (pedobaptism) and those that do not. Kageler (2018) noted that churches practicing infant baptism generally engaged in less outreach to teenagers, and given the purpose of my study, Protestant Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches provided a rich context for data collection, particularly in light of the significant global growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (Jacobsen, 2015).

The study participants were male and female youth leaders with at least one year of ministry experience at their current church or at least five years of youth ministry experience before changing churches.

Limitations

The a priori evidence indicated that male youth leaders outnumber female youth leaders in continental Europe. Identifying female youth leaders in cities with the required cultural and ethnic diversity proved challenging. To address this limitation, I utilized network sampling, asking participants to recommend female youth leaders. Another limitation was the inability to travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of travel restrictions in Europe, I conducted interviews via Zoom. Although the interviews were primarily conducted in English, two participants requested a translator's presence to assist when needed.

Participant Selection

To select participants for my study, I used two types of purposeful sampling: maximum variation and network sampling. In total, 24 youth leaders from 14 countries participated in the study. Study participants included 16 male and eight female youth leaders with a minimum of one year of ministry experience at their current church or at least five years of youth ministry experience before changing churches. As previously noted, the churches from which I selected participants included a mix of youth leaders from Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic

churches. Most of the participants were from national churches. However, two participants were from international churches. Table 1 details the demographics of the study participants.

Table 1. Study Participants

Pseudonym	Sex	National identity	Country of ministry	Years in ministry	Group size
Alois	M	Czech	Czech Republic	10-15	15-25
Andreia	F	Portuguese	Portugal	25-30	75-100
Carmen	F	Scot	Spain	1-5	20-30
Ciprian	M	Romanian	Romania	10-20	15-20
Dalibor	M	Czech	Czech Republic	1-5	8-10
Dima	M	Romanian	Romania	5-10	10-15
Dragomir	M	Romanian	Romania	1-5	10-15
Efrain	M	Spanish	Spain	10-15	15-20
Elsa	F	Portuguese	Austria	1-5	8-11
Enrique	M	Spanish	Spain	10-15	40-50
Iosif	M	Bulgarian	Bulgaria	30-35	13-16
John	M	American	Italy	1-5	10-12
Joos	M	American	Belgium	1-5	10-15
Justýna	F	Czech	Czech Republic	5-10	4-5
Kim	F	American	Bosnia-Herzegovina	20-25	10-15
Mary	F	Austrian	Austria	5-10	10-20
Michał	M	Polish	Poland	10-15	5-6
Pascal	M	French	France	10-15	20-30
Petr	M	Czech	Czech Republic	5-10	4-5
Timotheus	M	*	Germany	5-10	50-60
Trey	M	Finnish	Finland	1-5	50-60
Tristan	M	Czech	Czech Republic	15-20	5-10
Wilda	F	American	Austria	15-20	5-10
Wilma	F	American	Croatia	15-20	15-20

Note: * One participant declined to give a national identity and instead identified as "a citizen of heaven." M= Male; F= Female.

Methodology

Data were gathered from 24 participants across 13 European countries through semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted about one hour, was recorded, and subsequently transcribed. The transcriptions were imported into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis tool, where coded using initial and focused coding methods. The interviews were conducted in English; however, translators were present for two participants. Having some fluency in their native language, I verified their statements in English and indigenous language. All interviews were transcribed into English before the coding process.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the strict travel restrictions imposed by most European governments, conducting in-person interviews was virtually impossible. As a result, all interviews were conducted via Zoom, employing what Dzubinski (2017) described as technology-assisted qualitative data collection (TAQDAC).

Findings

The participants indicated they experienced barriers when engaging ethnoculturally diverse teens in Europe. Some of the barriers were quite significant, and some, such as discrimination and marginalization, were noted in some participant's churches. However, the data also revealed bridges that youth leaders constructed to overcome these barriers and reach ethnoculturally diverse youth.

Barriers to Effectively Engaging Multicultural Teenagers

Participants described many barriers to reaching multicultural youth. However, the data revealed four barriers, which were the most prominent. The youth leaders expressed how prejudice and discrimination, limited missionality, language, and cultural differences hindered their efforts to reach multicultural youth.

Prejudice and Discrimination

Many youth leaders vividly described instances of prejudice and discrimination toward immigrant or indigenous minority groups that hindered efforts to reach multicultural teens. Often, prejudicial attitudes were noted in the national culture but were also evident in the local church. Participants from across Europe indicated significant animosity toward Roma. Wilma noted that toward "Roma, there's *huge* (emphasis hers) prejudice."

Ciprian recalled how tensions between Roma and Romanians existed in his early childhood. Ciprian explained,

> There is tension, and it's a very difficult subject. When I was a child, the Roma neighborhood was assigned to the same school I was a part of. Sometimes I would hear teachers and people say, "Oh, how are we going to manage the Roma problem?" There are many preconceptions and many issues when it comes to the Roma. Racism is a loaded word; sometimes, some people use it too quickly, but there is definitely a problem. If you are gypsy in Romania, you are bound to encounter people who do not give you a chance.

Participants described how prejudicial attitudes of the national culture were evident in the church as well. Kim said, "In general, for our churches here in Bosina, foreign kids have no value." Similarly, Iosif noted the "barriers" in Bulgaria between the Bulgarian and Roma churches. He stopped short of saying that the churches hated each other. Iosif explained,

> In some areas in Bulgaria, there are big barriers. In some churches, I can say both Roma churches and Bulgarian churches, sometimes— they're not hating each other— but they have these cultural barriers, and everyone thinks they're right. Here in Sofia, sometimes you can feel these kinds of barriers.

Sometimes, these barriers were so significant that Roma were excluded from the national church. Wilma described an incident where the prejudicial attitudes of some church members prevented new Roma converts from being baptized in water. Further, some church members disliked worship music with Roma overtones. Wilma said,

> When the Roma church plant started, they would bring all the Roma people who were getting saved to our church to be baptized, which freaked out the church members. So finally, our pastor had to say to the Roma pastor, "Hey, we're going ask you guys to do

> your own baptism in your church because everybody is so freaked out by having all these Roma in the church." Mind you, ridiculous amounts of Roma we're getting saved and baptized; they were afraid of them and afraid to have them at the church! My husband and I were just like, "This cannot be happening! What is going on!" We still can't believe it. My husband sometimes plays the piano in church, and people say, "That sounds too much the Roma music," They don't say, "Roma." They say, "gypsy." "This sounds too much like gypsy music."

Tristan and Alois attributed the tension between Roma and the national church to cultural differences. Some of the language Tristan used to describe these tensions could be perceived as othering. Tristian said,

> Yeah, there is tension. Especially because they are different, and they are from different cultures. The Gypsies are so much louder than the Czech people. They change things a lot, and they often change how they think. Sometimes, when they have a meeting or church service, two people come, and at the next meeting, 50. So it's unpredictable. Often, things are stolen because the Roma youth will invite friends, and they often steal things. So it's often hard to cooperate with the Gypsy community. For example, we have three or four Gypsy people coming to church. They come to church, but they are not part of the church. They are still visitors because they don't have many friends.

At Alois's church, they have a separate church service for Roma. When describing the Roma worship services, Alois emphasized how "different" the Roma were by saying,

> The Roma are different. In our church, we have services in the evening for Roma. This church service is only for them. It's different. They have Roma worship songs, specific preaching from the minister, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is different.

I asked Alois if the cultural differences in worship styles made it hard for the Czech and Roma congregations to worship together. After thinking momentarily, Alois replied slowly, "It's not difficult; it's (long pause). I don't know– it's a bit difficult, yes."

Incidents of discrimination were not only focused on the Roma population. Participants in Spain commented how some older Spaniards exhibited prejudice toward immigrants, particularly Latin Americans. Enrique felt that the discrimination was partly due to immigration being a recent trend in Spain. When I asked him to explain, Enrique compared his experiences in England to his reality in Spain. Enrique said,

> In Spain, older people are really prejudiced towards Latin Americans and Arabs. For example, we lived in England for a time, and you see young people whose ancestors immigrated there four or five generations ago. Over there, it was completely normal to see people of color fully English. We're in the second, maybe the third generation of immigrants in Spain. They see the Latin American features and a Spanish person will ask them, "Where are you from?" They will reply, "I'm Spanish." but the Spaniard will say, "You're not from here." So the problem is with the older people. The younger people see it (diverse people) more as normal.

When I asked him if the prejudicial attitudes of some Spaniards impacted his church, Enrique indicated that it did. Because of his church's large population of Latin Americans, some Spaniards hesitated to attend. Enrique said, "Sometimes it's difficult to get a Spanish person to come because they think it's a Latin American church. I think it happens more with Spanish people because Latin Americans don't really have a problem worshiping with Spaniards." Interestingly, the prejudice some Spaniards held towards Latinos did not seem reciprocal. Enrique observed in his church, "The majority of new Spanish people that come to the church are brought in by Latin Americans."

