

ABSTRACT

College Student Identity Formation and Negotiation in the Context of Study Abroad

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The distinct structures and environments of institutions of higher learning directly influence and validate the identities, roles, and statuses of students. Study abroad programs represent one such sub-environment of colleges and universities wherein the conceptualization and negotiation of students' identities may be affected by distinct actors and experiences. Studying abroad, then, has the potential to influence the ways in which students make sense of themselves, those around them, and the world at large. This research study sought to answer the following question: How does the transitional experience of studying abroad affect how college students conceptualize and negotiate their identities, roles, and statuses? Ultimately, students' backgrounds, language skills, connections to program faculty, and efforts at integration shaped identity formation in the context of study abroad.

College Student Identity Formation and Negotiation in the Context of Study
Abroad

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who not only let me move across the country to attend college, but supported me as I traveled across the world and back.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As a sophomore at Pepperdine University, I studied abroad in Florence, Italy for two semesters--a personal feat for a first-generation, low socioeconomic status, female student. My experiences abroad ultimately shaped my worldview, cultivated new skills, encouraged my faith development, and changed the way I saw myself. Along with those changes came distance: it became hard to connect with friends and family that had never left the state, let alone the country. As such, I found myself oscillating between identities, fulfilling different roles around different people or in different environments in hopes of connecting to those around me in meaningful ways.

When I returned to the States in the summer between my sophomore and junior years, I found myself intentionally crafting my interactions with those around me. While it was easy to connect with friends who had also been abroad--even those who studied abroad at another program--I kept my conversations about Italy very limited with my family, as well as friends who had not studied abroad. Internally, I was confident in my newfound identities as a global citizen, college upperclassman, Resident Assistant, and Italian speaker, but my interactions with others did not convey these identities because I did not feel like I could connect with others who did not share these roles or experiences.

Since I have completed my undergraduate education and entered into graduate school, this intentional identity formation and negotiation process has continued. Often, the environment and those around me shape the roles and identities I fulfill in those instances. Through this proposed study, I hope to better understand these identity

processes in college students, especially as they relate to the specific context of study abroad.

Study Abroad, Historically and Today

American students formally studying in foreign lands or at universities abroad dates back to 1923, when the University of Delaware sent eight students to France for their junior year (Institute for Global Studies website, n.d.). Notably, short-term study abroad programs pre-date this trip by over 40 years: Indiana University established their first short-term program, that is less than five weeks in length, in 1879 (Hulstrand, 2006). This formal program grew out of the grand tours of old, wherein wealthy male students travelled to European cities to witness art, music, and literature first-hand (Lewin, 2009). As such, the emphasis of these programs and tours was the humanities. This focus influenced the type of student that participated in such programs, namely wealthy, White males. Study abroad programs were also popular among affluent female students enrolled in finishing schools from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries (Dessoiff, 2006). From the beginning, then, study abroad programs have been a vehicle through which colleges and universities have cultivated knowledge of the world, even though access to such knowledge has not been equal.

Today, globalization is a dominant trend across multiple arenas, including politics, economics, and higher education. Globalization is defined “as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the [dominant] role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions” (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, p. 7). Within higher education more specifically,

globalization has led to internationalization, which Altbach et al. (2009) defined as “the variety of policies and programs that universities and governments implement to respond to globalization” (p. 7). One such practice is the implementation or promotion of study abroad programs by institutions of higher education.

Study abroad programs address and encourage globalization through exposure and education. First, studying abroad exposes students to a foreign country, and often a foreign language (or languages) as well. While abroad, students have the opportunity to engage in the local culture(s) in a number of ways, from studying alongside foreign peers to living with host families. Given this exposure, students are able to connect with people and places worldwide. Economist Thomas Friedman noted that as a result of globalization, “the world is flat,” that is, more accessible and more integrated (2005, p. 6). Study abroad programs both promote and take advantage of this global reality, then, by exposing students to and connecting them with foreign countries. Similarly, the educational opportunities afforded by study abroad programs, which include learning a foreign language, studying original works of literature or art in their country of origin, or learning new customs or traditions from a foreign culture, respond to and encourage globalization. In sum, study abroad programs are both active in fostering further globalization, and responsive to pre-existing worldwide trends.

While the broad aims of study abroad programs, namely exposure and education, may be homogenous, the structure of programs--and therefore the experiences of students who study abroad--are not. In terms of program structure, programs differ in duration, host country, partnerships with foreign institutions, size, academic requirements, cost, and focus. The individualized experiences of study abroad participants reflect these

differences. Overall, however, there are general benefits associated with studying abroad, including higher grade point averages and higher graduation rates for participants when compared to non-participants (Hamir, 2011). Ultimately, while study abroad programs across the board may have similar goals and effects, the student experiences within them are varied.

Commitment, Participation, and Barriers

Commitment to studying abroad occurs on both a micro-level (student intent) and a macro-level (institutional pull). College students' intent to study abroad is based on a number of factors, including "their desire to travel, to experience another culture, to enhance their language skills, to fulfill degree requirements for their university, or simply to take advantage of the opportunity to live and learn in another setting" (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014, p. 77). Stroud (2010) also noted students' commitment to study abroad is also influenced by perceived career advantages offered by global experience. Student intent, then, includes both internal and external considerations.

On the institutional level, colleges and universities' commitment to offering study abroad programs is similarly based on a number of factors, including foreign language education and the development of "knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary either to compete successfully in the global marketplace or to work toward finding and implementing solutions to problems of global significance" (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014; Lewin, 2009, p. xiv). Tarrant (2010) summarized these reasons or factors as global competence and national needs. In sum, whereas studying abroad in the previous centuries was a vehicle through which universities could imbue high culture, today it has taken on a practical, global character (Lewin, 2009). A college or university's

commitment to study abroad represents its institutional pull, or its “characteristics designed to facilitate student participation in study abroad” (Mazon, 2009, p. 144). These characteristics can include resources, departments, and financial aid – all of which foster student participation study abroad. Institutional commitment and pull, therefore, are directly related to student intent.

Despite the exponential growth of study abroad participation, less than 10% of undergraduate students in the United States will participate in a study abroad program while enrolled. As such, a gap exists between student intent / institutional pull and actual participation in study abroad programs. Mazon (2009) described significant hurdles that students must overcome to study abroad, including financial barriers, fear, and lack of institutional resources. According to Dessoiff (2006), insufficient financial aid is the foremost barrier to study abroad. Moreover, fears of encountering racism abroad and the lack of information about study abroad offered by institutions deter students from participating in study abroad programs (Mazon, 2009; Dessoiff, 2006). Other factors that may discourage students from studying abroad include gender, race, academic major, and distance of college from home. Stroud (2010) found that female students are 2.4 times more likely than their male counterparts to study abroad, a phenomenon also described in previous research (p. 9; Dessoiff, 2006). Minority students, or students who identify as African American, Latino/a, and American Indian / Native, are also less likely than White students to study abroad, who comprise 75% of the study abroad population (Metzger, 2006; IIE, 2015). Moreover, students majoring in engineering and professional areas of study (e.g., pre-medicine) were less likely to study abroad than peers majoring in other majors, most likely due to inflexible curricular requirements (Stroud, 2010). Stroud

(2010) also found that students who attended college more than 100 miles from home were more likely to study abroad than those who lived less than 100 miles from their hometown. Finally, a lack of family support can hinder students' participation in study abroad programs. Dessoiff (2006) noted that minority students' and first-generation students' families may see studying abroad as "elusive," "frivolous," or "inappropriate" (p. 24). The barriers to study abroad, then, are diverse and abundant.

Study Abroad as a Transitional Experience

Schlossberg (1981) described the process of transition and adaptation in which individual's perception of the transition, environmental characteristics, and individual characteristics all affects an individual's capacity to positively adapt to the change. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) defined a transition as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 33). Notably, the type, context, and impact of a transition must be considered in order to understand how individuals make meaning within a specific transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

For college students studying abroad, there are two major transitions: departure from campus / arrival at study abroad program location, and departure from study abroad program location / arrival at college campus or home. First, these transitions are anticipated, using Goodman et al.'s (2006) language, since the departures and arrivals associated with studying abroad are scheduled and occur predictably. The context and impact of these transitions are personalized to each study abroad participants, since each student experiences them differently. Context "refers to one's relationship to the transition," and impact "is determined by the degree to which a transition alters one's

daily life” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 215). Finally, adaptation occurs when “an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 7). Transitions then, like identities, include personal and situational factors, and have the capacity to be internalized by the individual when adaptation occurs.

College as a Unique Structure and Environment

The distinct situational contexts of study abroad programs are an extension of the unique environment and structure of college in general. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) described a sociological view of college “as an arena of social interaction in which the individual comes in contact with a multitude of actors in a variety of settings” (p. 464). This consideration of the college environment as a primary influence on the development of college students, especially as it relates to student identities, highlights the certification and gatekeeping function of higher education (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). College, then, not only exists as a unique environment for students, but “certifies students for certain social and occupation positions in the world (usually of the middle and upper-middle classes), channels them in these directions, and to some extent ensures them of entrance to such positions” (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004, p. 464). As such, college students are exposed to new identities while in college, which the college environment in turn validates. Ultimately, colleges and universities do more than supply students with “specific skills, motives, and attitudes they may need in future positions” (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004, p. 465). Institutions of higher education also directly influence and validate the identities, roles, and statuses of students.

Students' perception of college and the college environment also influence the ways in which they interact with others and define themselves (Pike & Kuh, 2005). These perceptions may range from how students define the importance of college to how students characterize challenge and support within the college environment. Strange and Banning (2015) highlighted this subjective component of the college environment in their campus ecology model, specifically with the fourth level of the model (socially-constructed environment). In sum, the structure and environment of the college--as well as how students perceive the environment--influence how students define themselves.

College Student Identities, Roles, and Statuses

The identities, roles, and statuses adopted, both intentionally and unconsciously, by college students are wide-ranging due to the multi-faceted college environment, as well as the many influences and actors surrounding them. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) described three domains "in which college students were especially likely to acquire (or significantly modify) [their] felt [self-concept] identities," namely intelligence and knowledgeability, occupation, and cosmopolitanism (p. 488). For example, students may conceptualize or negotiate their identities based on their thought patterns (I am a critical thinker), career goals (I am a future doctor), and / or cultural experiences (I am interested in museums). Student identities are also influenced by actors within the college environment, such as peers, faculty and staff, and groups / organizations, as well as actors outside of the environment. To this end, Jung and Hecht (2004) described four frames of identity, wherein each level of identity is informed by the self, others, and the environment: the first frame, self-concept, by an individual's own thoughts and feelings toward themselves; the second frame, presented-self, by specific people and

environments; the third frame, imputed-self, by significant others and groups; and the fourth frame, communal self, by macro-level ideas, groups, and values. Ultimately, the college environment produces and reproduces students' identities through "a breadth and depth of experiences that adolescents and young adults might be hard pressed to find elsewhere," and external influences similarly shape these identities, roles, and statuses (Kaufman & Feldman, 2004, p. 485).

As aforementioned, college students also derive their identities, roles, and statuses in part from their families. Two student populations, namely first-generation college and first-generation American, are examples of this connection. First, students with one or more parent who did not attend or graduate from an institution of higher education are considered first-generation college students. Current literature on first-generation college students focuses on three main areas, namely demographic comparisons to second-generation peers, transitions to college, and persistence and outcomes related to higher education (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Moreover, first-generation college students are described as "straddling two cultures," since they must navigate their home environment and the college community (Hsiao, 1992). Similarly, first-generation American students must also straddle two or more cultures, namely American culture and that of their parents or grandparents. First-generation Americans are the first in their family to be born in the United States, since their parents and/or grandparents immigrated to the United States from another country. Recent research on first-generation American students and their families highlights the preservation of "customs, values, and languages" in tandem with acculturation, "an adaptive process of cultural adjustment" as a result of a new environment (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005, p. 4; Mena, Padilla, &

Maldonado, 1987, p. 207). In sum, college students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to conceptualize and negotiate their many identities, roles, and statuses within the unique environment of higher education.

In addition to the variety of influences that may shape college student identity both within and outside of the college environment, there are also multiple lenses through which we can view these identity processes. Two major approaches to understanding identity include the psychosocial or developmental lens, and the sociological lens.

Psychosocial understandings of identities, statuses, and roles rely on Erikson's (1968) and Chickering's (1969) developmental models of identity, which feature increasingly complex levels of identity formation tied to specific ages or stages within an individual's life. The focus of psychosocial approaches, then, is identity as an internal construct that matures along a developmental route. In contrast, sociological understandings describe identity as a function of the environment, as well as an internalization process. As such, the sociological lens, like that adopted by Kaufman and Feldman (2004), is not concerned with the consistent development of students' identity, but instead how the environment, other actors, and an individual shapes his or her sense of identities, roles, and statuses.

Using Jung and Hecht's (2004) terms, I have identified four frames of identity that are conceptually consistent throughout the literature, namely self-concept, presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self. It is within each of these levels (which will be described more fully in the subsequent chapters) that the production and reproduction of identities, roles, and statuses occurs. Notably, I hope to capture the various interactions between self, others, and the environment as they relate to identity through this framework.