Likewise, Efrain also noted that Spaniards were hesitant to attend church with Latin American immigrants. When I asked him to describe the situation in Spain, Efrain, like Enrique, put the onus on the older generation. Efrain explained, "Unfortunately, in Spain, some people, especially older people, have prejudices about developing relationships with people from other cultures. Some people don't want to attend church because they are prejudiced against Latinos."

Participants noted that prejudice and discrimination played a role in hindering their ability to reach diverse youth. While some participants told stories of overt discrimination, other participants used language that seemed to marginalize or other immigrants, people of color, and Roma. Dalibor referred to people of African descent as "African American" because he "didn't know how to describe them in any other way." Other participants, such as Petr, Mary, and

Dragomir, to name a few, used the descriptor “white” to describe their ethnic racial identity (ERI) or the population of their city or church.

Nevertheless, while prejudice and discrimination were prominent barriers, they were not the only significant ones. The missionality of the church, particularly the church’s focus on homogenous groups, also created barriers to participants’ efforts in reaching diverse youth.

Limited Missionality

Participants noted their church was, to some extent, missional or at least evangelistic. Most youth leaders explained that their churches participated in some form of foreign mission and local evangelism. The primary barrier that kept some churches from reaching diverse youth was their limited missionality. In other words, the less diverse churches tended to focus their evangelistic efforts on the indigenous population or the teens already in the church. Michał explained, “We are mainly focused on Polish people because this is the biggest need.”

Justýna described her church as “mainly Czech white people” and preferred the term “relevant” rather than “missional” to define her church. Justýna explained why: "I don’t describe our church as missional. I would say we are trying to be relevant, maybe. So we can invite unbelievers and guests or friends, and it would be relevant for them.”

Other youth leaders in homogenous churches rarely engaged the local community in evangelism. Alois explained, “In our local church, we don’t really do much in missions with our community or in our city.” This limited missionality helped explain why several participants indicated that the vast majority of the youth group were teens who grew up in the church and had parents who attended the church. Often, these teens were described as “church kids” in youth ministry vernacular. In response to a follow-up question, Alois explained that the teens in the youth group attended “because the teens are children from the church. Their parents are believers

from the church." Likewise, Dalibor commented, "Most of our youth have grown up in the church with their families."

It would be incorrect to imply that multicultural youth groups did not have significant numbers of church kids in their youth ministries— some did. Efrain and Timotheus described their youth groups as culturally diverse, and they also indicated that the youth groups consisted of a significant number of church kids. Efrain explained,

> The most typical teenagers in my group are the children of Christians in the church. They have grown up in the church since they were children. Some teens don't come from a Christian family, but the most representative in my group are church kids.

Timotheus observed the link between the multicultural composition of the church and his youth group. Timotheus said, "Our multicultural teenagers were always there (in the youth group) because most of them are the children of the parents that attend the church." In other words, because the church is diverse and many teens in the youth group are church kids, the youth group is diverse.

The churches with limited missionality were hindered in reaching diverse youth due to narrowly focusing their evangelistic efforts on the majority indigenous population. Other monocultural youth groups further limited their mission to the youth already in the church. Because the church was homogenous and focused on outreach to the majority population and the youth ministry almost exclusively ministered to church kids, there was little opportunity to reach diverse teens.

Language

Another barrier to reaching diverse youth was language. In countries where the indigenous language was less common globally, the lack of a shared language hindered the youth leader's efforts to engage diverse youth. Justýna described an encounter with Ukrainian teens who recently fled to the Czech Republic to escape the Russo-Ukrainian war. The teens attempted

to join the youth group but encountered a language barrier. Justýna explained, “I think for the Ukrainian teens, it was hard because of the language. We tried to speak English with them, but they only spoke Ukrainian.”

Language was often a barrier in most youth groups where the Sunday worship service was translated, but the youth service was not. Elsa, Mary, Petr, and Trey’s churches translate their Sunday services into English to engage the immigrants who attend. However, the youth services at their churches are usually not translated. Mary admitted that “the language barrier was a problem” that prompted a family to leave her church in favor of another church that used English in the youth ministry.

When non-German speakers visited her youth group, Elsa switched the entire youth service to English. However, this proved to be problematic and had less than optimal results. Elsa explained what happened when some Brazilian teens joined the youth group. Elsa said,

> We had some Brazilian teenagers here who only spoke Portuguese and English. So we switched the whole thing to English. For the first few minutes, all the teens were trying to use words they didn’t really remember, and they asked the leaders for a few words, then it kind of worked. I would say that sometimes language is a barrier because the teens do not feel 100% comfortable speaking a language other than German.

Language was sometimes a barrier in the youth groups that regularly engaged diverse teens. In Timotheus's church, Sunday services were translated into English and French. In the past, the church also translated the services into Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. However, in the youth ministry, there seemed to be an expectation that the teens should develop fluency in the indigenous language. When asked, “What language do you use in your youth service?” Timotheus responded,

> German. We sing English songs, but we talk in German, and we preach in German. Well, there are two guys who only speak English in our youth group. One is from South Africa, and the other one is from Canada, I think. But they need to learn German, so that’s fine, I’m sorry (laughter).

Other participants noted that using only English hindered indigenous youth from participating in the youth ministry. Kim explained how several parents and one pastor do not want their teens to attend the youth group. While she would like a bilingual youth service, Kim lacks fluency in Bosnian. Kim described her conundrum,

> I've heard from a few youth within the Bosnian church that their parents don't want them to come because it is in English. This one Pastor I know doesn't want his son coming because it's in English. Even though the son speaks English and understands English very well, he would rather that the son doesn't participate. The son is not involved in any youth function. They don't have a youth group at their church; they have nothing. Our youth group is multinational, and as I said, we don't have the Bosnian language option at this time because we don't have language support. But he doesn't want his kid involved because it is in English, which is bizarre and weird to me. I think he would enjoy and get a lot out of the group, but because it's mostly in English, the dad doesn't want his son involved because it's not 'Bosnian.'"

Admittedly language did not seem to be a barrier in countries where the indigenous language was widely spoken globally. For example, the youth leaders from Spain reported large numbers of Latin American immigrants in their churches. Yet, because the immigrants spoke a variation of Spanish, there appeared to be no hindrance to reaching diverse youth. Efrain explained,

> I am from Spain. I speak Castellano, but when a Chileno speaks, it is in Latino Español. We don't have anything defined about what language we use. It depends on the preacher. I don't think the different types of Spanish are a barrier.

The youth leaders in Spain did note that they sometimes used different vocabulary. For example, the Latin American words *pluma* (pen), *computadora* (computer), and *carro* (car) were sometimes substituted for the Castellano words *boligrafo* (pen), *ordenador* (computer), and *coche* (car).

In summary, language was a barrier to reaching diverse youth for various reasons. However, the primary reasons were a lack of a common language or exclusive use of the indigenous language or English. Even churches that offered translation as part of the Sunday

morning worship experience sometimes struggled with language in the youth ministry. Some participants, such as Kim, did not have anyone to translate. Other youth leaders did not have translation because they felt the immigrant teens needed to develop fluency in the indigenous language. The inability or choice not to translate the youth service seemed to discourage teens from attending the youth group. Some teens did not attend because they could not understand the language and connect with other teens, while others did not attend because their parents objected to the use of English.

Prejudice, limited missionality, and language hindered youth leaders from engaging multicultural youth. The following section will describe the final factor youth leaders described as a barrier— cultural differences.

Overlooking Cultural Differences

Interestingly, while some participants noted cultural differences regarding prejudice and discrimination, others ignored or had difficulty navigating cultural differences. For example, Alois, Efrain, Mary, and Tristan seemed to ignore or minimize cultural differences. When asked if there were any Roma in his city, Alois replied, “Roma? Yeah, lots of them, but I think of them as Czech.” Efrain noted that the cultural similarities made integrating Latin American teens into the youth group easy. Efrain said, “Even though they are from different countries in South America, the differences are so small it’s easy to integrate them because the cultures are so similar.” Likewise, Mary commented, “Sometimes I don’t even like to differentiate between cultures.” Instead, Mary prefers to “see them (teenagers) as individuals” regardless of their cultural background.

When asked about the diversity in his city, Tristan seemed to minimize the cultural distance between Czechs and Slovaks. Tristan said,

> Outside of big cities like Prague, most people are Czech. We don't count Slovaks because they're the same as Czechs, and usually, they speak Czech so well you don't realize they are Slovak. We were one country in the past, Czechoslovakia.

Other participants, such as Timotheus, seemed to use colorblind terminology. As he described how the Black Lives Matter movement impacted people of color in his church, Timotheus expressed that a new identity in Christ makes a national or racial identity irrelevant. Timotheus said,

> Two years ago, during Corona, the thing with Black Lives Matter hit social media. We have African people, and we have colored people in our church, and they were really hurt by the things going on in the world. And we tried to be sensitive to their feelings. We even went further and said, "Hey, racism is against God's will," because God's will is that we can gather everybody, it doesn't matter where you're from, doesn't matter your social background, or if you are rich or poor. It doesn't matter where you are from or what your skin color is. In church, everybody is welcome and can find it home. What we want to have in our church is what is in heaven. We needed to preach that our identity is not from our skin color and it's not from where we were born. Because when we met Christ, we are a new creation.