Statement of Problem

Study abroad programs represent a unique experience within the distinct college environment. Through such programs, college students are offered a number of opportunities that may influence the ways they define themselves across multiple dimensions. This study seeks to better understand these identities, the environmental factors that influence their production, and the processes through which they are created by exploring this primary question: How does the transitional experience of studying abroad affect how college students conceptualize and negotiate their identities, roles, and statuses? Three related sub-questions to this line of inquiry are:

1. Are there aspects of study abroad programs that are especially salient to students' identity?
2. Are there particular identities, roles, or statuses that college students transition between over the course of their study abroad experience?
3. Do first-generation college students conceptualize or negotiate identities, roles, and statuses differently than second-generation students?

Significance

Using Friedman's (2005) language, the world is only getting flatter. That is, there are increasing opportunities to connect with people and places across the world, thanks to advances in technology, communication, transportation, and education. As more colleges and universities implement and promote study abroad programs for students, a better understanding of how such experiences affect college student identity, including first-generation college student and first-generation American student identity, is needed. The goal of this research is to provide a sociological description of identity formation and

negotiation among students who study abroad in the university setting. These findings will aid higher education administrators in developing programs that positively influence college student identity. Moreover, such descriptions may be helpful in creating similar experiences for students who are unable to study abroad. Finally, this study adds to the literature on internationalization as a response to globalization by institutions of higher education, through its exploration and description of students' study abroad experiences.

Definitions

To clarify language used throughout my study, I have provided the following definitions of relevant terms. First, study abroad programs are those in which students travel to and study in a foreign country for academic purposes. As such, missions-centered programs / participants, which are also prevalent at the study institution, are not included in this study. Similarly, alternative spring break programs and their participants are not considered. Next, identity in this study refers to the holistic definition of self, including one's self-concept, presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self. This definition of identity includes an internalization component and external environmental influence in this study. Identity processes are those in which students constantly negotiate and commitment to various identities, roles, and statuses. First-generation college students are defined as students whose parent(s) did not attend or did not graduate from a college or university (Pike & Kuh, 2005). In contrast, second-generation students are those with one or more parent that attended and graduated from a college or university, and also includes students who may technically be third-, fourth-, etc., generation students. Finally, first-generation American students are those whose parents and/or grandparents immigrated to the United States from another country. As such, first-

generation Americans are the first in their families to be born in America (see Alessandria & Nelson, 2005).

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The existing literature on identity formation and negotiation is expansive, and considers the role of the individual, the role of society, and the influence of situational contexts (the environment) in shaping identity as a whole. Given these many intersections, research on identity embraces both psychosocial and sociological lenses. However, the current literature could be improved through the study of specific situational contexts in relation to identity. One such context is study abroad programs offered by American colleges and universities. While participation in and outcomes of studying abroad are well-documented, little to no attention is given to the conceptualization or transformation of college student identity in regard to such experiences. Therefore, just as identity literature can be strengthened through consideration of the specific study abroad environment, study abroad literature can be expanded through the study of student identity in this context.

Identity Formation and Negotiation

The current literature explores two manifestations of identity. First, identity can be viewed as an “internalization of social positions within a self-structure” that produces “a stable, trans-situational self-concept” (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010, p. 478). From this perspective, personal meaning-making is the primary source of identity formation. Conversely, identity can also be viewed in terms of imported “consensual cultural meanings” from situational environments (Owens et al., 2010, p. 478). In this approach to identity, various environments shape identities specifically tied to the said

environment. Identity, then, is derived from a number of sources – both internal and external – including relationships, situations, and culture (see Goffman, 1959; Durkheim & Simpson, 1933). In this study, I explored both manifestations of identity, that is identity as an internalization process and as a function of the environment, through a sociological lens.

College Students and Identity

The specific focus of this study is college student identity formation and negotiation. Notably, college students occupy a liminal position between adolescence and adulthood known as emerging adulthood (Smith, 2011). Emerging adults are those ages 18 to 30 who are subject to identity changes within an unstable environment (Setran & Kiesling, 2013). As such, emerging adults often describe feelings and thoughts related to moral uncertainty, autonomy, and religious doubts. Such instability (as it relates to both identity and the environment) can be attributed to a number of factors, including the delay of marriage / starting a family, increased educational opportunity attainment, and a lack of moral and spiritual mentors (Smith, 2011; Setran & Kiesling, 2013). As such, the identities, roles, and statuses of college students are malleable in this life-stage.

Within the study population, I want to differentiate between first-generation and second-generation college students as it relates to the identities, roles, and statuses each conceptualize and negotiate. Although there are a number of first-generation definitions across the literature, I have adapted the following for this study: neither parent has attended college and / or completed a baccalaureate degree. Therefore, a student whose mother attended college for one semester and then dropped out and whose father did not attend college would be considered a first-generation student under this definition. While

minority and socioeconomic statuses are sometimes included in first-generation student definitions, for the purposes of this study, they are not.

The characteristics, experiences, and development of first-generation college students are well-described in the current literature. In terms of academics, first-generation students have weaker cognitive skills, lower grades, and lower degree aspirations than their traditional peers (Terenzini et al., 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005). First-generation students also receive “less encouragement from their parents to attend college,” and report less interactions with and support from faculty and staff (Terenzini et al., 1996, p. 16; Collier & Morgan, 2008). Related to social engagement, first-generation students are more likely to live off-campus and less likely to receive support from friends than their traditional peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1996). First-generation students are also more likely to be from ethnic minorities and low-income families (Choy, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1996). In sum, there are a number of challenges and background influences within the first-generation college student experience that may shape the ways these students make sense of themselves across situations, including studying abroad.

Moving beyond a deficit model of first-generation college students, however, brings into light other parts of their character, strengths, and experiences. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that “first-generation students tended to derive significantly greater educational benefits from engagement in academic or classroom activities,” as compared to their peers (p. 280). Moreover, first-generation college students also “derived greater outcome benefits from extracurricular involvement and peer interaction than other students, even though they were significantly less likely to be engaged in these activities

during college” (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 278; see also Filkins & Doyle, 2002).

Participating in study abroad programs, then, may be one form of involvement or engagement from which first-generation college students can also deeply benefit.

Notably, existing literature does not highlight the experiences of first-generation college students while abroad, but instead focuses on their general absence in study abroad programs.

The current literature on first-generation college students also discusses the influence of cultural and social capital on students’ experiences and identities. First, cultural capital is associated with knowledge of a society or institution that makes engagement in that environment easier (Pascarella et al., 2004). Social capital, in contrast, refers to relationships that provide advantages and resources for individuals (Pascarella et al., 2004). London (1989) explored the experiences of 15 first-generation students, and found that these students report “periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even anguish” during their time in college (p. 168). Notably, London (1989) attributed such thoughts and feelings to the social dislocation brought on by college attendance, wherein “individual achievement and upward mobility... produce a discontinuity that cleaves[distances] families and friends [from the student]” (p. 168). This discontinuity, or incongruence, represents a lack of cultural and social capital within first-generation students and their families that ultimately affects students’ experiences and persistence in college (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Studying abroad, however, may function as a tool through which first-generation students can gain cultural and social capital, given the opportunities for exposure and engagement inherent in such programs.

Ultimately, this study addresses the need for continued research on first-generation college students' experiences throughout the study abroad process.

I would also like to distinguish first-generation American students as a specific student population to be considered for the purposes of this study. Again, first-generation American students are those who were the first in their family to be born in the United States, as their parents and/or grandparents immigrated to the country from another. As such, first-generation American students' have diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural heritages. Notably, the first-generation college and first-generation American identities may overlap. First-generation American students are often motivated to attend college for reasons other than those cited by their non first-generation American peers, including helping the family and proving personal worth (Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006). While in college, first-generation American students report higher self-esteem and higher academic motivation than their non first-generation American peers, as well as more familial demands (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005; Tseng, 2004). It should be noted that current literature on the experiences and characteristics of first-generation American students often groups all students of immigrant families together, rather than categorizing them based on demographic data. Although the first-generation American students were similarly grouped for the purposes of this study, their families' countries of origin were shared to reject an outright generalization of this student subgroup. Ultimately, while current literature addresses the experiences of first-generation American students in college, as well as the experiences of international students in study abroad programs, little is known about the intersections of first-generation American students, studying abroad, and identity processes.

Approaches to Identity

College student identity formation and negotiation can be viewed through a number of disciplines or lenses. First, identity processes are often understood through a psychosocial approach. For example, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) Vector Theory described development along seven stages, or vectors. In their fifth vector, establishing identity, Chickering and Reisser (1993) defined identity as a "solid sense of self" that included attributes such as "comfort with body and appearance [and] personal stability and integration" (p. 181). Notably, this vector highlights the internalization perspective of identity discussed earlier, given its emphasis on the personal development of an enduring self-concept. It is important to note that while both psychosocial and sociological understandings of identity, roles, and statuses feature the self-concept or internalization function of identity, the sociological approach also heavily considers external influences, including the environment, in efforts to understand identity. Moreover, psychosocial theories related to identity development, like Erikson (1968) and Chickering (1969, 1993), feature the lockstep development of an individual along pre-determined stages that move from the simple or immature to the complex and mature. As such, psychosocial theories place value upon certain identities, roles, and statuses, as well as on individuals' positions within them. By doing so, a psychosocial understanding of identity and identity processes may be limited to specific age-stage development.

In contrast, a sociological view captures both internal and external influences. This approach to understanding identity, then, represents the situational context perspective, since external influences, like the environment and others, are viewed as factors that influence the construction of identity. Under the umbrella of a general

sociological lens, I adopted a symbolic interactionism approach in exploring and describing identity, roles, and statuses in relation to the specific situational context of studying abroad. Symbolic interactionism, as sociological theory, “posits that people act differently with different people in different situations...[and] toward different objects that they encounter” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). Blumer (1969) described three central premises of this approach:

that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings the things have for them; that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; [and] that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 2).

Snow (2001) expanded on this conceptualization, describing “broader and more inclusive orienting principles that Blumer’s (1969) conceptualization implies but does not fully articulate: the principle of interactive determination, the principle of symbolization, the principle of emergence, and the principle of human agency” (p. 368). In essence, a symbolic interactionism approach to identity places “emphasis on the self, construction, and interaction,” given the theory’s assumption that individual’s make sense of themselves through the construction of identities based on interactions with others, wherein interaction and meaning are intrinsically connected (Woods, 1992, p. 338). Notably, symbolic interactionism also functions as a methodology, and this function and its implications will be discussed in the following chapter. Ultimately, although both psychosocial and sociological understandings of identity are present within the literature, a sociological approach, namely symbolic interactionism, was adopted to better capture identity as having both internal and external influences.

Study Abroad

Study abroad programs function as a specific environment, or situational context, wherein identity processes can be explored. Participation in study abroad programs at American colleges and universities has nearly tripled in the past two decades, with over 300,000 undergraduate and graduate students studying abroad in 2013-2014 (Institute of International Education, 2015). Notably, the type, length, and location of programs are varied. The first distinction, type, relates to academic credit. Whereas most students participating in study abroad programs receive academic credit from a sponsoring institution, approximately 7% of students who studied abroad from 2013-2014 did not receive academic credit (IIE, 2015). Therefore, while a large majority of students complete coursework (and receive academic credit) while abroad, a small percentage of students instead opt for non-academic work, often in the form of internships or volunteering. Moreover, study abroad programs can be differentiated based on length of stay: year, semester, or short-term. Hulstand (2006) described a “rising demand for short-term programs,” or those that last eight weeks or less, and ten years later, this demand has come to fruition (p. 50). In 2013-2014, over 62% of study abroad participants took part in short-term programs, up 2% from the previous year (IIE, 2015). In contrast, 35% of students in the same year participated in semester-long programs, and 3% in year-long programs (IIE, 2015). In sum, the past decade has seen a monumental shift from the standard study abroad program length of a semester or year to less than eight weeks. Finally, study abroad programs vary in terms of host region or location. According to the IIE, almost half of students who studied abroad in 2013-2014 did so in Europe, 12% in Latin America, 12% Asia, and 4% Africa (2015). Students’ study abroad experiences can

therefore differ greatly, based on these three distinctions. In turn, this study included participants from both summer-long and semester-long programs, as well as from various host countries and academic classifications, in order to better understand how such factors may shape students' experiences and identity processes.

Effects

While significant barriers to study abroad exist, the benefits of studying abroad are well-documented. Dwyer (2004) described a number of positive outcomes, including increased use of a foreign language, greater appreciation of the arts, increased interest in travel and exploring other cultures, and greater capacity to tolerate ambiguity. Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2014) also noted such benefits, within the categories of external and internal change. External change outcomes included increased "second-language proficiency, [and] higher levels of international political concern, cross-cultural interest, and cultural cosmopolitanism" (p. 78-79). Internal change outcomes included personal growth (autonomy, self-confidence), "the liberalization of attitudes, values, and interests as well as increases in critical thinking," and a greater "understanding of one's sense of vocational calling" (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014, p. 81-82). Similarly, Cubillos and Ilvento (2013) found that study abroad programs increase student self-efficacy beliefs. Notably, the gains associated with studying abroad are consistent across program lengths: there are no noticeable differences in outcomes among students who study abroad for eight weeks and those who study abroad for a semester or longer (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2013; Dwyer, 2004). In contrast, there is a lack of research on consistency of outcomes across demographic characteristics, including race, first-generation status, and low socioeconomic background.