In addition to minimizing or eliminating cultural differences, other participants recalled having difficulty navigating cultural issues. Tristan described Roma as "louder than Czech people" and "unpredictable." At the same time, Alois noted that Roma worship styles made it "difficult" for Czechs and Roma to worship together.

Difficulties navigating cultural issues were not limited to the national churches and Roma. Other participants noted similar tensions between the national church and recent immigrants from the global south. Pascal noted that cultural differences in gender roles and perspectives of the supernatural sometimes hindered effective youth ministry. Pascal recalled a story of how a "white French lady" had to speak to the father of a recent French African teen immigrant. The meeting did not "go well" until Pascal asked a French African elder in the church to mediate. Pascal explained,

> One of our group leaders had to face a problem with the parents of a teen, and she is a white French lady. The problem was with a teen whose parents were African people, and

> she didn't know the code to talk with the father. She was a girl talking to a man. It didn't go well. It was difficult. So we contacted one of our elders in the church, who is a French African, and he came to the meeting. In our church, he is like the dad. He is also someone who is wise. So he came to this meeting, and he helped in the meeting. I talked with the youth leader afterward. I told her, "You know, you used some words that, culturally, were difficult for him to accept, and he used words that were difficult for you to accept culturally. Yet, we have to work together, which is not that easy."

In another incident, Pascal remarked that cultural differences in the supernatural were often challenging to navigate and could create barriers in youth ministry. Pascal described a situation where he felt a teen needed counseling while the parents thought the teen needed deliverance. The issue revolved around sexual identity, making the encounter even more complex. Pascal said,

> Recently, I had a young boy who was dealing with homosexuality. When he was in Africa, he had a homosexual experience at a very young age. Now he's struggling with it. When we discussed it with his parents, they thought we had to pray for him because he had to be delivered. They thought that he was possessed. That's very cultural. His parents thought he was possessed, but I didn't think he was possessed. I felt he needed some counseling. We gave him some things to help him with his problem without over-focusing on the problem. At the same time, there were people in the church who said, "No, this is horrible! It's an abomination in the Bible!" So you can't talk about it.

The issues related to cultural differences that hindered youth leaders from effectively engaging multicultural youth were found among all participants. While multicultural youth groups seemed to build bridges to navigate or manage cultural differences, the issues surrounding these differences nevertheless seemed to create tension in the church that hindered youth ministry. On the other hand, youth ministries that did not engage ethnoculturally diverse youth seemed to use cultural differences to justify their homogeneity.

Bridges for Engaging Multicultural Teenagers

Youth leaders who effectively engaged multicultural teenagers described bridges that helped them engage and retain multicultural teenagers. One of the most significant bridges was

the intentionality behind building bridges. The youth leaders intentionally engaged diverse youth and adjusted their methods to minister to diverse youth.

Intentionality

Except for Efrain, the youth leaders engaging multicultural youth were intentional about participating in foreign missions. Further, all churches engaging multicultural youth were intentional about their efforts to evangelize across cultures. Ciprian noted that being intentionally missional was a top priority for his church. Ciprian said that they have a "24/7 emphasis on reaching the lost. Being missional is one of our priorities."

While Efrain's church did not participate in international missions, it was intentional about local evangelism. Efrain explained why reaching multicultural youth was "important" for him. He attributed the importance of a Biblical mandate as a way to battle his prejudices. Efrain said,

> For me, it's so important about what the Apostle Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 9, "To the Jews I become like a Jew, to win the Jews, to those under the law I become like one under the law." I think this is an important aspect of ministry. Obviously, I battle with some *prejuicios* (prejudices). We all have *prejuicios* (prejudices). I battle with them to connect with people from another culture so I can reach people for Christ. As I know Jesus more and battle my prejudices, my *cosmovisión* (worldview) changes.

Timotheus also noted the intentionality of his church in engaging diverse people through street evangelism. He described his city as diverse, having Roma, Sinti, and French populations, to name a few. His church would conduct street evangelism in public locations to engage the diverse populations in the city. Timotheus explained, "When I started here in 2012, we went every Saturday on the streets to do good music, do some drama on the street with music, and then preach the gospel. So that's what we did for many, many years."

The participants were intentional about their evangelism efforts to engage diverse groups and adjusted their praxis to engage and retain diverse teens. These adjustments in praxis include

developing culturally diverse teams, developing cultural awareness, empowering teens, leveraging language and translation, and creating safe places.

Participants adjusted their praxis to attract and retain youth from different cultures while being careful not to adjust it so much that it alienated indigenous youth. Carmen explained that cultural differences and commonalities among teenagers created situations "outside your normal" as a leader. Thus, it was vital for her to adjust her praxis to meet the needs of teens. Carmen explained,

> The teenagers who will come to the group are not all going to be the same or think the same ways we did when we were teenagers. But specific to multicultural youth is that even though your experiences can help them because some things are common to all humanity, there are going to be moments that come up that are just gonna be outside of your normal.

Pascal seemed to echo Carmen's thoughts. When asked to describe the changes they made to attract or retain multicultural youth, Pascal confided that he had to "change my way of thinking" about teenagers. Because diverse teenagers brought different cultural values and dynamics to the youth group, the youth ministry needed to "adapt." Pascal explained, "If we're not ready to change and adapt our praxis in a way that relates to their daily life, well, don't expect to keep them."

There were many ways participants adjusted their praxis to engage multicultural youth. However, the most common changes included developing culturally diverse teams, developing cultural awareness, empowering teens, leveraging language and translation, and creating safe places.

Developing Culturally Diverse Teams

All the participants engaging ethnoculturally diverse youth had also developed or were developing culturally diverse teams. For example, Kim is an American serving in a Bosnian church. At the time of our interview, her only help was her American husband. Kim recognized

that their presence brings diversity to the church and the youth group, yet she is developing a culturally diverse team that would include Bosnians. Kim explained the importance of having a diverse team. She said, “Having more support in that area would be huge. Even just feeling like you’re connected to others in the same fight. You can pull together, feed off each other, and give each other advice and encouragement.”

When I asked Timotheus to describe what helped him attract or retain multicultural youth, he half-jokingly replied that he and his co-youth pastor’s ethnic heritage attracted youth. Timotheus's parents immigrated from Romania to Germany, and Timotheus’s co-pastor, Kai, is Sinti— a branch of Roma born in Germany. Timotheus said, “Me and my co-pastor Kai, we look multicultural. That’s all we need to do (laughter).” Timotheus also noted that his youth leadership team was diverse, describing them as “three Germans and the rest are Italian, African, and Russian.”

Carmen commented that her team was “quite a mixture” and included “a Nigerian, two Bolivians, some from Catalonia, a few girls from the States, one from Panama.” She explained why it was essential to have a diverse youth leadership team. Carmen said, “People from certain cultures will be drawn toward the leaders of certain cultures. Not all the time, but it definitely, I think, helps because there’s just this underlying understanding of family life and that kind of thing.”

Having diverse leaders helped attract youth from diverse cultures. Additionally, diverse leaders were able to help provide context and meaning to the behaviors and experiences of diverse youth. Leaders from different cultures also help the youth ministry adjust its praxis to develop cultural awareness.

Developing Cultural Awareness

The process by which participants developed cultural awareness included insights from diverse leaders and youth, short-term missions trips (STM), and cultural exchanges. As mentioned in the previous section, diverse leaders were valuable sources of insight and development of cultural awareness. The diverse leaders attracted diverse youth and helped the youth leaders develop cultural intelligence. Carmen succinctly summarized what was expressed by other leaders. Carmen said,

> It's good that my team is diverse because maybe if I don't understand Nigerian culture, the Nigerian leaders we have on the team will understand and be able to give some insight. That's a big way they help me because I may not understand all the cultural expectations or these kinds of things.

Leaders were not the only resource the participants had to draw on to develop cultural awareness. Many times, the youth themselves provided insights. Carmen recalled when a recent Ukrainian immigrant teen taught her about Ukrainian culture during a group discussion about loneliness. Carmen reflected that the encounter deepened her cultural awareness. She said,

> We had a conversation in a group where one of the leaders asked the Ukrainian girls to give their opinion on loneliness. They had been kind of quiet during the discussions, and I think this leader just wanted to hear what was going on in their heads. It was interesting to me from a cultural standpoint because one of the Ukrainian girls very briefly said, "In my culture, we don't talk about feelings, even with our family and our closest people. So it's not very comfortable for me to share this part of who I am yet with you." I was like, "Wow!" It was very cool to hear that she was willing to share that. I was really impressed with her. But also, I realized that this could be something we need to pay attention to and think about— that the people in our context may not have the same level of vulnerability that we might expect from a teenager from a different culture.

Other leaders commented that the teens provided insights into cultural practices such as food and music that participants incorporated into their youth services to attract or retain multicultural teens. Enrique described how he adjusted his praxis in the youth ministry café after receiving feedback from Latino teenagers. Enrique described the changes by saying,

> In the past few weeks, we have started to have more food because we noticed that the youth would leave approximately 10 minutes after the meeting finished— they were gone. So we've opened up a space for them to get together and talk. Another difference is that we have adopted food from different countries, such as *salchipapas* from Colombia and *empanadas*.

Likewise, Efrain and Iosif noted how the immigrant and minority youth were instrumental in incorporating cultural music styles into the youth ministry. Efrain uses rap and *reggaetón* in the youth services because it is "important to connect with the music styles of the teenagers." Efrain explained that *reggaetón* is a "mix of rap and Latino songs" popular among immigrant Latino and Spanish youth.

Iosif, who has served in diverse youth ministries at other churches, remarked that "worship is one of the favorite things of Roma youth." He described the Roma teens by saying, "They're musicians, They're dancers. They like to dance and play music." Iosif explained that music could be a sensitive topic when ministering to Roma youth. He described a Bulgarian music style called *chalga* that was popular with adolescents. Iosif said, "We have a type of music called *chalga* in Bulgaria. Some people say folk music, but it's not traditional Bulgarian folk music. It is totally different."

According to Iosif, some youth leaders in Bulgaria have adjusted their methods to include *chalga*. However, *chalga* is controversial in some churches. Iosif explained,

> I can say *chalga* is dirty music. It's a musical style that uses profane words. It's always talking about sex, bad behavior, how to be strong and tough, and controlling others. The rhythm of the music is very good. Not only do the Roma youth like it, but the Bulgarian teens also like the rhythm, so they try to use the same rhythm with Christian words. Sometimes, it works well, but it can also push them to listen to *chalga* music with bad verses, and they start to behave in the way the music advocates. That's why some Roma pastors and leaders forbid the young people and the churches to use *chalga* in worship.

Both leaders and youth have helped develop cultural awareness in the youth ministry, which has led to changes in praxis. Sometimes, as in the case of *chalga*, the changes have been

controversial. Youth leaders engaging multicultural youth have also found STM and cross-cultural exchanges helpful in developing cultural awareness.

As noted earlier, Pascal has been on mission trips to Africa and Europe. He commented that “those experiences opened my mind to different cultures.” Likewise, Dima recalled how he “traveled all over Europe” with his youth pastor. He felt those STMs developed cultural awareness and “trained” him for multicultural youth ministry.

Carmen was a recipient of a short-term missions team. She recollected how “a team of five interns from Sweden came to work at the church for two weeks.” One of the events they created was a meet-and-greet where the Swedish interns could interact with the youth. The participants engaging diverse youth were intentional about participating in STM and cultural exchanges. They described cultural exchanges and STM as helpful in developing cultural awareness for teens and leaders.

Empowering Teens

Another way youth leaders adjusted their praxis to engage multicultural teenagers was by empowering them to become active participants in the youth ministry. All the youth leaders, except Justýna, encouraged their teens to participate in various ways. Some teens helped with worship, drama, or dance. Other teens set up the room before service or cleaned up the room afterward. In other groups, teens helped with social media, chose topics for discussion, or helped prepare food. In other words, the teens were involved in virtually all aspects of ministry. Furthermore, participants engaging diverse youth reported using ethnic music and dance styles to empower multicultural youth and attract diverse youth.

The main difference between the leaders engaging multicultural teens and those who were not is that they empowered their teens to engage other teens. When Iosif served at a diverse

church, he created events to empower Bulgarian teens to connect with Roma teens. Iosif described the events by saying,

> We had events with Roma and Bulgarian teens together. We go as guests to their church, sit at one table and eat with them, then sing together or sometimes just have fun games, dancing together. That's enough, after that, we're friends. The teens start chatting with each other, they become friends on social media, they start going out and walking in the park together, and they create friendships. We did this very often, very often, and it really works!

Pascal empowered his teens to connect with visitors and help include them in the activities. Pascal explained, "I met with some teens and asked them, 'Can you take care of Jack for a while? Can you draw him in your activities? Can he be part of your team?'" Pascal found that by connecting visiting teens with the teens in the youth group, the visiting teens were more likely to return and stay connected to the group. Pascal was not the only participant to notice this connection. Several other leaders observed how empowered teens inviting their friends helped connect them to the youth group. For example, Elsa commented that when an unchurched teen comes to youth service due to an invitation from a friend, "they will most likely stay" in the youth group.

In contrast, when I asked Justýna to describe how the youth were involved in the youth group, she replied, "Nothing special. They just come and enjoy it." Justýna explained that she and her co-leader do everything to prepare and run the service.

By building bridges to empower teens to connect with teens, youth leaders created cohesive network bonds. These bonds helped unchurched teens, often from diverse cultures, connect to the youth ministry through relationships with other teens. Additionally, youth groups engaging multicultural teens tended to empower youth to use cultural music and dance as part of their overall strategy to attract diverse youth.

Leveraging Language and Translation

While language was a barrier for some participants, other participants creatively leveraged language and translation as a bridge to engage multicultural teens. Some participants used translation, and others used a widely spoken common language. Carmen, Joos, Dima, Wilda, and Ciprian used the indigenous language and translated it into English. Carmen explained, "We do as much as we possibly can bilingual between English and Spanish." However, she did note that translation can sometimes be "messier" than one language. She explained,

> Discussions can be a little bit messier because when you're having a small group discussion, it doesn't make sense to have a continual translation like that all the time. But we are intentional to make sure that the languages are both used so that everyone can understand.

Similarly, Joos used both French and English in his youth services. He noted that while translation helps include diverse youth, it can be time-consuming. Joos said, "We do a short five to ten-minute lesson because it has to be translated, which takes forever."

Ciprian and Dima commented on the ubiquitous use of English in Europe. While both offer translation from the indigenous language to English, they will sometimes only use English because most European and immigrant teens are fluent in English. Ciprian remarked, "We use English translation, or sometimes not. Depending on who participates because most Romanian teenagers speak quite good English, so sometimes we don't have to translate it into Romanian." Dima echoed Ciprian's observations and explained that using English made things "easier." Dima explained,

> It definitely makes it easier for us that the international people all speak Romanian and English. If someone's not comfortable speaking Romanian, although everyone understands it, some of them find it hard to speak it, we will be sure to speak to them in English. It seems to work fine.

Kim and Wilma use English exclusively in their youth groups for different reasons. Kim has not yet developed fluency in the indigenous language nor developed a team with members who can translate. Kim, too, noticed the ubiquitousness of— and the teen's facility in— English. She said, "All the foreigner kids speak English well, or good enough to understand. Even the Bosnians that come to youth speak English and understand English just fine." However, Kim indicated that she desires to eventually move to a bilingual Bosnian and English model.

Wilma uses English to draw youth who would otherwise not attend church. She explained that, in some ways, using English may go "against what they tell you in missions," but in her context, it seemed to work. She explained,

> Everybody wants their kids and their teenagers to speak English. As long as you're upfront about it, like, "We're a Christian, and we talk about positive things, and Jesus could be mentioned." The parents will be like, "Oh, English. We'll send our kids to hang out, play English games, and have group discussions in English." It kind of goes against what they tell you in missions, right? (In a different voice) "Learn the Language! Speak their heart language!" But teenagers want to speak English! They want to talk to Americans! They want to ask, "Do all Americans wear socks to bed?" I've been asked that because, apparently, that's a thing they saw in a movie. They're very curious about Americans. So don't run away from the fact that you're American. Embrace it and be like, "I'm a crazy American. We're gonna learn about Jesus and practice English together."

While many participants adjusted their praxis to leverage language and translation, there were a few exceptions. Three participants, Andreia, Efrain, and Enrique, used their indigenous languages exclusively. Andreia used Portuguese, and Efrain and Enrique used Castillian Spanish occasionally modified. All three indicated they were engaging multicultural youth from former Portuguese or Spanish colonies in Latin America or Africa. Because the indigenous teens shared a common language with the immigrant teens, there was no need to offer translation. Andreia explained why they only used Portuguese. She said,

> We use Portuguese because most of the people who come from Africa and Brazil speak Portuguese. Brazilian is different with the accent and some words, but we understand

> each other. Even in Africa, although they have different local languages, Portuguese is a common language.

The participants who built bridges by leveraging language and translation indicated that they could engage diverse youth who they might not have engaged by using the indigenous language alone. There were some notable exceptions, but these were engaging diverse youth fluent in a world version of the indigenous language; for example, Angolan, Cape Verdean, and Brazilian teens in Portugal and Bolivian, Argentine, and Peruvian teens in Spain. In the next section, I will describe a final adjustment in praxis that participants found helpful for engaging multicultural youth— creating safe spaces.

Creating Safe Places

Many participants mentioned the importance of creating safe places for their youth. However, participants who engaged diverse teens mentioned safe places more often. The participants who indicated they created safe places also acknowledged discrimination and marginalization among the general population toward minority groups.