Synthesis of Current Literature

In sum, the current literature on identity and study abroad does not fully consider the following areas: the experiences of first-generation college students and first-generation American students related to studying abroad; the effect of study abroad on social and cultural capital for first-generation college students; connections between study abroad program distinctions and identity formation and negotiation; and study abroad-related outcomes for diverse student groups. This study on identity processes within the situational context of studying abroad addresses these gaps by including diverse student populations, varied program types, and a holistic identity framework, in hopes of better understanding the intersections of identity and study abroad for college students of many backgrounds.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The central focus of this study is how students conceptualize and then negotiate their identities, roles, and statuses within and across situations, specifically those related to studying abroad. Inherent in this focus is the guiding belief that individuals perceive and respond to multiple social realities in unique ways, which in turn affects the identities, roles, and statuses they consciously construct and unconsciously adopt. An interpretive, explanatory qualitative approach was therefore selected for this study. First, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to examine “how the meanings we assign to our experiences, situations, and social events shape our attitudes, experiences, and social realities” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 12). The subjective study abroad experiences of students, and how those experiences affected students’ identity processes, represent this meaning-making process in the study. I sought to explain such processes in the context of the study abroad environment, so the purpose of my research was explanatory in nature. Finally, an interpretive posture lends itself to valuing meaning-making that is constructed through human interaction by those enmeshed in such interactions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Notably, this construction or interpretation is shared by the researcher, participants, and guiding literature or frameworks. In sum, an interpretive qualitative approach to this study advances the belief that an individual’s subjective experiences and interactions represent “important sources of knowledge” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17).

Symbolic Interactionism: Theory and Methodology

More specifically, a symbolic interactionism approach was adopted for this study. Symbolic interactionism functions as both an ontology, in that the approach makes assumptions on the nature of social reality, and a methodology, in that it offers a theoretical perspective on the way in which humans make meaning within a social reality. These assumptions and perspectives include the recognition that the social world is constantly being constructed, the notion that people attach social meanings to others and objects in an interpretive manner, and the idea that differences in these meanings affects attitudes and behaviors (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Woods, 1992). In this study, then, symbolic interactionism provides a sociological lens through which the intersection of students' identities and environments--and the meanings they make from these interactions--can be observed and described.

Moreover, the adoption of symbolic interactionism as a methodological approach results in the following implications: "respecting the empirical world, [recognizing] layers of reality, learning the symbols, [and] situating the interaction" (Woods, 1992, p. 348-368). First, respecting the empirical world translates to studying how individuals "themselves experience and perceive" situations (Woods, 1992, p. 348). As such, this study was concerned with how college students uniquely experienced and then made sense of their participation in a study abroad program as an individual. Next, recognizing layers of reality includes "maintaining a certain openness of mind...nor necessarily settling for first or even second appearances" of meaning (Woods, 1992, p. 351). To this end, I as the researcher reflected upon and included my personal biases and experiences, in hopes of remaining neutral throughout the data collection and interpretation processes.

Moreover, time spent interviewing participants and interpreting data was not severely limited or constrained, which promoted rapport between researcher and participant, as well as immersion within relevant situations and findings. Woods (1992) described learning the symbols as the process of “understanding the symbolic meanings that emerge in interactions and are attributed in situations over time” (p. 355). To this end, all study interviews were conducted face-to-face, so that both verbal and nonverbal communication and cues could be observed. In addition, any usage of “special vocabulary,” which ranged from cultural abbreviations to institution-specific experiences, was clarified by the researcher (Woods, 1992, p. 355). Finally, situating the interaction involves “understanding the context within which it [the interaction] occurs” (Woods, 1992, p. 358). Notably, the assumption that perception and situations are inextricably linked undergirds this methodological implication (Woods, 1992). In an effort to understand identity processes within the context of study abroad, inquiries related to pre-departure, including early childhood and high school, as well as post-return were made during study interviews. Ultimately, symbolic interactionism functions as both a theory to understand and define identity and its related processes, as well as a methodology that includes assumptions and implications for data collection and interpretation.

Conceptual Framework

To study identity in study abroad participants as both an intra-individual construct and within unique situational contexts, I created a conceptual framework based on Jung and Hecht’s (2004) Communication Theory of Identity that features four frames of identity, namely self-concept, presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self (Figure 1). Given Burke and Rietzes’ (1991) finding that identity processes occur in cybernetic

feedback loops, wherein “individuals continually adjust behavior to keep their reflected appraisals congruent with their identity standards or references,” the presented identity framework operates as a non-hierarchical feedback loop (p. 840). As such, the four frames of identity constantly inform one another, and are sometimes indistinguishable. The interrelatedness of identity pieces is a key assumption of Jung and Hecht’s (2004) original framework: “One’s personal [self-concept] identity is infused into one’s enacted [presented-self] and relational [imputed-self] identities, as well as communal identities, just as the communal identities are a part of personal, enacted, and relational identities” (p. 267). Therefore, while each of the four pieces of the identity framework may be analyzed separately, an individual’s identity should be understood holistically, as an integrated whole.

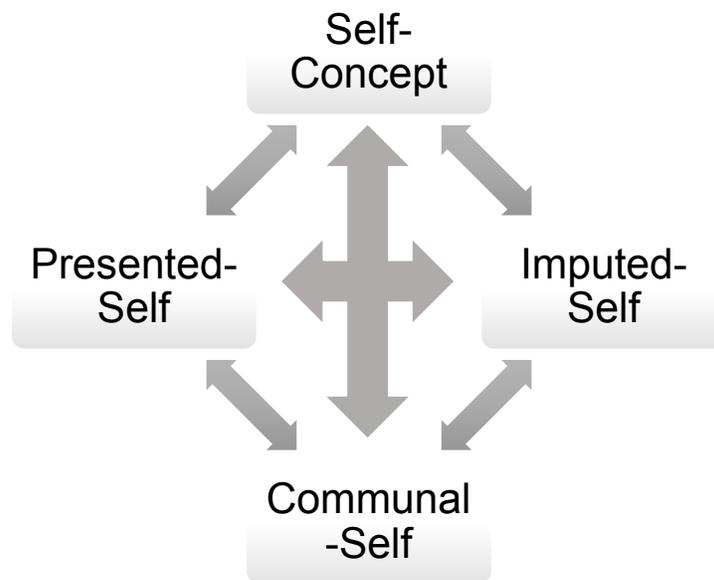


Figure 1. Frames of identity in a cybernetic loop.

Self-Concept

The idea of the self was first described by Mead (1934), who noted two major components, namely the *I* and the *me*. Whereas the *me* represents one's sense of self in relation to the environment, the *I* represents an active response to that sense of self (Mead, 1934). Drawing on the notion of the self, Rosenberg (1979) defined one's self-concept as the "totality of a specific person's thoughts and feelings toward him- or herself as an object" (p. 7). Self-concept, therefore, represents an individual's internalized identities (Owens et al., 2010). Moreover, these multiple identities provide individuals with meaning and purpose, as well as structure and organization: simply put, how we define ourselves influences our actions, include meaning-making (Owens et al., 2010). While self-concept represents stable, internalized identities, it is also open to influence from situational contexts (Owens et al., 2010). That is, how we make meaning of who we are and what we should do can be influenced by environmental factors. The phenomenon wherein an individual's behaviors, or the external manifestations of self-concept, are misaligned with a standard of self is known as self-shock (Zaharna, 1989). In sum, how we personally make sense of our identity represents our self-concept, and when situational contexts--including transitions--spur changes in our thoughts or behaviors, we must adapt our self-concept to better capture our position within a social reality. The first level of the conceptual framework, then, is the self-concept frame, which describes one's internalized identity. Moreover, the negotiation process that takes place within the self-concept frame is between our stable sense of self and new interactions that require an identity-related response.

Presented-Self

The notion of a situational presented self dates back to Goffman (1959), who found that individuals' presentation of self sought to communicate certain meanings or images. As such, whereas self-concept theorists mainly focus on "intra-individual features of identity in the self-structure that are carried from situation to situation," presented-self theorists like Goffman (1959) emphasized "how the elements of situations in which actors are involved shape their behavior, cognitive, and emotional reactions" (Owens et al., 2010, p. 485). Therefore, self-concept can be conceptualized as an enduring (but still open to influence) identity, while the presented-self is a constantly negotiated identity based on specific situational contexts. Notably, the identities and roles individuals embrace can be both self-selected or unchosen (Serpe, 1987; Shavers & Moore, 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Two main elements of the presented-self are prominence and commitment, (McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stryker & Burke, 2000). First, prominence refers to the role-identity an individual self-adopts given their self-concept within a social position (McCall & Simmons, 1966). Notably, how prominent a role-identity appears is connected to an individual's commitment to and perceived success within that particular role. Whereas McCall and Simmons (1966) conceptualized commitment as a psychological process, Stryker and Burke (2000) presented a sociological understanding of commitment: "Commitment refers to the degree persons' relationships to others in their networks depends on having a particular identity and role, measurable by the costs of losing meaningful relations to others should the identity be foregone" (p. 5). The salience,

or prominence, of a role-identity is therefore related to both an individual's internal perceptions and external relationships.

Moreover, individuals seek opportunities wherein their presented-self is congruent with their self-concept (Serpe & Stryker, 1987). Such opportunities promote "feelings of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). However, as noted by Goffman (1959), an individual may also find himself within situational contexts that "contradict, discredit, or otherwise throw doubt upon" their presented-self (p. 12). In these situations, individuals may "attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support" their own self-concepts (and by extension their presented-self) and those of others, a process known as identity negotiation (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). Such discrepancies, which may also occur between other frames of identity, are also called identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

The second frame, presented-self, ultimately describes an individual's presentation of self to others. The way an individual performs in front of others is based on the situational context, commitment to a certain identity, role, or status, and prominence of an identity, role, or status. As such, the negotiation process within this frame is ongoing: as individuals enter new environments, they must select an appropriate identity, role, or status to fulfill within that specific situational context.

Imputed-Self

Cooley's (1902) description of the looking-glass self captures the notion of the imputed-self, wherein an individual's "definite imagination of how one's self appears in a particular mind," that is in the mind of another person, influences how one sees himself (p. 151). In the imputed-self frame, then, both relationships with others and imagination

are important, as both inform our identities. Notably, Jung and Hecht (2004) delineated between four levels of the imputed-self, which they refer to as an individual's relational identity: first, the ascribed relational identity, or the looking-glass self described earlier; second, identities through others, such as someone's friend or someone's spouse; third, identities in relation to other identities, wherein an individual can be both a woman and a student, or a father and lawyer; and fourth, the relationship itself as an identity, e.g., friend or couple (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

Group or category memberships are also a vehicle that imbues imagination, which in turn informs the imputed-self. Such categories may be ascribed (like race or gender) or achieved (like educational degree or level of employment) (Owens et al., 2010). An individual's imagination in reference to group memberships usually describes one of two characteristics, namely in-group and out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Such characterizations, however, are also informed by the social environment, since in certain situational contexts, some memberships may appear more relevant than others. The imputed-self frame, then, is informed by our relationships with others, our perceptions of those relationships and how others view us, and the environment in which these relationships take place. Moreover, the negotiation process within this third frame is directly influenced by our relationships and how those relationships function within the situational context we are in.

Communal-Self

The concept of a communal identity can be traced back to Durkheim's (1933) description of collective consciousness, or the "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society" (p. 79). The communal-self,

therefore, is an individual's identity as it relates to his or her society, and the shared values, beliefs, and experiences within the society. As explained by Brewer (1991), individuals develop a communal-self as a compromise between complete individualization and complete integration: in seeking connection to others or a larger society, we adopt specific values, interests, or beliefs from said society. A risk within the communal-self, then, is the loss of self-concept to unchosen, pervasive norms. In sum, the fourth frame, communal-self, describes an individual's identity in reference to society in general, and the way an individual compromises between individuality and societal integration represents the negotiation process in this final frame.

Methods

I collected data for this study from a single university setting. The study university is located in the Southwest, and enrolls approximately 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Notably, the selected institution offers over 100 distinct study abroad programs in a given year. Since the focus of this research was the relationship between the situational context of studying abroad and identity formation and negotiation, the breadth of study abroad offerings at the institution provided multiple sub-environments to indirectly observe students' interactions and identity processes.

Despite this abundance of program offerings, the study institution has created a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that addresses the ongoing need for "enhanced international travel experiences" and "diversity abroad" (QEP, 2016, p. 3). The institution's study abroad programs date back to 1971, when exchange programs with Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka, Japan and Hong Kong Baptist University were implemented (QEP, 2016). Last year, nearly 700 undergraduate and graduate students

from the study institution participated in study abroad programs, 76% of which were White, 12% Hispanic, 4.4% Black, 4.4% Multiracial, and 3% Asian (QEP, 2016, p. 14). Notably, these demographic trends are reflective of college student study abroad participation across the United States. In sum, the study institution's QEP highlighted the need for increased, more diverse participation in study abroad programs offered by the institution, as a means of satisfying "university priorities to reach a greater number of students through a variety of initiatives that will enhance the quality not only of their educations but their lives and vocations" (QEP, 2016, p. 5).

The study university's QEP also noted the need for increased access to studying abroad, especially for first-generation college students. The retention and graduation rates of first-generation students are markedly lower than their traditional student peers (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Ishitani, 2003). Curricular and co-curricular involvement, like that which occurs through studying abroad, can increase these rates (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Astin, 1999; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). However, first-generation students are not always aware of the importance of engagement or ways in which they can engage with the college environment (QEP, 2016; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Ultimately, the QEP illustrates the study institution's recent prioritization of study abroad programs for students of all backgrounds.