When I asked Carmen what drew so many diverse teens to her group, she replied, "I think the teenagers would say it's a place they feel safe, that they know that we're going to be there for them and that we are happy for them to come." When I asked Dima what advice he would give someone who wanted to reach multicultural youth, he also spoke of the importance of creating safe spaces. Dima said,

> I would tell them, "Make your youth ministry a place where, no matter where they come from, the teens feel safe and they can feel at home." If you were at our youth service, you would see teenagers interacting, and you wouldn't be able to tell that they are from different cultures. We have the same identity as a youth group, and all feel at home. We all feel safe here, no matter our background.

Enrique noted that he created his youth group as a safe place for all teenagers to escape the prejudice prevalent in Spain. When I asked Enrique why so many Latino teens attended the

youth group, he replied, “Because when they go there, they find other people that are in the same situation or similar to them from different countries, and they look for that for a community.” In other words, the teens came to connect in a safe place with other teens from different cultures who had shared experiences.

Finally, Wilda explained that while her youth group was a safe place, it was also a work in progress. Wilda clarified, “It would be accurate to describe the youth group as a safe place. I think we have a way to go for that to be true for every youth group member, but I’ve heard that expressed from some of the youth.” Some of the teens in Wilda’s youth group considered the group a safe place. Other youths in the group were on a journey of discovery and were still “hesitant and uncertain” to see if they would fit in. However, all participants engaging multicultural youth described how they adjusted their methods to create safe spaces for diverse teens.

Discussion

The data revealed significant barriers youth leaders faced when attempting to engage ethnoculturally diverse teens and bridges the youth leaders built to overcome these barriers to reach diverse teens with the gospel. What follows is a discussion of the findings in light of the relevant literature.

Significant Barriers to Effectively Engaging Multicultural Teens

All participants described barriers to engaging culturally diverse youth that included prejudice and discrimination, limited missionality, language, and overlooking cultural differences.

Prejudice, Discrimination, and Marginalization

Participants described instances of prejudice and discrimination. Their descriptions align with the literature on discrimination toward immigrants (Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2016) and

Roma (Dimitrova et al., 2014). In their survey of 19 European countries, Gorodzeisky and Semyonov (2016) found racial prejudice toward immigrants from non-European origins. The participants in Spain described instances of marginalization toward Latino immigrants. León (2019) noted that immigrants from Argentina assimilated quickly into Spain due to their education and "their racial similarities with the Spaniards; most looked like southern Europeans" (p. 30). However, the second wave of immigrants from other parts of Latin America were not as welcomed. León (2019) explained,

> Unlike immigrants and exiles from Argentina, who could racially "pass" as Spaniards, Caribbean immigrants from Cuba and the Dominican Republic, along with those from Andean countries like Peru and Ecuador, were labeled as racial Others and became the object of hostility.

Likewise, Berrocal (2020) found that discrimination towards Latinos by Spaniards tended to focus on Latinos with "darker skin" (p. 10), while Latinos with lighter skin were able to blend in more easily. The hostility and discrimination noted by León (2019) and Berrocal (2020) is likely why participants observed that older Spaniards did not want to attend churches that they perceived to be Latino.

Other participants described prejudice and discrimination toward Roma. This finding was not unexpected since the literature showed that Roma are Europe's "largest indigenous ethnic minority and exposed to severe discrimination, social exclusion, poverty, and compromised well-being" (Dimitrova et al., 2014, p. 375). Indeed, several participants commented about the general population's prejudicial attitudes toward Roma in their countries. A surprising finding was the participant's descriptions of marginalization and discrimination against Roma within the national churches.

One participant described their church as a multi-congregational church, with a service for nationals and a service for Roma. The participant explained that the Roma service was "only

for them." This structure is similar to Ortiz's (1996) rental model, where two congregations share facilities with no interaction between the groups.

Some participants described stereotypes the majority culture held towards Roma, such as Roma stealing, being violent towards women and children, and worshiping differently from the majority culture. Regarding religious stereotypes of Roma, Podolinská (2021) posited that any divergence from the religious norms of the mainstream culture is viewed as "unorthodox deviations" (p. 156). This deviation from cultural norms may help explain why some participants noted how "different" Roma worship styles were when compared to the majority culture.

It is plausible that diverse teens would avoid attending a youth group where they could face marginalization. Teens have changed their ERI to avoid association with those who discriminate against them (Gryskiewicz, 2020). It is just as likely that teens will avoid going somewhere where they could face discrimination and marginalization.

Limiting or Not Participating in Mission

Emerson and Chai Kim (2003) found that congregations become diverse "out of their sense of mission" (p. 225). Some participants hindered themselves by limiting their mission by conducting no local evangelism, while others focused their evangelism efforts solely on the majority population. Further, participants who did not engage diverse youth focused less on international missions than youth leaders who were engaging ethnoculturally diverse youth.

Limited missionality is related to the leadership in the church. A significant finding by DeYoung et al. (2003) indicated that "A key barrier to becoming a multiracial church is lack of leadership" (p. 170). In contrast, Edwards et al. (2013) observed that if church leaders "intentionally and regularly promote diversity" (p. 217), the church will increase in diversity. When Emerson and Woo (2008) asked pastors why their churches were homogenous, one

primary response was, “people simply are more comfortable in racially homogenous congregations” (p. 38). According to Woo (2009), the church must leave its comfort zone to engage culturally diverse people. One member of Woo’s (2009) diverse church commented, “I definitely forfeited being comfortable as I was in previous churches. It was time to reach out, stretch, and get involved” (p. 114). The literature shows that a church’s limited missionality rests on its leadership’s shoulders. If the leadership wishes the church to remain monocultural, the church will remain monocultural.

Some participants limited their missionality by exclusively focusing on the majority population because, as one participant said, “this is the biggest need.” Others limited their missionality, perhaps because they were uncomfortable engaging with people who did not speak their language or because they felt they were too culturally different. Others, unfortunately, limited their missionality because they were wrestling with prejudicial stereotypes.

Failing to Leverage Language

Language was a barrier that impacted various churches differently. For example, immigrants moving to the Czech Republic, Romania, and Bulgaria usually do not speak the national language upon arrival. However, often, but not always, English was a shared language. Nevertheless, some churches used the national language exclusively in their services. By using only the national language, participants faced barriers in reaching immigrant teens who lacked fluency in the national language.

By failing to translate their youth services into English, some churches created barriers that limited their engagement with ethnoculturally diverse youth. I found the lack of translation in some of these churches puzzling. Some translated their Sunday worship service into English, and all the youth leaders were fluent in English. Further, immigrant teens from other European

countries will likely fall within the 96% of secondary school students learning English (Eurostat, 2021b).

By moving to a bilingual youth service, they could build bridges to engage indigenous and immigrant teens. Rodriguez (2010) and Song (2017) found similar issues in Latino immigrant churches in the United States and Korean immigrant churches in Canada. Spanish-language Latino churches in the US lost their teenagers who were not fluent in Spanish (Rodriguez, 2010). However, by transitioning to a bilingual Spanish and English model, the Latino churches retained their youth and began to reach non-Spanish speakers in their social networks (Rodriguez, 2010).

Song (2017) noted that most large Korean churches in Canada had two youth groups based on language— a Korean-speaking group and an English-speaking group "that seldom function together in harmony" (p. 101). On the other hand, youth groups that worshiped together and used Korean and English helped immigrant students integrate into the new culture and were "much happier than those groups separated by language" (Song, 2017, p. 106).

Transition is not without its challenges. Some participants noted that translation sometimes "takes forever" and can be a "bit messier" than one language. Nevertheless, some churches seem to have the tools to transform this barrier into a bridge.

Overlooking Cultural Differences

Participants wrestled with cultural differences. Some participants struggled with culturally situated gender roles or perspectives of the supernatural. Other participants seemed to take a colorblind or "cultureblind" (Ford et al., 2004, p. 97) perspective regarding the diverse cultures in their city or church. Ford et al. (2004) defined cultureblind among teachers as "ignoring, minimizing or negating culture and cultural differences, educators pretend that

differences do not exist" (p. 97). Yancey (2022) posits that colorblindness, and presumably cultureblindness, is a "path that goes nowhere" (p. 2) and "ignores the damage our racialized society has sustained" (p. 2).

Immigrant youth often face discrimination and sometimes struggle to assimilate their new language and cultural norms (Dimitrova et al., 2013; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2016). The cultureblind approach taken by some participants fails "to truly understand what is distinctive about another person's ethnicity and culture" (Parrett, 1999, p. 35) and acknowledge the struggles experienced by immigrants and the role their heritage plays in their ERI development (Gryskiewicz, 2020). The clutureblind participants seem to advocate for a "one size fits all" (Linhart & Livermore, 2011, p. 155) form of youth ministry that Linhart and Livermore (2011) warn youth leaders to avoid. Participants do this by requiring immigrant youth to speak the national language and worship in the national style.

Participants likely perceive being cultureblind as a good thing. Apfelbaum et al. (2012) suggested that people are colorblind and presumably cultureblind, for altruistic reasons— to prevent discrimination. Apfelbaum et al. (2012) explained, writing, "The logic underlying the belief that color blindness can prevent prejudice and discrimination is straightforward: If people or institutions do not even notice race, then they cannot act in a racially biased manner" p. 205). Adding to the complexity of the colorblind argument, Yancey (2022) indicated that some aspects of colorblindness could be helpful. One example is a teacher grading papers. Yancey (2022) explained,

> When I grade my student's papers, I am colorblind. I will not provide extra points for students from marginalized populations. They earn the grade according to their efforts and abilities. To do otherwise is to give them a distorted view of what they have learned (p. 58).

So while some participants choose to be cultureblind for noble reasons, the result is ignoring aspects of immigrants' identities and "the damage our racialized society has sustained" (Yancey, 2022, p. 2). The cultureblind approach has also led to cultural clashes that could have been avoided if participants had developed cultural awareness. Some examples from the findings include communication and perspectives of the supernatural.

The GLOBE study (GLOBE, 2020) indicated that Europe is higher than Sub-Saharan Africa in gender egalitarianism. One participant described how a female European youth leader had difficulty communicating with the father of an African immigrant teen. The African father, likely from a patriarchal culture, had difficulty accepting what a "white European lady" had to say about his child. It was not until an African elder in the church mediated the discussion that the issue was resolved. It seems that the youth leader was operating from her European cultural values while overlooking or ignoring the cultural values of the African father. Had the youth leader invited the elder to attend the initial meeting or asked the Elder to act as an intermediary with the parent, the cultural clash may have been avoided.

In another incident, a participant described how African parents felt their teen needed deliverance while the youth leader thought the teen needed counseling. The youth leader's description brought to mind Hiebert's (1982) *Flaw of the Excluded Middle*. When faced with a similar situation in India, Hiebert's (1982) Western worldview of the supernatural clashed with the worldview of Indian believers. Hiebert (1982) clarified,

> I had excluded the middle level of supernatural but this-worldly beings and forces from my own worldview. As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian, I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. For me the middle zone did not really exist. Unlike Indian villagers, I had given little thought to spirits of this world, to local ancestors and ghosts, or to the souls of animals. For me these belonged to the realm of fairies, trolls and other mythical beings (p. 43).

The youth leader admitted that he felt the teen needed counseling and not deliverance. He did not consider the parent's perspective that supernatural forces were involved. What is especially intriguing is that the youth leader identified his church as a Pentecostal one with a history of recognizing healing, deliverance, and other supernatural manifestations. The participant was hindered from effectively engaging an immigrant teen and his family by overlooking the cultural differences of "the excluded middle" (Hiebert, 1982, p. 43).

Participants faced daunting hindrances that made it challenging to engage diverse youth effectively. Admittedly, some hindrances, such as national prejudice toward immigrants and Roma, were out of the participant's control. However, youth leaders could leverage several barriers to helpful bridges.

By choosing to move out of their cultural comfort zone and intentionally including diverse youth in their evangelism efforts, other helpful changes could follow. Culturally diverse believers would become leaders. Culturally diverse leaders would help develop cultural competency in the youth group. Increased cultural competency would help the youth group avoid cultural *faux pas* and increase their impact. Finally, diverse leaders would likely speak the language of immigrants, allowing the youth group to use a bilingual or multilingual model.

By leaving behind their cultureblind worldview and seeing the beauty and value in other cultures, youth leaders could effectively engage diverse youth and their parents and, perhaps, in the process, influence the national culture's attitudes towards marginalized people.

Building Bridges to Engage Multicultural Teens

The participants described bridges that helped them engage multicultural teens. Much of their description aligns closely with the literature on multiethnic and international churches. Participants indicated that they were following the Biblical mandate to engage all *ethnos* of

people with the gospel. Due to this Biblical directive, participants were intentional about their efforts to engage multicultural youth. Their intentionality also led to changes, such as developing culturally diverse teams and cultural awareness. Additionally, they empowered teens for service and leveraged language and translation to engage immigrant youth who were not fluent in the national language. Simultaneously, participants created safe places where diverse youth could meet without fear of being marginalized.

Intentionality Engaging Diverse Youth

My findings regarding intentionality align closely with the literature. According to Breckenridge and Breckenridge (1995), the first priority of a multicultural ministry is to "understand the evangelical nature of the task" (p. 12). To engage different cultures, a church must be intentional in its evangelism efforts to include culturally diverse people (DeYmaz, 2007; Ortiz, 1996; Yancey, 2003). Indeed, one participant stated that his church has a "24/7 emphasis on reaching the lost." An emphasis that goes beyond reaching the majority culture and engages immigrants and marginalized minority groups.

A primary difference between the churches engaging ethnoculturally diverse youth and those who were not was the *intentional* engagement of culturally diverse groups in their adult and youth services. Participants were willing to go outside their cultural comfort zone to engage people who spoke different languages and often looked different. As indicated by the literature, the leaders played an essential role in guiding the church's efforts to engage diverse cultures (DeYmaz, 2007; DeYoung et al., 2003; Ortiz, 1996; Yancey, 2003).

Why did some participants choose not to engage diverse youth? Participants who described their cities as homogenous felt since there were few diverse teens in the city, they had

little opportunity to engage diverse youth. The literature would imply that the leaders in the church wanted to focus the church's evangelism efforts on the majority culture.

On the other hand, participants from churches with diverse Sunday morning services and homogenous youth groups all described their cities as diverse. Indeed, immigrants were attending the Sunday morning worship services in these churches. However, they were engaging multicultural teens. The literature would suggest that the lead pastors were not intentionally diffusing the cultural value of multicultural mission to the youth ministry or that the participant's vision of the youth ministry did not align with the multicultural vision of the lead pastor. DeYoung et al. (2003) posited that a "lack of leadership" prevents many churches from becoming multiracial.

Before Woo (2009) could transition his church to a multiethnic church, he had to fire the current youth pastor who did not share his vision. Woo (2009) explained,

> The week before my first official Sunday, May 19, 1992, the church hired a young white man to be the minister to students. I sat down and talked with him and his wife concerning the future vision of the church prior to my arrival, but I sensed that our visions for Wilcrest were not identical, thus limiting the effectiveness of the leadership team (p. 101).

Developing multicultural churches and youth groups can be a "long and difficult journey" (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 143) that takes intentional effort (DeYmaz, 2007; DeYoung et al., 2003; Ortiz, 1996; Yancey, 2022). The results seemed worth the challenges and hard work for the participants engaging culturally diverse teens. Often, when they would tell stories about reaching diverse youth or describe the various nationalities in their group, the participants would smile and laugh as if they could not contain the joy they felt at reaching teens from around the world.

Developing Culturally Diverse Leadership Teams

All the participants who described their youth ministry as effectively engaging diverse youth had culturally diverse youth leaders. These diverse leaders were often immigrants from other parts of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. According to McIntosh and McMahan (2012), immigrants who have learned to navigate both their parent's culture and new culture "are a valuable asset" (p. 130) who can help develop ministries attractive to other immigrants. Having diverse leaders helped the participants develop cultural awareness and helped them understand immigrant experiences. Further, diverse team members assisted the leaders in navigating complex cultural issues.

My findings on culturally diverse leaders in youth groups align with the literature regarding multiracial (DeYmaz, 2007; Yancey, 2003) and immigrant churches (Dye, 2017). Once again, the value of intentionality is present. While diverse leadership "can happen quite naturally" (Yancey, 2003, p. 109), it is usually created intentionally. DeYmaz (2007) agreed with Yancey's (2003) assessment and indicated that diverse leaders with a vision of multicultural ministry "must be intentionally sought" (p. 72).

Participants also mentioned their culturally diverse leaders attracted diverse teens. Interestingly, Dye (2017) discovered that immigrant pastors in Europe attracted "indigenous Europeans and immigrants" (p. 242). Furthermore, much like the diverse leaders described by the participants, Dye (2017) found that 1.5 and 2.0 immigrants acted as "connectors" (p. 242), bringing the indigenous population and immigrants together.

Some participants had diverse leadership in their church; however, their youth groups were monocultural. Two plausible explanations are intentionality and transition. As previously mentioned, a church must be intentional about reaching diverse groups. Perhaps the participants

in these churches are not intentionally engaging diverse teens. Alternatively, perhaps these youth groups are in a transitional stage where they are slowly transitioning to multicultural youth groups; only the number of diverse youth in the group has not yet reached "critical mass" (Edwards et al., 2013, p. 213).

Developing Cultural Awareness Among Leaders and Youth

Participants considered developing cultural awareness as an essential bridge to engaging diverse youth. Youth leaders relied on insights from culturally diverse leaders, short-term missions (STM), and cultural exchanges to develop cultural awareness.

As previously noted, participants relied on diverse team members to help them develop cultural awareness. Writing about multiethnic churches in the United States, McIntosh and McMahan (2012) note how members of diverse churches can learn from one another. Participants engaging diverse youth are doing just that— relying on the experiences of immigrant and minority leaders to help develop cultural awareness of the teens they are engaging. This finding aligns with the literature about multiracial churches in the United States (DeYmaz, 2007; McIntosh & McMahan, 2012; Yancey, 2003).