At the study institution, I conducted semi-structured, open interviews with participants, to better understand and explain student interactions in the study abroad context that in turn shaped their identities, roles, and statuses (Appendix A). Interviews provide deep insight into social phenomena, human / object interactions, and the relationship between phenomena, interactions, and identity processes. All interviews

were audio-recorded, and conducted in-person. Participants also completed a demographic questionnaire prior to the interview, which asked for information on their family background, classification, and study abroad program(s).

To select study participants, I utilized stratified purposeful sampling as a means to generate a varied, yet “information-rich” study population (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

Potential study participants volunteered to be interviewed by responding to an email call from the study abroad department at the study institution. The email call was sent to approximately 700 undergraduate and graduate students who had studied abroad in the last year, including the summer term. The first 25 students who responded to the email call were given access to an electronic interview sign-up document. Other interested students were directed to an electronic waitlist, and were later contacted when interviews closed. From the 25 students given access, 16 students were interviewed during the fall semester; the other nine students either did not sign-up for an interview once given access to the interview document, or cancelled their interview before meeting (Table 1).

Table 1. *Participants' Backgrounds*

Pseudonym	Classification	Host Country	First-generation College Student	First-generation American
Katie	Senior	Western Europe	No	No
Amy	Junior	Western Europe	No	No
Samuel	Senior	Western Europe	Yes	Yes
Mallory	Senior	Western Europe	No	No
Lori	Senior	Western Europe	No	No
Jackie	Senior	Western Europe	Yes	No
Marie	Junior	Western Europe	Yes	No
Taylor	Sophomore	Western Europe	Yes	No
Kristin	Junior	Western Europe	No	No
Becca	Sophomore	South America	No	No
Vanessa	Senior	Eastern Asia, Western Europe	No	Yes
Rachel	Junior	Western Europe	Yes	Yes
Leah	Junior	Western Europe	No	Yes
Danielle	Senior	Western Europe	No	No
Jennifer	Junior	Western Europe	Yes	Yes
Christine	Senior	Western Europe	No	No

To protect students' identities, I provided each participant with both a number and a pseudonym for the purposes of the study. First, students were assigned a number between one and 25 that corresponded to the interview schedule. Since the interview

schedule was public to the first 25 students who responded to the email call, the assignment of a number protected the identity of students from each other. Moreover, both first and last names were removed from any study materials, and replaced with the pseudonym. In later chapters, pseudonyms, rather than numbers, are used in conjunction with students' quotes and experiences. Other efforts at confidentiality included limiting access to gathered data. As such, I was the only person with complete access to the participant roster: others involved in the process were only given information tied to pseudonyms. To further protect students, specific study abroad programs were replaced with general country locations. Again, only I had access to the specific program information. Finally, students were asked to sign an informed consent document before starting the interview process. Before signing took place, I explained the overall purpose of my study, as well as the aforementioned protections. Time was also allotted for students to ask questions about the study and consent.

To analyze my data, interviews were first transcribed verbatim. Two stages of coding were then completed using the track-changes function of a word processor, namely Initial and Structural Coding. First, Initial Coding is the process of “breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts” while remaining “open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102; Charmaz, 2006, p. 46; as cited in Saldana, 2009, p. 81). Initial Coding, then, allows the researcher to both broadly examine and start to categorize data without steering the data in a specific way. Notably, other coding methods may be employed alongside Initial Coding in First Cycle coding efforts, including In Vivo Coding (Saldana, 2009). In Vivo Coding “keeps the data rooted in the participant’s own language” by using words and

phrases shared by the interviewee when creating codes (Saldana, 2009, p. 6). In efforts to remain unbiased and to highlight the created meaning of study participants, I used both Initial and In Vivo Coding methods in First Cycle coding, which yielded approximately 100 codes in the language of participants.

To further make sense of study participants' experiences, I also used a Second Cycle coding method, which encourages "a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization" (Saldana, 2009, p. 149). More specifically, Structural Coding was completed following First Cycling coding. According to Saldana (2009), "Structural Coding applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data to both code and categorize the data corpus" (p. 66). Given the four-part conceptual framework on identity adopted for the purposes of this study, I created a list of structural codes based on the four frames prior to Second Cycle coding. As a result of Second Cycle coding, I condensed over 100 codes to 12 major categories, and from the 12 categories I drew five overarching themes and two conclusions. Ultimately, these broad deductions represent "subtle and tacit processes" of identity formation and negotiation based on the experiences shared by study participants (Saldana, 2009, p. 13).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an effort to establish credibility, I presented holistic data findings in order to accurately represent the perspectives of the study participants. Moreover, I utilized member checks during the data analysis and interpretation process, in order to ensure a true presentation of findings.

Study participants were presented with a list of interview excerpts that were used to support my findings, and then given the opportunity to reflect on and offer responses to these quotes. To promote transferability, I provided thick descriptions of participant selection, data collection, and data interpretation, so that the study may be replicated in future work. I strove to establish dependability through auditing, wherein findings and conclusions were presented to my advisor to assess my interpretation and articulation of them. Finally, in an effort to encourage confirmability, I presented my own biases and dispositions (see Appendix B) in hopes of remaining neutral throughout the study process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

College student's identities, roles, and statuses are shaped by both internalization processes and external influences, including specific situational contexts, other people, and cultural or societal norms and values. Within their particular identities, students' actions are determined by the meaning they assign toward environments, objects, and others (Blumer, 1969; Snow, 2001). Notably, differences in meaning, and therefore differences in actions, are borne from social interactions. Identity, then, is a fluid yet stable conceptualization of who we are, based on where we are, who we interact with, and what meaning we assign to those interactions. This study sought to answer how a specific experience, namely studying abroad, may affect the ways in which college students conceptualize and negotiate their identities, roles, and statuses. The following sub-questions also guided this inquiry:

- (a) Are there aspects of study abroad programs that are especially salient to students' identity?
- (b) Are their particular identities, roles, or statuses that college students transition between over the course of their study abroad experience?
- (c) Do first-generation college students conceptualize or negotiate identities, roles, and statuses differently than second-generation students?

I have identified five key themes that can be used to answer these sub-questions, which in turn answer the guiding research question. These central findings include *language*, *living abroad*, *types of travelers*, *immigration*, and *role as students*. The subsequent

sections describe these main themes in relation to a particular frame(s) of identity derived from my guiding framework based on Jung and Hecht's (2004) model, namely self-concept, presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self.

Language

In terms of elements of study abroad programs that significantly affected the ways students made sense of themselves and their surroundings, foreign language was a central aspect that influenced students' self-concept, especially related to feelings of validation in who they are and their capabilities. Notably, students were aware of the struggles and rewards associated with language differences before departing for the trip, and many stated that a main motivation behind studying abroad was language acquisition. Taylor, a current sophomore who studied abroad in the summer between her freshman and sophomore years, recounted her reason for studying abroad, explaining

I remember in my French class my professor brought up, who was one of the professors who actually led the trip, well there is a study abroad program. It was specific to a couple of classes; there was only selective classes you could take there. Where I was in my French study then, I was perfect for, I aligned perfectly for the classes on the trip...so once I heard of that, I remember I was walking back from class and I immediately called my dad and I was like, dad there's this thing and I really want to do it [in reference to studying abroad].

Taylor has been studying French since kindergarten, and hoped to have better control over the language by living in a French-speaking country for a month. This desire was not unique to her, however, as most study participants expressed an interest in developing their language skills or becoming fluent in another language. Studying abroad, then, represents an opportunity wherein students can immerse themselves in a foreign language in hopes of gaining a better understanding and command of it.

Study participants did note differences between studying a foreign language on their home campus versus in a country where the language was dominant. One such difference is related to access to heritage speakers. Vanessa, a current senior who was one of the only study participants to study abroad outside of Europe, described her foreign language course as research-based and interactive. She explained that,

Since I did research there, it was not really a class time. More like I have to go interview people, and so for the first week it was like just going out and interviewing people, like during the normal school hours. And then the rest of the day we'd go tour the country and then I think sometime in the second week we presented our research, and then for the rest of the trip we just kind of explored the country without any more homework.

Given the structure of her class abroad, Vanessa was able to interact and speak with local students at a level difficult to recreate in the United States. Other study participants experienced greater access to heritage speakers through tandem language exchanges, homework assignments that required interviews with homestay families, and written correspondence with local students. Part of the distinctiveness and influence of language study within study abroad programs, then, relates to students' ability to engage with heritage speakers.

Moreover, students were intentional in their program choice based on the courses offered, especially foreign language classes. At the study institution, undergraduate students must complete four language courses to satisfy degree requirements, while also balancing required courses for their major and / or minor. Study participants demonstrated an awareness of this requirement, as well as their course schedule constraints. Leah, a health-related major, explained the benefit of study abroad programs in accommodating both university requirements and schedule limitations, noting "if I didn't have to take Spanish three and four here at [campus] then I would have more time

for my science classes.” Jackie, a transfer student, echoed this reasoning, stating “I was like I need two more semesters of Spanish for my minor. I might as well just study abroad.” As a transfer student, Jackie was especially cognizant of her course requirements, and even differentiated by two programs in the same host country by the courses available. She explained,

Plus, you could only get one class [in the other program.] So you wouldn’t be able to get two, and only one [institution] professor was going. And although there was more freedom, like you got to go from country to country to country [in the other program,] it wasn’t as rewarding academically, and that’s what I wanted.

The availability of foreign language courses, then, appears to be both an essential aspect of study abroad programs, as well as a motivating factor in program participation and location choice.

It should be noted that study participants also selected study abroad programs based on other courses offered, such as general education or elective classes. This was especially true of students who studied in an English-speaking country. Samuel, a current senior who studied abroad in Western Europe, mentioned that while he wanted to study abroad, he did not want to take classes that would not help him graduate to do so. He noted that “At the end, it was, it came down to me figuring out which program offered classes that weren't just like BS classes that I could get credit for and graduate.” Other students who studied in countries where English is common similarly sought out classes that satisfied major / minor requirements or personal passions. Ultimately, while foreign language courses appear to be a determining factor in program choice, there are other considerations present.

While study abroad programs offer the unique opportunity to study a foreign language surrounded by heritage speakers, the process of learning a language abroad is

not without its struggles. Notably, these struggles existed across study programs, language ability, and host countries, even those where English is spoken by many, if not all, residents. Becca, a student who studied Spanish before studying abroad in South America, summarized her struggles with the language. She noted that,

The funny thing was that going down there I could tell you very confidently that I could read, write and listen to understand in Spanish very well, [but] speaking is difficult and that's why I'm going. So that was my reason for going in the first place. It was difficult to speak and so I would be sitting there trying to speak to my host mom at dinner and of course everybody else at the table could understand and help me out if I didn't, which was actually really helpful in the end, because there were times when I would sit there and struggle so much for a word.

Becca's description of her language-related struggles are representative of many study participants who, although were exposed to the host country's language through classes or travel, experienced difficulties in expressing themselves in another language. As noted earlier, students were aware of these potential challenges pre-departure, as evidenced by their knowledge of regional dialects, the speed of local conversations, and the rigorous pace of classes abroad, especially those offered over five weeks in the summer. Language capabilities, therefore, have the power to influence students' ability to fully communicate with others while abroad.

The struggles encountered by study participants, however, were viewed as both natural aspects of the language acquisition process, as well as motivating factors within that process. When asked if language-related challenges had any effect on her experience, Becca responded,

No not really, because I knew that that was a normal part of learning Spanish, or learning another language. So it was more of a, in that moment, maybe it did affect me a little bit, like I'm a little bit embarrassed about the fact that I can't pull this out ... but then afterwards, looking back on it, I have no reason to feel bad

about that. It's just, that's where I struggled most. Some people struggle with grammar or different things so.

Similarly, Jennifer explained that language struggles are inevitable, but worthwhile in that they provide a learning opportunity. She explained that “When you don’t have to get out of your comfort zone, you don’t have to learn anything different because everyone accommodates you...[but] the discomfort of it, it just brings a lot more growth.” Notably, Jennifer studied in a country where English is spoken widely, so her exposure to foreign languages and resulting struggles often occurred when she travelled to other countries in Europe. Moreover, study participants described language-based struggles as an inspiration to continue to study foreign language(s). For example, Vanessa, who described the language barriers she faced as “wonderfully horrible,” stated that such challenges “Made me want to learn more languages...I had a moment where I was like, wow, I just really want to get better at this [speaking in another language]. This desire was not unique to Vanessa, as many students reported a re-commitment to learning a foreign language, especially after earning below-average grades on language assignments at home and abroad. In sum, study participants’ perspective on language-related barriers was one that emphasized the opportunities and motivations such challenges may bring.

Moreover, many students shared that these struggles did not affect their capacity to be fully themselves while abroad. More broadly, study participants reported that in general, they could be authentic throughout their study abroad programs, even if they were dressing differently, speaking another language, going to a new school, living in a new residence, or subduing their behaviors. Taylor summarized these pressures, as well as her ability to be herself abroad, explaining,

You kind of wanted to be a better version of yourself, if that makes sense. There was definitely a pressure not to be as loud. I feel like people there were very, they keep to themselves. Like on the metro, you could always tell when there was a tourist on board because they would be chattering very loud in American [English] and people next to them would roll their eyes. So normally on the metro we would speak in French to each other, like me and my friends, we would speak French normally.

Taylor also mentioned that “it was mostly easy for [her] to express [herself] in French,” and “no matter what, I could still be who I was.” This sentiment was shared by many interviewees, who saw their experiences, thoughts, and actions abroad as a natural extension of who they are. One student, Rachel, even noted that she felt more at home in her host country than in America. Students’ experiences abroad then, which include struggles with the local language, ultimately did not limit their capacity to act or think in ways that were congruent with a pre-departure self-concept.