An unexpected finding was that the churches engaging diverse youth used STM or cultural exchanges to foster cultural awareness. The participant, who was the most prolific user of cultural exchanges, explained that the purpose of the exchanges was to develop cultural awareness in the teens and leaders, or in their words, "to know new cultures."

There is an absence of literature regarding STM and the cultural exchange phenomena in Europe. Most youth ministry STM research derives from the United States, and some findings may not apply to a European context. For example, most STM from the US goes to Latin America (Beyerlein et al., 2011; Johnson, 2014), and some STM literature emerging from the US

questions the effectiveness of primarily rich, white Americans going to impoverished areas (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012).

While some participants revealed they had taken STM to Africa, most participants described going to other European countries, and none indicated that they had taken a STM to Latin America. Participants likely take STM to European countries for the same reasons Beyerlein et al. (2011) note Americans go to Mexico— "relatively low travel cost" (p. 781) and ease of travel. With the creation of the Schengen zone and the adoption of the Euro, it is rare to stop at any border crossing in the EU (Zaiotti, 2011), and travel can be quite affordable.

Eastern European countries have lower incomes and living standards than Western Europe. Yet participants from Eastern Europe have taken their teens, including Roma, on STM to Western Europe to assist with evangelism and develop cultural awareness. In other words, white Europeans were going on STM to minister to and learn about white Europeans.

The STM literature from the US is likely relevant to Europeans traveling to Africa or working with marginalized groups such as Roma. However, participants traveling to Africa stated their intention was ministry. They did not mention developing cultural awareness as a purpose for intercontinental travel. Further, no participant mentioned taking STM to work with Roma. Those engaging Roma did so as a part of their church's local evangelism strategy.

The primary difference between STM and cultural exchanges is that STM always had an evangelism or ministry component. However, both STM and exchanges were useful in helping develop cultural awareness. Lilleaasen's and Nandrup's (2020) study coming out of Norway found that 75% of STM participants "wanted to learn more about mission and other cultures" (p. 251). Further, 70% of the participants in their study said "meeting other people or experiencing other cultures" (Lilleaasen & Nandrup, 2020, p. 251) was their favorite part of the STM.

While there may be components of American-based STM literature that may be relevant to Europe, there are also differences that could be significant. Since the literature on STM related to European teens going to other European countries is thin, any conclusion should wait for further data.

The biggest danger to multicultural youth ministry is people from the outside who think all youth ministries and all cultures are the same. Indeed, the literature indicates that while there are similarities, there are differences in youth ministry globally (Conner & Molla, 2018; Gryskiewicz & Owensby, 2020; Linhart & Livermore, 2011). These differences extend to how European youth leaders perceive STM for developing cultural awareness.

Empowering Teens to Serve and Engage

All participants, except one, empowered teens to participate in aspects of youth ministry. Teens helped set up the room before youth service or helped clean up afterward. Other teens led worship, operated AV equipment, or administered the youth group's Instagram account. This adjustment in praxis resulted from the pattern described by youth leaders. The pattern depicted was Missional Value → Diffusing Missional Value → Empowering teens. Leaders empowered teens by discipling them in the faith, teaching them how to share their testimony, and encouraging the teens to invite their peer clusters to youth service.

Woo (2009) noted, “Your belief determines your behavior, and your behavior reflects your beliefs” (p. 38). Mission was part of the church's DNA—a core value reflected in local cross-cultural evangelism and international missions. Leadership intentionally diffused the mission’s value to the youth ministry and empowered teens to engage other teens with the gospel.

Youth leaders empowering their youth to engage their friends and peers is not a new strategy. Indeed, teens engaging with their peer clusters can be an effective form of evangelism (Hull, 2017). Additionally, Yancey (2003) found that network evangelism— evangelism within peer clusters— grows multiracial churches significantly.

The literature on multiracial churches aligns with my findings in this regard. Participants shared story after story of how their teens engaged multicultural teens evangelistically. Peer cluster evangelism seemed to be an effective form of engaging indigenous European and immigrant teens. In cities with large immigrant populations, such as Vienna (Lukacsy & Fendt, 2017) and Brussels (Deboosere et al., 2009), teens in the church are likely to attend school with culturally diverse teens, granting opportunities to include them in their peer clusters.

Participants in diverse churches with diverse youth groups described a sound strategy to engage diverse teens— Empower teens to invite their peer clusters to an event with food, music, and activities broadly appealing to many different cultures. Some participants used music styles such as *reggaetón* or *chalga*. Others used ethnic food such as *salchipapas, empanadas,* or *pancit* to attract teens from different cultures. Interestingly, Glenn et al. (2019) discovered similar findings among immigrant churches in the US that used ethnic food and dance to engage immigrant teens.

Participants found empowered teens to be one of the most effective ways of building bridges to diverse youth. Often, empowered teens issued a simple invitation to members of their peer cluster. Other times, empowered teens shared with their peers what God had done in their lives and then invited them to an event to hear more. To paraphrase Yancey (2003), because peer cluster evangelism has a substantial probability of engaging diverse teens, youth leaders may want to adopt this model.

Leveraging Language and Translation to Engage Youth

The literature on language and translation in multiracial churches is relatively thin; however, research related to international (Dreessen, 2020; Gryskiewicz et al., 2021) and immigrant churches (Dye, 2017; Rodriguez, 2010; Song, 2017) does align with my findings. Perhaps the literature on language in multiracial churches in the US is lacking because approximately 80% of the US population only speaks English (USCB, 2021). In contrast, 65% of the population of the EU speaks one or more foreign languages (Eurostat, 2021a).

Participants built bridges by leveraging English and the indigenous language to engage culturally diverse youth. This leverage most often took the form of simultaneously translating the service from the indigenous language into English. Using English and the indigenous language has successfully engaged immigrant and indigenous communities in international churches worldwide (Dreessen, 2020; Dye, 2017; Gryskiewicz et al., 2021). In the US, Glenn et al. (2019) found that some immigrant churches offered bilingual services for 1.0 and 2.0 generation youth while other immigrant churches offered separate services. However, as noted earlier, Song (2017) found that youth groups separated by language were less than optimal, whereas "The integrated group appeared much happier than those groups separated by language" (p. 106). In Europe, Dye (2017) found Germans started attending an immigrant church in the city because the immigrant church offered something the indigenous German church did not— bilingual Sunday services in German and English.

In a 2021 demographic study, Gryskiewicz et al. (2021) discovered significant numbers of immigrants and indigenous Europeans worshiping together in International churches. All the churches in the study used English, often translated into the indigenous language. So significant was this finding that we recommended that indigenous European churches consider translating

their services into English to reach immigrants. We concluded that “in Europe, it seems that English can be a bridge to reach people” (Gryskiewicz et al., 2021, p. 372). Indeed, some youth leaders are using English as a bridge to engage culturally diverse youth.

Dreessen and March (2009) argue that much like Koine Greek was the common language of the first century, English is the common language of today. Likewise, We (Gryskiewicz et al., 2021) argued that a *Pax Europa* exists in the EU with open borders and English as a common language. However, two participants only used English, and one used only German. Yet, they are reaching diverse youth. I postulate that since 35% of the people in the EU are monolingual (Eurostat, 2021a), the two participants who use only English could engage teens who have no fluency in English by adding translation into the indigenous language. For similar reasons, if the participant using only German added English translation to their youth services, they could engage immigrant teens who are not fluent in German.

In contrast to the US, where only 20% of the population can converse in a second language (USCB, 2021), 65% of Europeans are fluent in two or more languages (Eurostat, 2021a). Further, Eurostat (2021b) reported over 95% of the students in the EU learn English, and approximately 60% learn two or more foreign languages. Additionally, almost 1.5 billion speak English, making it the most widely spoken language globally (Eberhard et al., 2022). By prudently using both the indigenous language and English, youth leaders are engaging and keeping culturally diverse immigrant teens who would otherwise not attend a youth service in a language they do not understand.

Creating Safe Places for Teens

Finally, youth leaders engaging culturally diverse youth built bridges by creating safe spaces. Participants described their youth group as a safe space where teens developed their gifts,

talents, and leadership skills. The youth group was also a safe place where immigrant and marginalized minority youth could meet with other teens with similar life experiences. Clark (1999) noted the importance of the church as a safe place for teens by writing,

> There are few safe places for kids today. For most, home is not safe. School is not safe. Friends are not even safe (necessary, but rarely safe). The church is the one place, the one setting where a person should be free to experience the warmth of acceptance and the comfort of encouragement. But, sadly, the church can be the most unsafe place in an adolescent's world (p. 103).