A majority of study participants noted program faculty as key factors in this process of overcoming and maximizing language-related struggles. The type of help sought by students, however, varied: whereas some students only need practical, short-term guidance, other students spent the entirety of their program working on language skills and cultural topics with professors on the trip. Kristin, a student who studies Chinese but studied abroad for three months in Western Europe, was one such study participant who requested minimal help. Kristin explained that because her program professors was European, he could show her and others around or answer any questions they had, like how to buy a ticket from the train station, as the ticket machines did not use English. On the other end of the spectrum, students like Taylor, Leah, and Jackie described almost-daily interactions with their professors that were usually in the language they were studying. In these instances, professors often encouraged students to only

speak in the foreign language, citing practice and immersion as the best way to become fluent. While the level of engagement with professors and local languages did vary, students ultimately found program faculty to be an influential aspect of learning another language.

After studying a foreign language abroad, students reported a sense of validation that was directly connected to their language skills. Like many study participants, Rachel had studied a foreign language before studying abroad. In our interview, Rachel shared that even though she had studied French for six years, she still felt “really insecure” about her speaking skills. During her time abroad, however, Rachel was told by a homestay sibling that he could not even detect an accent in her spoken French. In response, Rachel described “a great sense of validation, that all these years of hard work have paid off.” Other students reported similar feelings of validation after being confused for locals, or following praise for their language skills by heritage speakers, peers, and professors. Another aspect of language, then, is its ability to affect how we feel about ourselves or our skills, as well as how others view us.

Foreign language study also appeared as a strengthening tie between students and their familial roots, especially for first-generation American students – a student population that will be discussed in-depth in a later theme. For students who grew up with grandparents or parents that spoke a foreign language, the opportunity to improve their language skills allowed them to better connect with these family members and their heritage. Leah, whose grandparents only speak Spanish, described this connection. She shared,

I have a grandma who only speaks Spanish. She's the one that lives in Spain. And so now every time I see her and talk to her, I'm actually able to communicate with

her. Before was always like let me see what words I can put together to see if you can understand me, but now I am able to talk to her.

Leah also noted that her older brother now views her as “more Spanish” as a result of her language skills. In sum, study participants associated language skills with deeper connections with family members.

Although students have the opportunity to study a foreign language at their home campus, the experience of studying another language abroad is distinctive and influential, especially in terms of students’ self-concepts and imputed-selves. Related to self-concept, language acquisition, and living abroad in general, did not limit study participants’ ability to be themselves, that is to act or think in ways congruent with their stable notions of self. Moreover, students associated language skills with validation and connection, two emotions connected to the imputed-self identity frame, since others’ encouragement, praise, and responses – in this case professors, locals, parents, and peers – affected the way students thought and felt about themselves. Ultimately, both the process of learning a foreign language, including students’ struggles, and speaking in a country’s native tongue influenced students’ ideas about themselves, as well as their imagination about how others see them.

Living Abroad

A secondary, yet still distinct, element of study abroad programs is the opportunity to live in another country for an extended period of time. Although this aspect of a study abroad experience is obvious, the implications of living abroad on students’ communal-selves may not be. Students’ experiences of living in a foreign city and country ultimately fostered an understanding of the commonalities shared by

humankind, as well as a greater capacity for patience. More specifically, this perspective shift included the recognition that even though borders and oceans may separate us, humans are similar in thought, actions, and desires. Notably, students shared that this new understanding continues to shape their thoughts and behavior, even following their return to the United States.

Students in the study lived in countries across the globe, and their living conditions differed significantly: whereas some students lived in plush residence halls at established universities in Western Europe, others lived in guarded neighborhoods in South America or with homestay families in Asia. It should be noted that the use of “lived” rather than “stayed” or “were hosted” is intentional on the part of the author. Students were clear that they lived in and deeply experienced these countries, not just stayed there. Christine, a current senior who studied abroad in Western Europe over the summer, explained that while she did feel like a tourist when she first arrived, by the final weeks of her program she felt “at home” there. She explained,

After [a] trip with my friend [who was not in the program,] I brought her back [to my city] and our dorm room and said I'll show you [city,] because at that point I knew about it and I was telling her all these things. And that's when I realized like, I was telling her as if I lived there. And I did. And that's when the light clicked. I was like I am living here. And that was that last week, and it was the best week of my life. I mean the whole trip was probably the best, the best trip I have ever taken my life because of how much you change. But that last week was incredible. So I did feel at home.

The difference between feeling like a tourist versus feeling at home while abroad is an important distinction that will be explored in-depth in the following section. Ultimately, although students’ experiences abroad differed in terms of geographic location, students’ did describe their time their in similar ways.

A benefit of living abroad for an extended period of time is the opportunity to engage with natives and locals of the host country or city. Study participants spent anywhere from five weeks to a semester abroad, and often travelled to multiple cities and countries throughout their program. Given differences in program structure, length, and travel, the levels of engagement students had with natives and locals also varied. To clarify, natives are residents of a city who were born in the city's country, whereas locals are also residents of a city but were born outside of the country in question. For example, natives that students encountered while abroad included business owners and program staff, while the most common locals encountered were other students who were also studying in the country, but for three or four years, rather than a few months. Students with low levels of engagement with natives and locals often travelled as group, which limited their exposure to others, or did not spend a lot of time in a particular city-- including their program city. Kristin, a student who did not engage with locals or natives regularly, offered this explanation:

I really didn't go out into the city as much, which I kind of regret. But at the same time, I'm not, I really like to stay in my room and study. And also I didn't really have a ton of cash on me all the time, and so I couldn't really spend a lot of money on coffee every day. So I did meet a couple of locals...but I didn't spend too much time in [the program city,] which I do kind of regret.

Other reasons noted by students for not engaging with people in the city include safety considerations and busy schedules. In contrast, there were study participants that shared stories of deep engagement with locals or natives that ranged from daily conversations with a barista to spending time with a host family to interviewing city residents. For example, Jennifer recalled a class assignment where she was tasked with talking to people around the city about their religions and beliefs, so she spent a lot of her time

reaching out to people she encountered, from train conductors to street musicians to a family at a local mosque. In sum, students' experiences with local and native people were not uniform, but instead existed along a continuum of engagement level.

As a result of engagement with natives and locals while abroad, though, students reported new understandings of how humans are intrinsically related. To again use language consistent throughout the interviews, this innate relationship represents a "sameness" or "unity" of people across the globe. Marie, a first-generation college student, captured this new perspective in her closing thoughts:

I think it's recognizing that people all around the world, yes we live half a world away from each other and we may eat a little bit different foods, but there are people still going to work every day and they may drive really crazy but they are still driving to jobs just like people in the U.S. I guess I just always thought they were so different, but we all have a lot of human factors. They are the exact same. You still have kids, you are still eating, you're still meeting with friends or going to church. So just seeing it more as unity within the human race.

This understanding was echoed by many participants who saw people – mothers, children, workers, teachers, coffee shop owners – who led lives just like Americans. The opportunity to live alongside others across the globe, then, can affect how students make sense of the human race and connections within it.

After their return to the United States, twelve of sixteen study participants shared that this newfound understanding of the sameness of humanity encourages them to be more patient and tolerant of others, including international students and those from other religious backgrounds. Related to this notion of sameness or unity is the idea that students can better empathize with those around them, after encountering both struggles and triumphs while living in a new country. A story told by Jackie in relation to her

interactions with an exchange student captures this empathetic and patient behavior. She shared,

I do more things for other people. Like I am more understanding when it comes to cultures. We have a foreign exchange student in our class from Japan, and although I don't know the language, I see she gets really frustrated in class because she just doesn't understand something. And I'll go over there and I'll explain it really slow, and some people just get really annoyed by it because they have to listen to her speak, and it's just like I have so much patience. So patience I guess would be a key word. Just so much patience for people who are here learning the language, because I know how frustrating it is the first few weeks. I'm very encouraging [and] the words of encouragement I would say to people who are coming from out of the country are keep it up and keep going because it gets easier.

Other students recalled that they tried to be better roommates and friends to those around them, or more open to religious differences. Ultimately, the stories and examples shared by students in which they thought about or acted toward others in more patient, tolerant, or empathetic ways demonstrates the power of the study abroad experience in influencing student's identities, roles, and statuses long have they have returned to the United States.

In addition to these external manifestations of patience and tolerance, eleven students also mentioned internal changes in priorities and / or perspectives that occurred in tandem with their realization of the sameness of humankind. For example, Amy shared that before going on the trip, she attended football games with her peers as an attempt to fit the traditional campus mold. Even though she personally did not care for football or attending sports games, Amy still ranked such activities as high on her list of priorities. After her return from studying abroad, though, she realized that she no longer wanted to go to football games, even if not going meant going against campus norms. Amy explained that "other people just don't understand why I don't value certain things because everybody else values it. And I don't think that so much. I think it's just me

having different priorities.” Amy went on to say that she is almost disgusted when she witnesses her peers upset --even crying--over the outcomes of a football game, especially in light of pressing issues she personally saw while abroad. Similarly, other study participants reported an increased awareness of world events, greater interest in social justice issues, and greater appreciation of their belongings and opportunities after returning from abroad. In sum, study abroad programs have the capacity to influence students’ identities, roles, and statuses both in thought and in action.

A student’s communal-self, the identity frame related to societal / cultural norms and values, is associated with changes in beliefs related to a macro-level group. As such, study participants’ revelations that people across the world share human factors represents movement toward integration as a world citizen and away from individualization in the sense of a specific national identity. In contrast, changes in behavior are more closely connected to the presented-self, or how individuals act around certain people, and changes in priorities can be tied to a student’s self-concept. For example, updated priorities represent internal changes that illustrate new ways a student is defining their values – a primary essence of who they are. In sum, the ability to live in another country and witness people from other cultures and backgrounds living in similar ways to Americans fostered students’ understanding of the unity / sameness of people across the globe, which in turn fostered internal and external changes post-trip.

Types of Travelers

Throughout the process of studying abroad, the ways in which study participants’ defined themselves in relation to living, studying, and travelling outside of their home country transitioned from *tourist* to *traveler*. Thirteen students explicitly used these

terms, and explained that as they felt more at home in their host countries and more integrated into the local culture, they began seeing themselves as travelers. Other points along this continuum of integration and engagement include native and local people. Ultimately, students were cognizant of changing definitions of self related to travel, even though both forced and self-chosen integration took place during their time abroad.

Study participants identified four main types of people that experience life abroad, namely tourists / vacationers, travelers, locals, and natives. These four categories can be placed along a continuum that features little adaptation and engagement on one end, and deep integration and engagement on the other (Figure 2). First, students defined tourists as people who go abroad but do not embrace the local culture. According to Danielle and Vanessa, tourists are therefore more concerned with social media or taking pictures in “trendy” locations that they are with learning the culture they are visiting. Moreover, students viewed tourists as making little effort to look like they belonged in the area. For example, Lori explained that she and her peers often played a game called “spot the American,” wherein they could easily identify tourists by their dress and etiquette. Notably, study participants did report feeling like tourists when they first arrived in their host country. Samuel equated his first few weeks in Europe to being “the new kid in class,” but by the end of his program he explained that he felt “at home” in his host city. In sum, students defined tourists as people who did little to fit in with a local city or culture, and often saw themselves as tourists at the beginning of their study abroad programs.

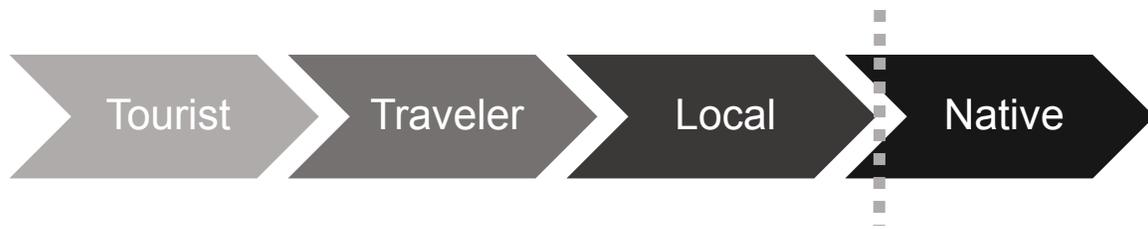


Figure 2. Continuum of identities in reference to integration.

By the end of their time abroad, however, students described themselves as travelers, given their integration and “fit” within their host city / country. When asked to describe her experience while abroad, Leah explained,

When you're there for five weeks, you get to know a lay of the land and you don't have to ask questions about where things are. You know the way the metro works, what stations are where. But when you're a traveler, I mean granted when you study abroad you still wanted to take pictures and you can be obnoxious. You don't speak their language and stuff but at the same time you, when you are a tourist, you're just doing all the touristy things. You come and then you move on to the next city, so you don't really get to embrace the culture and the lifestyle. It's different in an extraordinary way, just you learn a new way of moving and talking and how interactions occur. So the longer you are there are less touristy you are.

Leah and others, then, saw travelers as people who embrace the local way of life by learning the ways of locals and natives there. Two students even went as far to say that they felt more like themselves while they were abroad than in the United States. Notably, the majority of students were exposed to travel prior to studying abroad, but reported feeling more like tourists on those short-term trips that usually included vacation or visiting family members. In sum, the length of time spent in a foreign country allowed students to integrate within the local culture at a deeper level, which in turn influenced how they thought about themselves as travelers rather than tourists.

Although some means to integration were self-enacted, others were recommended or enforced by other actors, including program faculty and family members. For example,

students studying in Europe noted that they were told by faculty members going on their trip pre-departure not to pack t-shirts, shirts with American or campus logos / brands visible, or other casual articles of clothing. As such, students looked more similar in terms of dress once abroad, given these instructions from their program faculty. In this case, integration or adoption of local customs of dress were not self-selected, even though such action still fostered congruence or fit with the culture there. In contrast, study participants also shared that they consciously decided on their own to alter their outward appearance or behavior, as a means of integration. Like many students, Katie explained that she chose to speak quieter while abroad, to better fit in with the local way of doing things. Notably, she stated that such behavior changes were just surface-level changes, and that she still felt like she could fully be herself in Europe. Similarly, other students integrated local slang / phrases into conversation, attempted to speak the local language while in public, and refrained from being overly friendly with locals and natives as means of fitting in with the culture of their respective host cities. Ultimately, as students moved along the integration continuum, they were conscious of their burgeoning status as a traveler, and the ways they chose to adopt local customs were both self-selected and forced.

People with whom students engaged with as travelers included natives and locals. As noted earlier, native people are defined as though who were born and still live in a particular country or region, and locals are people who live in a city or country but were not born there. Notably, the transition from local to native is time-intensive, and may not even be possible, since complete integration within a foreign culture requires deep knowledge of history, customs, culture, language, and other aspects of that society. As

such, the integration continuum features a dotted line between local and native that represents this difficulty in movement. Students often connected their cultural observations to natives and locals. For example, Becca mentioned Spanish dancers, cowboys, winemakers who lived near her host city when describing the local culture there. Study participants recalled that they interacted with locals and natives both regularly and spontaneously, and four students are still in contact with locals / natives they met abroad. Locals and natives ultimately embody the high adaptation / high engagement end of the integration continuum, as they represent the local culture of a host city or country.

The transition from tourist to traveler can be connected to all four levels of the identity framework presented in this study. Notably, students' internalization of local norms, values, or behavior and subsequent identification as a traveler is associated with the self-concept and presented-self frames, since students were making sense of who they were abroad and acting accordingly. In instances where students felt pressured to act in certain ways, the imputed-self is central, as students' imagination about who they are or should be is influenced by others. Finally, deeper engagement and integration by students within a culture highlights the communal-self, wherein the main identity-related tension is that between complete individualization and complete integration. In sum, study participants did transition between specific, self-identified identities, roles, and statuses during their time abroad, and these transitions were significantly connected to travelling, living, and studying in a foreign location.

Immigration

Both first-generation and second-generation college students were intentionally included in this study in hopes of observing similarities and differences in their study abroad experiences that could be connected in some way to their educational status. Surprisingly, study participants' status as first-generation American citizens appeared to be a more salient influence before, during, and after students' study abroad experiences. Of the sixteen students interviewed, six are first-generation college students, and of those six, three are also first-generation Americans. In comparison, ten study participants are second-generation college students, and two of those ten are also first-generation American citizens. To clarify, students who are first-generation Americans are individuals who are the first in their family to be born in the United States. As such, first-generation American students in the study all had grandparents and parents who emigrated to the U.S from a variety of countries, including Vietnam, Mexico, and Nigeria, for multiple reasons, including fleeing from political strife. Ultimately, first-generation American students from all educational backgrounds were able to justify their travel desires and share their travel-related experiences with their family members in meaningful ways as a result of parents' and grandparents' exposure to travel as immigrants.

Study participants revealed various levels of support from family members when they expressed interest in or applied to study abroad programs. Family members' responses ranged from uncertainty to neutral to full approval. Exactly half of students interviewed shared that their parents were supportive and excited toward their study abroad broad. Notably, these eight students included only one first-generation college

student, and only two first-generation Americans. Parents of second-generation students / Americans, then, appeared to be more supportive or have less concerns than parents of first-generation students. Jennifer, a first-generation college student and first-generation American, shared that her mother's excitement was tempered by safety concerns. She explained,

My mom was excited. She was also worried, especially after I picked a program and got in and started getting scholarships for it, because of everything happening abroad, in general and specifically in and around the area of Eastern Europe where I was going to be traveling. And so my mom was like that's really exciting and very cool but also like there are wars being fought really close to that area, so be careful. So a lot of fear but still excitement.

In their discussions with parents, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives, students noted that safety concerns and financial considerations were the two main apprehensions expressed. First, safety concerns were especially relevant to students who studied abroad in the past year, as the prominent terrorist attacks in France and Turkey were often brought up by parents in conversations with students. Both students and their relatives also considered the cost of studying abroad when deciding to pursue a program.

Consistent with current research on study abroad, financial barriers continue to be a significant hurdle for students who wish to study abroad. Ultimately, families' responses to their student's desire and commitment to study abroad were not uniform, but not surprising, given the literature on challenges associated with studying abroad.

Reasons for studying abroad shared by study participants included language acquisition, a desire to travel, and a personal interest in a specific culture. Specific to the first-generation American students, though, was the justification of studying abroad based on their parents' experiences with travel as immigrants. Students whose parents and grandparents immigrated to the United States explained that their families' experiences

with travel through immigration were shared with them throughout their lives, but the idea of travel, especially for leisure and not necessity, was “inaccessible,” “not feasible,” or “a distant dream.” Only one first-generation American student, Vanessa, stated that travel was accessible for her, and explained that although she had been able to travel with her parents and her high school peers, she also recognized what a “blessing” that exposure was. Notably, Vanessa was not a first-generation college student. Although first-generation American students did not originally see studying abroad as something they could do, once they began applying for and being accepted to programs, they relied heavily on their parents’ and grandparents’ travel narrative to convince themselves that they too should have an opportunity to see the world. For example, Rachel explained that her parents never imagined that she would have an opportunity to travel, and her acceptance to the study abroad program was surreal. By connecting the opportunity to study abroad in Western Europe with her parents’ immigration from Vietnam, though, she recognized that travel could be accessible to her. Connections like these may represent a form social and cultural capital for first-generation American students, since their relationships to people who have experienced travel through immigration benefitted their own understanding of and experiences with travel. In sum, first-generation American students used their families’ exposure to travel as a vehicle to recognize that travel was also accessible to them.

First-generation American students also felt that they could openly share their abroad experiences with their family members, since they too had lived in other parts of the world. Notably, this was even true for the three students who were both first-generation Americans and first-generation college students. Leah shared that while she

“talked [her] mom’s ear off,” she could be especially open with her dad, who had fled from Cuba to Western Europe before moving to the United States some twenty years earlier. Near the end of her trip, Leah visited the neighborhood her dad first lived in after leaving his home country. She recounted,

I FaceTimed him [her dad] walking out of the metro, and he instantly knew I was back where he used to live, because he wanted me to go and take a couple pictures you know. And so he guided me to a where his old apartment was and told me all about it. My friends were with me and we could see how happy he was. It was an emotional experience.

Similarly, other first-generation American students recalled that they felt comfortable sharing their study abroad experiences, from the mundane to the extraordinary, with their parents, since they too had travel experiences.

Among students who were not first-generation Americans, the amount and types of stories shared with family members were limited in comparison to first-generation American students, as many students chose instead to share their experiences with peers, especially those who had also studied abroad – either with them or in another program. In response to a question regarding what study abroad-related stories and with whom Kristin shares, she explained,

But there’s some stories that are a little too crazy for my parents, and they would be a little too nervous for me, even though I turned out safe at the very end. Sometimes we’d end up travelling for over 24 hours because of all this crazy mix up, so I feel like they would get a little too nervous about that.

Similarly, Lori explained that even though she interacts with many students interested in studying abroad, it is easier for her to connect with others who have experienced living in another country. She shared,

I have three really good friends that aren't from America. They're here studying abroad. One is from Belgium and two are from Australia, and we all hang out all

the time. So it's easy to talk about different experiences with them. And then my coworkers in the [office] have also studied abroad. So it's really nice to talk about things with them, especially since we've experienced the same things a lot of times, just at different times.

Students from all educational and national backgrounds, though, explained that they were more willing to share a wide variety of stories with people, including family members, friends, acquaintances, and professors, who appeared to them as “open-minded,” rather than closed-off or set in their ways. Ultimately, travel exposure and openness were two factors that influenced how or how much students shared with others about their study abroad experiences.

In sum, all sixteen study participants recommended that others experience studying abroad. However, students’ justifications for wanting to study abroad, as well as their willingness to share their experiences post-trip, differed significantly. Moreover, first-generation American students’ connection to their immigrant family members can be associated with the imputed-self identity frame. In this level of identity, how we make sense of ourselves through others is central, and students demonstrated this relational imagination when they envisioned themselves as travelers or having access to travel through their parents or grandparents. Ultimately, both first- and second-generation college students whose families immigrated to the United States had similar study abroad experiences pre- and post-trip, and students in general were intentional in what, how much, and with whom they shared following their return.

Role as Students

One powerful similarity shared by students of all backgrounds was their emphasis on their identity, role, or status as a student while abroad. This internal identification had

multiple external manifestations throughout the study abroad process. First, students heavily considered course offerings and program faculty when deciding to study abroad and when selecting between specific locations / programs. Study participants also referred to their own educational and vocational goals in their study abroad considerations. As such, students ultimately shared a pervasive perspective that highlighted studying abroad as a learning opportunity with practical implications related to their college careers. Notably, this view was consistent across majors, gender, program locations, program length, educational background, and family background.

As described in the first theme, both language and general education courses played an important role in students' program choices. Faculty members associated with study abroad programs, either directly or indirectly, also influenced students' study abroad-related decisions, as well as their primary identity as a student. First, five students noted that they had taken a class with or had met with program faculty (outside of a study abroad orientation session) prior to studying abroad with them. For example, Jackie shared that prior to the trip, she

Was very scared, and so I was like no I'm not going to do it [study abroad.] And then I took my third semester [of Spanish.] And I was still not going to do it. And then I took my fourth semester, and we started having more conversations in class. Then she [the professor] gave out the same thing [brochure for the program trip] and she's like I'm going to this year, and I was like, I really want to go, you know she's going. So kind of all of that hit me like in one class period when she was talking about it [studying abroad.]

Jackie, like others, wanted to take a particular course with a specific professor, and studied abroad as a means to do so. Throughout the interviews, students shared the central and varied roles their professors took on, from tour guide to teacher to home cook, all while emphasizing the prominence of class, homework, assignments, grades, exams,

and class trips throughout their program. Ultimately, study participants retained their primary identity as a student while abroad.

Study participants similarly discussed their educational and vocational goals in reference to studying abroad, thus placing additional emphasis as their current position as a student. Kristin, for example, shared that she wants to live and work abroad one day, and her time in Europe confirmed this desire. Others, like Jackie and Leah, referenced the language component of studying abroad as a benefit to their majors and future careers, since being bilingual can offer career advantages in their respective fields, namely law and medicine. For Katie, graduating early to enter the field of speech therapy was her main academic goal. She shared,

I remember looking into the program, and I'm graduating early. I'm graduating in December. And basically I only have these four upper level electives left, these four courses that I needed. Before, it was just major courses, and in my major, it doesn't have any study abroad opportunities. So I was like [specific program] has everything that I needed to finish so I could still graduate early.

Although study participants' educational goals were diverse, many considered studying abroad as a complement to them. In doing so, the identity, role, and status of a student, especially a student of a specific field or topic, was prioritized over others.

More broadly, study participants described study abroad experiences as “learning opportunities” that they intentionally sought out. In this regard, interviewees emphasized a more general vision of a student, in comparison to specifically a college student. Prior to studying abroad, Danielle shared that she only connected travel to “vacation and business.” Her previous travels, therefore, were focused on leisure, rather than learning. However, Danielle was interested in a country she had previously visiting “for fun,” and studied abroad there to learn more about the language, culture, people, and “new ways of

thinking and doing things.” For Danielle, then, studying abroad “was more so for a learning experience... not just like to whatever, put it on social media or something.”

Moreover, Danielle shared that participating in a study abroad program

Taught me, first of all that there are other ways of doing things - I never even really thought about other ways of doing things. But it taught me that not only are there other ways of doing things but sometimes the other ways are better, and beneficial. And not necessarily always better but just its fun trying things in news ways or even experiencing that there is another way. It's just good to have your mind open to that.

Like Danielle, study participants intentionally decided to study abroad, in hopes of gaining insight into the world around them. Ultimately, this desire to learn and experience another country underscores the salience of the student identity, even when individuals are away from their home campus.

Moreover, half of the students interviewed differentiated between studying abroad and travel, and noted that their position of a student was not the same as a traveler. For example, Mallory noted that her class schedule and homework made studying abroad different than the times she traveled with her family. Even though Mallory recognized that this difference “was obvious,” she emphasized the magnitude of this difference. In closing, Mallory shared that studying abroad was difficult for her personally, as academic requirements and living abroad exacerbated issues related to her mental health, and while she would not study abroad again, she was interested in traveling, free from constraints and pressures tied to the classroom. It is important to note that while some students mentioned these differences, the majority of students did recognize themselves as travelers who embraced the local culture, language, and customs.

Interestingly, only one of the sixteen students knew other peers who would be studying abroad alongside them before leaving for the trip. As such, peer influence was

not cited by any study participants in their decision to study abroad. This lack of influence is surprising, as college student development literature often highlights the significant role peers play in each other's college experiences (see Astin, 1999). Although students expressed nervousness, anxiety, and fear prior to the trip in relation to their lack of pre-established friends, these feelings did little to deter students' commitment to study abroad.