All participants, save one, provided a safe place for teens to develop their gifts, talents, and leadership skills by empowering them to participate actively in the church's mission. Some teens were leaders of creative arts teams— using dance, music, or drama to engage other teens. Other teens used their gifts to help with street evangelism or preach to the youth group. Glenn et al. (2019) observed that immigrant churches in the US incorporated teens into church leadership roles. “Whether teaching, preaching, sharing ideas, or greeting, young people seemed to take seriously the responsibility entrusted to them, and congregations gave safe space and value to young people's contributions” (Glenn et al., 2019, p. 65). By giving the teens room to use their gifts and trusting them in leadership positions, the participants created safe spaces where youth could explore how they could be active participants in ministry.

Participants indicated that they strove to create a welcoming place where culturally diverse teens could “feel at home.” Greenway et al. (2018) called this a “warm community” (p. 90) where youth felt loved and supported. “This warmth is also characterized by sincerity that helps young people feel safe and develop trust in their church” (Greenway et al., 2018, p. 90). Youth leaders engaging diverse youth described their safe places similarly, adding that their youth groups provided a place where immigrant and minority youth could meet with marginalized teens and relate to each other over shared life experiences. Glenn et al. (2019) found analogous situations in immigrant churches in the US. Members of Latin American

immigrant churches found “safety and trust as well as hope for their future” (Glenn et al., 2019, p. 18) upon hearing other immigrants share stories similar to their own.

Sadly, participants indicated that people in the majority population often marginalized immigrants and minorities. Recent studies corroborate this finding (Berrocal, 2020; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2016, 2020; León, 2019). However, by creating safe spaces, participants provided a place where teens could escape the discrimination present in society. This finding is not to say that people in the church cannot discriminate; indeed, participants described instances of discrimination within the national church. However, Yancey (1999) observed that whites in multiethnic churches participated “in less stereotyping and had lower levels of social distance” (p. 297). DeYoung et al. (2003) confirmed Yancey's (1999) findings, noting that whites in multiracial churches were “more likely to have progressive racial attitudes” (p. 137) compared to whites who did not attend a diverse church. According to the participants engaging diverse youth, all the teens in the group interacted well, and many participants used the term “family” to describe the relationship.

One participant described their youth group as a safe place in progress. In other words, some teens expressed that the youth group was their safe place, while others were “hesitant and uncertain” about whether they would fit in. This description is likely true for every youth group with diverse youth. As new teens are engaged and attend the youth service for the first time, they may be “hesitant and uncertain” if they will be marginalized or accepted. Interestingly, no participant mentioned any instances of teens being marginalized in the youth group.

I discovered similar findings among 2.0 and 2.5 immigrant teens in an international church in Austria (Gryskiewicz, 2020). All participants in the Austrian international church reported they were marginalized and faced discrimination by the national culture. Yet, all the

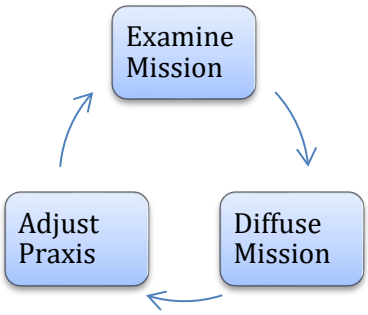
teens noted their church was their safe place—where they had never faced discrimination or marginalization. For churches and youth leaders who wish to engage culturally diverse youth, making the youth group a safe place should be a priority.

Implications for Practice

This study has highlighted bridges participants found helpful for engaging culturally diverse youth. Some of these bridges are currently utilized in multiracial (DeYmaz, 2007; Rodriguez, 2011; Woo, 2009; Yancey, 2003) and international (Dreessen, 2020; Dye, 2017; Gryskiewicz et al., 2021) churches. The implication for practice is cyclic, as illustrated in Figure 1, and can be summarized as examine mission, diffuse mission, and adjust praxis.

Figure 1

Examine, Diffuse, and Adjust Cycle



Examine Mission

As the findings demonstrate, participants who described their ministry as effectively engaging culturally diverse youth believed the church's mission was reaching all people with the gospel. Leaders who wish to engage culturally diverse youth should examine their missiology—is it inclusive or exclusive of other cultures and ethnicities? To help evaluate their missiology, leaders can examine the church's international missions and local evangelism efforts. My findings indicate that participation in international missions and local evangelism can serve as a thermometer to measure how hot or cold a congregation is toward mission. The more a church

participated in mission and outreach, the more likely they were to be diverse. After determining their mission, leaders wishing to engage culturally diverse youth can then begin to diffuse mission.

Diffuse Mission

Participants that effectively engaged diverse youth had leaders— both lead pastors and youth leaders— who diffused the missional value of the church to all generations. Adults and teens were encouraged to participate in international missions and local evangelism. Additionally, leaders developed their cultural awareness and provided opportunities for others to do the same. Participants relied on the experiences of culturally diverse leaders and utilized cultural exchanges and STM to help develop cultural awareness.

Leaders who wish to engage diverse youth should consider ways to diffuse mission to all age groups in their church. Opportunities to diffuse mission could include but are not limited to giving teens ownership of ministry, including teens in international mission and evangelism, and creating opportunities for cross-cultural contact with other teens. As leaders develop cultural competency, they will become aware of changes in praxis that must occur to engage diverse youth.

Adjust Praxis

As a result of examining and diffusing mission, leaders became aware that they need to make adjustments in praxis to engage diverse cultures and ethnicities. Some adjustments included developing culturally diverse teams and leaders, creating space for teens to become involved in the church's mission, and empowering teens to engage their peer clusters. Many participants utilized translation, and all participants created safe places for teens to gather.

Leaders who wish to engage diverse youth will make the necessary and sometimes difficult step of adjusting their praxis. This adjustment will often necessitate stepping outside of

your comfort zone, as the changes may not be to the leader's tastes. It could mean incorporating music styles such as rap, spoken word, *reggaetón,* or *chalga* that the leader may not necessarily enjoy but engages diverse youth. It could include serving ethnic food such as *salchipapas*, *phở*, or *sarmale* that the leader may not like but connects with immigrant teens. Leaders may have to have uncomfortable discussions with teens and their parents to halt stereotyping or discrimination that may take place in the church— a necessary step to creating a safe place for immigrant and minority teens. For many leaders in the US, offering translation from English to Spanish may be far outside their comfort zone, but it would help them build bridges to engage immigrant teens from Latin America.

There is no one-size-fits-all all adjustments in praxis. As leaders develop cultural awareness and work alongside culturally diverse leaders, they will discover the changes in praxis that work in their setting. However, the cycle is not yet complete. Changing demographics, attrition of leaders, and new cultural insights will prompt prudent leaders to continue the cycle of examining mission, diffusing mission, and adjusting praxis.

Consider the following scenario that illustrates the Examine, Diffuse, and Adjust Cycle. An Anglo church discovers a large population of Latino immigrants in the area. The church leaders examine their mission and determine they must engage all cultures and ethnicities; they want to reach Latinos and Anglos with the gospel. They diffuse mission to all departments in the church— making mission and evangelism a core value for everyone, and they begin to develop cultural awareness. The leadership has learned that they must adjust their methods to engage Latinos. They discovered many Latino immigrants in the community do not speak English, so they offer English classes as a community service and translation in their Sunday services. The worship team incorporates Latino rhythms into their music, and the church hires a Latino pastor.

The youth leader incorporates translation, food, and music that appeal to Latino teens and develops relationships with immigrant teens and parents. Upon overhearing a teen making disparaging remarks about Latinos, the youth leader has an uncomfortable discussion with the teen and parents to confront injustice and create a safe space for all teens. Latinos begin to attend the church. Several years go by, and Latinos and Anglos are full partners in the life of the church. Then, the church discovers a sizeable Vietnamese community in town, and the process starts again.

Recommendations for Future Research

I was struck by the dearth of research on church-based adolescent ministry in Europe during my study. Basic information about youth ministry in Europe was simply lacking. I recommend future studies explore the demographics of ministry to adolescents in Europe. Some areas of inquiry could include youth leader training and ministry preparation, how many churches have active youth groups, and the number, gender, ethnic, and cultural composition of teens attending youth groups.

There seems to be a gap in the church diversity literature regarding cultural diversity. This research has shown that the literature on church diversity in the US is applicable in Europe. However, the study has also revealed that churches can be culturally diverse yet racially homogenous. Since cultural differences are as significant as racial differences, conducting further research on racial and cultural diversity in churches would be prudent.

Several participants in Eastern Europe noted discrimination and marginalization faced by Roma believers in national churches. Research in this area could provide valuable insights and help bring reconciliation and understanding between national churches and Roma.

Finally, participants in this study and the international church literature note the use of English in many national and virtually all international churches. It would be worth exploring

why many Europeans and immigrants choose to worship in English rather than their indigenous language.

Conclusion

Participants shared stories of how they effectively navigated barriers and built bridges to engage culturally diverse adolescents with the gospel. Youth leaders described how mission to *ta ethne* was the driving value that compelled them in their evangelism efforts. This research has demonstrated that youth leaders circumvented barriers and built bridges to challenge stereotypes, create safe spaces, develop cultural awareness, and adjust their praxis so ethnoculturally diverse teens would feel safe and welcomed as active members of the family of God.

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