Study participants' emphasis on their identity, role, or status as a student can be connected to both the self-concept and imputed-self frames of identity. First, study participants described themselves as students, both implicitly and explicitly, through their emphasis on program courses and academic aspirations. Moreover, study participants' position as students can be seen through others, specifically professors and program faculty. Ultimately, both first- and second-generation college students emphasized their primary role as a student throughout their study abroad experiences, and therefore had shared or similar experiences, despite differences in background.

Identity Framework in Action

Although various experiences, thoughts, feelings, and perspectives can be attributed to the four frames of identity, the concept of identity should be understood in whole, rather than in segmented parts. To this end, identity frames exist within a cybernetic loop, wherein each level is directly and indirectly connected to the others. As such, discrepancies or shock in one frame can result in negotiation, formation, and re-formation of particular identities, roles, and statuses in all of the levels. Ultimately, identity can be understood as both internalized sense-making and as a function of specific

environments, and all four frames of identity, from self-concept to communal-self, should be comprehended as a whole.

To demonstrate the cybernetic nature of the four frames of identity, as well as how the frames should be understood in whole, I have applied the framework to the experiences of Taylor, who studied abroad in Western Europe between her freshman and sophomore years. At the self-concept level, Taylor described herself as a French speaker who had been studying the language since kindergarten, a native Californian, a child of a disabled parent, and a science major. While abroad, Taylor noted that she spoke in French while on the metro, as well as with her professors and host family. She explained that she did so to blend in with locals and natives. Furthermore, Taylor shared that even though she was speaking French most of the time, doing so was natural and felt like an extension of herself. As such, speaking a foreign language in specific environments as a means of integration represents both the presented-self frame and the self-concept frame, since Taylor connected her actions to her personal thoughts and feelings about herself. In terms of the imputed-self, Taylor emphasized her frequent interactions with program faculty, that in turn reinforced her identity as a student while abroad. Since Taylor was describing herself as a student through another, in this case professors, the imputed-self is at play. Moreover, Taylor's identity as a student can also be attributed to the self-concept frame, since Taylor also described herself as a student in terms of majoring in science. Finally, Taylor noted that learning more about French culture, history, and perspectives made her a more understanding person. In this instance, macro-level values, beliefs, experiences, or traditions affected how Taylor made sense of herself, which represents the communal-self frame in action. In sum, Taylor was one of sixteen students who I

interviewed through which the four levels of identity, and their interconnectedness, can be observed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Studying abroad represents a specific situational context wherein college students have the opportunity to learn new languages and immerse themselves, to varying degrees, in new cultures and traditions. Within this context, students maintain and negotiate, both consciously and unconsciously, aspects of their identity. The purpose of this study was to better explain the extent to which students' holistic identity, including self-concept, presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self, was influenced by the study abroad environment. Whereas previous research focused on the motivations, structure, and outcomes of study abroad programs, this study highlighted students' experiences and reflections related to their time abroad. As demonstrated by the findings, the process of identity conceptualization and negotiation occurs throughout the study abroad experience, from pre-departure to the semesters following the program. Moreover, study abroad participants' identities, roles, and statuses are influenced by a wide variety of actors and factors, including family, language, professors, career / vocation, and travel exposure. Ultimately, this study allowed deeper insight into both the study abroad experience and college student identity formation through a focus on their intersection--a previously limited area of research.

From the five themes discussed in the previous chapter, I have drawn two primary conclusions. First, integration, as evidenced by students' desire to learn another language and their transitions from tourist to traveler, was a conscious choice that helped students make sense of the world around them and their place in it. Moreover, the identities of

student and first-generation American significantly affected participants' experiences while abroad, as well as the depth of their connections post-return. This chapter highlights these two broad conclusions, as well as reflections on current literature in light of study findings, an examination of the nature of the conceptual framework with reference to identity processes in the context of study abroad, and implications for study abroad departments and institutions of higher learning. The chapter then concludes with study limitations and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

The five themes of language, living abroad, types of travel, immigration, and role as students represent the experiences, reflections, and descriptions shared by study participants in relation to studying abroad. The first conclusion, conscious integration as a traveler, is connected to the themes of language, living abroad, and types of travel. In contrast, the second conclusion, namely student and first-generation Americans as significant identities, is tied to the themes of living abroad, immigration, and roles as students. Ultimately, these two meta-themes provide broad insight into the unique experiences of study abroad participants.

Integration is the process wherein individuals adopt different ways of thinking and behavior to better reflect a new environment (Berry, 2011). Within the context of study abroad, the transition from tourist to traveler for students represents intentional integration, through which participants sought a better fit with their surroundings abroad. This active modification of thought and behavior points to what Goffman (1959) explained as the presentation of self, wherein individuals shape their interactions to reflect specific environments. Moreover, students' active decisions to dress less casually,

learn and speak the native language, engage with native and local peoples, and embrace local ideas about food, travel, and lifestyles demonstrate both internal and external strivings toward integration in their host countries. Of these choices, language acquisition and engagement with natives and locals were cited most often by study participants. Moreover, the impact of both had tangible influences on the ways in which students make sense of themselves, those around them, and society at a global level. For example, the validation that students reported as a result of having a better command of a foreign language is connected to language acquisition in general, which in turn is tied to conscious integration. Notably, this outcome is consistent with previous research, as scholars like Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2014) similarly reported this connection. In the same vein, engagement with natives and locals shaped study participants' perspectives regarding the sameness or unity of humanity, and such engagement is also related to the search for fit while abroad. In sum, as students transitioned from tourist to traveler while abroad, they made conscious choices to encourage their own fit or integration in their host country.

It should be noted, however, that outside influences may have limited the sense in which integration was fully a choice of the student. First, study participants reported that program professors instructed them how to dress during pre-departure meetings. As such, students purposefully packed outfits that met the standards of their host country, which then impacted how they dressed --and fit in--while abroad. Moreover, students revealed that although many of their classes abroad had language requirements, even outside of the classroom, some of their peers spoke mainly in English throughout the majority of the trip. Language acquisition as a vehicle of integration, then, should be clarified to describe

only the intentional study and practice of language, as not to include students who attended class or completed course assignments but did not actively pursue a foreign language in hopes of integrating with the local culture or ways of life. Ultimately, the extent to which integration was an active, complete choice of the student is influenced by external requirements and internal decisions.

In terms of especially significant identities, roles, or statuses highlighted or negotiated by study participants while abroad, both student and first-generation American deeply affected individuals' experiences, perspectives, and connections throughout the study abroad process. First, study participants highlighted their primary position as a student throughout the study abroad process, including following their return from a program. Individuals' emphases on coursework, careers and calling, professors, graduation, and required courses demonstrate the salience of the college student identity. Moreover, participants' general desires to learn more about the languages and lifestyles present in their host countries also illustrates the identity, role, or status of individuals as students. Given the extensive nature of this identity, study participants from all programs and backgrounds had shared experiences that ranged from completing assignments while travelling to interacting with professors to observing local traditions. Although the distinct structure of study abroad programs may be responsible for the salience of the student identity, study participants nonetheless shared that their experiences abroad revolved in part around their position as a student.

The identity of first-generation American also influenced students' experiences, as well as their capacity to connect with others, especially family members. Although first-generation American students did not view travel as accessible prior to studying

abroad, by recalling their parents' and grandparents' stories and experiences of immigration, they were able to recognize that travel was in fact feasible. Moreover, first-generation American students noted that they were able to engage with natives and locals in the language of their parents or grandparents in instances when that was the only language the two shared. Even though knowing a third language is not unique to only first-generation American students, its connection to families' immigration did impact students' experiences while abroad. Finally, first-generation American students were able to share many meaningful stories of their experiences with their family members post-program, whereas other students reported limiting what they shared with their parents and other family members. The identity, role, or status as a child of immigrants who also had travel experiences, then, can be connected to the deep level of connection shared between students and their families, a relational dynamic of first-generation Americans previously noted in the literature (see Alessandria & Nelson, 2005). Ultimately, both student and first-generation American represent two significant identities, roles, or statuses held by study participants in the context of studying abroad.

Identity Framework

Identity can be understood as both an internalization process and a function of a specific environment, or situational context. Following the conceptual framework adopted for the purposes of this study, identity can be further categorized into four frames, namely self-concept, presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self. Whereas the self-concept frame represents stable, internalized identities, roles, and statuses, the presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self frames inform the contextual perspective of identity. Throughout the study abroad process, from pre-departure to post-trip, study

participants shared thoughts, feelings, experiences, behaviors, and perspectives connected to each of the four frames. Although it is possible to assign certain thoughts or actions to specific identity frames, it is important to note that the four frames function as a cybernetic loop, and should be understood as a whole (Burke & Rietzes, 1991). As such, there is definite overlap between the four frames, since each informs the other. The following section synthesizes examples of these frames in action, and discusses the function and nature of the conceptual framework.

Self-Concept

An individual's self-concept includes all of his or her thoughts and feelings directed toward him- or herself, which ultimately become stable across situations over time. For study abroad participants, the self-concept frame can be connected to being comfortable while abroad, negotiating new priorities and perspectives, and emphasizing their position as a student. First, students reported that they felt comfortable with who they were while in their host countries. Moreover, study participants shared that studying abroad did not limit their abilities to fully be themselves. Notably, such feelings of comfort held true even as students consciously adopted local ways of life, including language, dress, speech volume, and dining customs. As such, study participants' sense of self was enduring, since external changes did not affect how students were thinking or feelings about themselves.

Study participants also shared that they embraced new priorities and perspectives related to their time abroad. For example, some students noted that following their participation in a study abroad program, they identified more as a part of the human race rather than as an American. New perspectives like these are tied to the self-concept

frame, since students are internally directing their feelings and thoughts as a human toward themselves, and then are making sense of who they are, based on these personal ideas. Notably, the communal-self frame is also relevant in this example, and will be discussed more in a following section.

The salient identity of student also represents the self-concept frame. Throughout their study abroad experiences, participants emphasized their primary position as a student through references to coursework, their home campus, majors / minors, and career goals. It should be noted that this student identity only relates to the self-concept frame when individuals direct their own thoughts and feelings toward themselves without consideration of others (imputed-self) and society or culture (communal-self). For example, when study abroad participants highlighted their identity as a student by referencing program faculty or other teachers, the imputed-self frame is emphasized. Ultimately, study participants defined themselves as students throughout the study abroad process, and living abroad did little to curb this primary identity, role, or status.

Presented-Self

Although individuals may have a stable sense of self, their behavior is not always consistent across various situations or environments. The presented-self frame, then, represents the identities, roles, and statuses individuals temporarily adopt within particular environments. Although students lived abroad for a significant amount of time – anywhere from five weeks to three months – the study abroad environment can still be considered transitory or temporary, especially given the amount of travel experienced by students while abroad. Study participants' efforts to integrate with their local culture and traditions while abroad therefore highlight the presented-self.

Efforts to integrate included changes in dress, language, and behavior. Moreover, these efforts were especially visible in public, when students were most exposed to the outside world, and in turn new cultures and ways of life. For example, study participants shared that they were committed to speaking the local language while riding the metro or in the city to better fit in with natives and locals or to downplay their American identity, but sometimes spoke English at their homestay, since their host families were aware that they were Americans. In this instance, the change in situational context prompted the change in behavior. This inconsistency across environments underscores the presented-self frame, since students temporarily adopted another identity (like local or non-American) based on the environment in which they were present. These attempts at integration, though, did not impact study participants' senses of self, which again remained stable throughout the study abroad process.

Imputed-Self

Individuals' imaginations about how others see them informs the imputed-self frame. As such, other actors are especially significant when considering this level of identity. For study abroad participants, these actors included professors, program staff, peers, family members, locals and natives, and host families. In terms of the imputed-self aspect of identity, language acquisition-related encouragement and the position as a first-generation American influenced the ways in which students made sense of themselves through other people. First, students shared that throughout the language-learning process, both faculty and natives and locals encouraged their progress and skills. In turn, participants reported feeling more confident in their identity as a second-language speaker. Notably, this aspect of students' identities relates to the imputed-self frame,

since the identity was negotiated through others, namely program professors and native and local people with whom students interacted. Again, the foundation of the imputed-self frame is sense-making that considers others.

Students' identity, role, and status as the child of immigrant parents also highlights the imputed-self frame, since first-generation American study participants were able to make sense of who they are in reference to their parents and their own experiences with travel. In study interviews, first-generation American students noted that they relied on their parents' and grandparents' stories of immigration to be able to identify as a traveler, or someone able to study abroad. Moreover, these individuals also defined themselves in terms of their familial roots, especially those connected to the countries from which their parents or grandparents emigrated. Given first-generation American students' consideration of others, in this case family members, when making sense of their own identities, roles, and statuses, the imputed-self frame of identity can be observed through such thoughts and connections.

Communal-Self

The communal-self frame represents the process in which macro-level norms and values influence individuals' personal sense-making. As such, the communal-self includes negotiations between pervasive beliefs and complete individualization. Studying abroad, given its structure which encourages cultural immersion, is an environment wherein the communal-self may be affected by the introduction of new cultures, customs, and perspectives. Notably, study participants' perspectives on the sameness or unity of humankind highlights identity at the global level, which in turn is connected to the communal-self. Students revealed that living abroad fostered a realization that people

from all backgrounds and countries share certain human factors, like raising a family or going to work. Moreover, this realization was coupled with the recognition by study participants that they too shared these human factors, and as such they considered themselves more than just Americans, but as global citizens or a part of the human race. In this instance, the specific situational context of studying abroad influenced study participants' perspectives, which then affected the ways they made sense of themselves and the world around them. As such, the role of environment and pervasive beliefs shaped students' identities in relation to the communal-self aspect of who they are.

Nature of the Framework

The four-level conceptual framework utilized in this study describes the frames of identity, including self-concept, presented-self, imputed-self, and communal-self, as well as their general relationship to one another within a cybernetic loop. In its use, the framework provided direction for both interpretation and analysis of the data, namely the stories and reflections shared by study participants. In this sense, the framework is a stable guide that both informed and influenced the researcher, the data, and the co-creation of meaning. Notably, the study findings on identity formation and negotiation in the context of study abroad can also be applied or plugged in to the framework, and in doing so, the nature of the framework is further revealed.

Study participants' thoughts and actions throughout the study abroad process reflected all four frames of identity. Although the conceptual framework originally positioned each of these frames equidistant from each other within a cybernetic loop, participants both explicitly and implicitly highlighted closer connections between specific frames. For example, the self-concept and imputed-self frames had significant overlap for

students in the study. First, study participants identified themselves as students in reference to their coursework and career goals, which reflects their personal interests and strivings. Moreover, participants defined themselves as students through others, especially professors, throughout their study abroad experiences. In this instance, both the self-concept and imputed-self frames are represented within a primary identity, namely student. As such, these frames may be imagined as closer to one another within the cybernetic identity loop. It is important to note that while these two levels may be more closely connected for most students in this study, differing contexts and even individual experiences may change the position of the four identity frames. Moreover, identity should be understood as a whole, so dividing aspects of an individual's identity into particular frames may be arbitrary, especially given their interconnectedness. As such, even though it appears that the self-concept and imputed-self levels are closely connected for study participants, such a connection may simply point to the holistic nature of identity.

In sum, while the conceptual framework functioned as a guide from the development of an interview protocol to the analysis of study findings, the application of the framework to students' thoughts and actions may result in the unnecessary division of individuals' identities, which again should be comprehended as an interconnected whole, rather than separate facets. Moreover, study findings demonstrated how the conceptual framework may be amended to reflect closer connections between the frames, but this positioning may simply underline the holistic nature of identity. From a researcher standpoint, then, the conceptual framework offered significant help in the interpretation aspects of the study, but was less helpful in the analysis stage, given its limitations in

terms of explaining the nature and function of identity as both a whole and interconnected, yet separate parts.

Study Abroad through the Lens of Symbolic Interactionism

As a sociological theory and methodological approach, symbolic interactionism assumes the construction of identities, roles, and statuses, as well as meaning, by individuals through interactions with others and the environment. Notably, differences in meaning are directly tied to differences in interaction under this lens. For study participants, a number of interactions between varied actors and within diverse environments took place. Riding the metro and interacting with other Americans and local and native people, speaking in a foreign language with a local resident in a homestay neighborhood, and conversing with a professor who has lived in the host country before the study abroad program all represent instances of these interactions within the situational context of study abroad. Moreover, differences in meaning can also be observed in these illustrations. For example, Rachel, a first-generation college student and first-generation American, shared a story about her homestay family, where she described the moment she learned that the family's son was learning the language of her immigrant parents. In this moment, she noted that she felt like "her worlds were colliding;" moreover, she recognized that she was as interested in learning French from him as he was in learning Vietnamese from her. Rachel went on to say that for the rest of her time abroad, he would speak to her in Vietnamese and she would respond in French. Through a symbolic interactionist lens, we can observe how the original interaction between Rachel and her homestay brother influenced the meaning she assigned to him as someone interested in learning the language of her family, as well as how this meaning

shaped subsequent interactions. Ultimately, Rachel shared that interactions with her homestay family and others validated her French language skills, as well as her general interest in France. Her constructed identity as a French speaker or Francophone, then, can be contributed to her interactions and the meaning she derived from them, when viewed through a symbolic interactionist lens. Ultimately, this sociological and methodological approach encouraged deeper insight into the individual interactions and meaning-making processes of study participants.

Implications and Limitations

The aim of qualitative research is not to produce generalizable results, but instead the deep understanding of individuals and their experiences (Patton, 1990; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explain college student identity processes, namely formation and negotiation, in the context of study abroad programs. Through interviews with sixteen students at a private, four-year university, I was able to glean insight into their identities, perspectives, and experiences. The following sections describe ways in which study abroad or global engagement departments, as well as colleges and universities in general, can integrate study findings into programming and related opportunities for undergraduate students. Moreover, study limitations and considerations for future research will also be discussed. In sum, both studying abroad and college student identity are topics of importance in higher education today, given their connection to the mission and purpose of institutions of higher learning.

For Study Abroad Departments

Departments that promote, develop, and coordinate study abroad programs are common within colleges and universities in America. Whereas some study abroad departments are a part of larger offices that also house international student services, global engagement services, or missions-related services, other departments stand alone. Notably, these offices play a central role in the experiences of study abroad participants, since they shape program offerings, program faculty and staff choices, course offerings, funding or accessibility, and pre-departure knowledge. As such, study abroad departments could benefit from a better understanding of the influence of professors, peers, and pre-trip informational sessions on students' identity processes.

First, study participants shared that professors associated with study abroad programs influenced their eventual program choice, as well as language acquisition while abroad. Moreover, program faculty members' encouragement fostered students' feelings of validation and confidence, and study participants emphasized their primary role of students through their professors while studying abroad. Study abroad departments, then, should encourage program professors to share about their own experiences with study abroad programs, since students' decisions to pursue a specific program were often based on the professor associated with the trip and/or the courses offered. Moreover, students may benefit from increased exposure to their program faculty throughout the study abroad process, since faculty's validation and roles shaped the ways students make sense of themselves. For example, professors may host dinners or discussions in the months leading up to departure, as well as during and following the study abroad trip. Ultimately,

study abroad departments should utilize their connections with program faculty, to positively influence study abroad participants' experiences and identities.

Notably, the role of peers was not significant in this study. Only one student recalled that they knew another student prior to departure that was going abroad on the same trip as them. Moreover, study participants shared that this lack of known peers did not discourage them from applying to or enrolling in a study abroad program. Unlike the role of professors, then, the role of peers was less meaningful in terms of formation and negotiation across the four frames of identity. It is not understood, however, if this lack of peer influence can be tied to a campus culture that may value individualization or independence, since literature consistently illustrates the power of peers in the lives of college students. As such, study abroad programs should reference campus climate information, as well as students' reasons for going abroad, when creating advertising materials and program opportunities.

Study participants also referenced pre-departure informational sessions in relation to their efforts of integration while abroad. In these sessions, students shared that topics of homesickness, safety, and dress were emphasized, along with information regarding travel and train passes. With this information in mind, students made conscious decisions, like dressing more formally, in attempts to better fit in with local cultures and people. Ultimately, study abroad departments have the opportunity, through pre-departure meetings, to shape students' understandings of host countries, which in turn may influence efforts at integration--a phenomenon connected to all four frames of identity.

Study abroad departments should also be committed to creating opportunities for students of all backgrounds. As demonstrated by the study findings, significant barriers to

studying abroad are present in the lives of college students, including financial challenges, safety concerns, misperceptions regarding travel and who can be a traveler, and course requirements. Given these challenges, study abroad departments should provide information regarding funding and scholarships to students and their families, share diverse stories of students who travelled abroad, and work with academic offices to offer courses in programs that satisfy both language and general education requirements of the institution. Diverse study abroad participation is increasingly important, given the rise in globalization in modern society. Ultimately, the opportunity to study abroad should be accessible, especially in light of its general benefits and relation to identity processes.

For Institutions of Higher Education

The college environment directly influences and validates the identities, roles, and statuses held by students (see Kaufman & Feldman, 2004). As such, institutions of higher education should be intentional in the ways they shape and structure their environments. For the purposes of this study, the distinct situational context of study abroad programs was considered. Related to this environment, colleges and universities can make institutional-level changes, including directing funds, promoting language acquisition, and prioritizing study abroad opportunities in strategic or quality enhancement plans, that would benefit study abroad programs and the students who participate in them.

In an effort to ensure students from all backgrounds, including low-socioeconomic status, have an opportunity to study abroad, institutions could direct funds, donors, and campaigns toward study abroad-related scholarships and programs. Along this line of thought, colleges and universities may also establish a variety of

scholarships aimed at increasing the diversity of study abroad participants. Since the literature shows that male students, first-generation student, racial minority students, and STEM students are less likely to go abroad than their peers, such scholarship opportunities could have demographic or academic requirements as a means of promoting participation by these groups (Dessoff, 2006; Stroud, 2010). Moreover, access to funding also addresses the primary barrier cited by students wishing to study abroad, namely financial constraints. Making studying abroad programs a financial priority, then, is one type of change colleges and universities could adopt to foster diverse study abroad participation.

Study participants cited curricular requirements for foreign language study as a central reason for wanting to study abroad. Moreover, language acquisition while abroad was tied to identity formation and negotiation, especially in terms of the self-concept and presented-self frames. As such, colleges and universities should continue to require and encourage foreign language courses for undergraduate students. Notably, study participants shared that their command of a language, in comparison to a surface-level comprehension, deeply affected their trip, since language skills were tied to confidence, the capacity to express one's self, and the ability to engage with natives and locals. As such, foreign language requirements put in place by institutions could include upper-level courses, in order to foster students' deep understanding of another language, which could then shape the ways students make sense of themselves and interact with others. In sum, foreign language study may be one area in which colleges and universities could make modifications that would in turn influence students' identities, roles, and statuses.

Institutions of higher education, in recognition of the benefits of studying abroad and global engagement in general, should also express the value of both in mission statements, strategic plans, quality enhancement plans, and other documents of espoused values. Although such statements or commitments are often symbolic in nature, they have practical outcomes as well that could influence the prioritization of study abroad programs across colleges and universities. For example, the study institution recently published a quality enhancement plan calling for increased and more diverse study abroad participation. While the outcomes of this plan are not yet visible, such a commitment represents the value the institution is placing on such programs, and also provides clear action plans to support these opportunities. The ways colleges and universities share their commitment to studying abroad, then, ultimately affects how such programs are able to operate. Moreover, the aims of studying abroad are similar to those of institutions of higher learning, namely education and exposure. As such, by advancing and prioritizing study abroad programs, colleges and universities are also promoting their own general mission and goals.

Study Limitations

The primary limitations to the study are related to the homogeneity of students interviewed, especially in terms of gender, program location, and home campus. Of the sixteen study participants, fifteen were female. Notably, female students represent more than 70% of study abroad participants annually, and this trend has held steady over time. Although the lack of male study participants was not unusual, then, given participation statistics along gendered lines, it still restricts a deep understanding of how male students conceptualize and negotiate identities, roles, and statuses throughout the study abroad

process. Program locations were also similar, as the majority of students studied abroad in Western Europe. Only two students participated in programs outside of Western Europe: Becca studied abroad in South America, and Vanessa studied abroad in Eastern Asia and Western Europe. Although program location may affect the ways in which students makes sense of themselves, others, and the world around them, this study was not able to provide in-depth comparison or explanation based on program choice due to this relative homogeneity. Moreover, the study was conducted at only one university, so there was no difference in terms of students' home campus. Given this lack of diversity in terms of research location, no comparisons between students could be made in terms of program offerings, campus culture, or peer influence, as they relate to the study abroad process and identity formation.

Other limitations that may have prevented a deep understanding of identity in the context of study abroad include sample size and data collection methods. First, it should be noted that qualitative researchers do not set a minimum sample size; instead, researchers continue data collection until the point of saturation, that is where consistent ideas and themes regularly appear in interviews or other forms of data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, saturation was reached for second-generation students, as many students whose parents also attended college shared similar beliefs and experiences. However, first-generation college students' experiences varied, especially if they were also first-generation Americans. As such, interviews could have been continued with study participants from these two backgrounds, until saturation was also reached. Finally, interviews were the singular source of data collection for the purposes of this study. As a result, triangulation of data, which encourages dependability and

trustworthiness in qualitative research, was not completed. In sum, distinct limitations to this study exist which may have affected the extent to which I was able to garner a deep understanding of identity processes in the context of study abroad.

Future Research

As the world gets flatter, to use Friedman's (2005) language, opportunities to engage with people and ideas across the world are more available. Study abroad programs at institutions of higher learning are one such vehicle of this engagement. However, more research on study abroad programs and their participants is needed to better understand how students, institutions, and countries both affect and are affected by studying abroad.

In terms of specific student groups, little is known about the experiences of first-generation college students and/or first-generation American students related to their study abroad experiences. Although participants from both student populations were included in this study, further research can confirm or offer alternate findings related to their experiences and identity processes. Notably, research related to study abroad as a tool for these students to gain social and cultural capital may also benefit our understanding of study abroad as a distinct situational context, as well as an extension of the unique college arena.

As discussed in the limitations section, this study was only conducted at one institution, namely a private, four-year university. Study abroad programs, however, are offered at colleges and universities across the United States, including community colleges. As such, additional research related to community college student identity formation and negotiation in the context of study abroad could deepen the literature

related to community college students' experiences, study abroad as a unique situational context that shapes identity, and college student identity formation and negotiation in general.

Finally, the majority of students included in the study participated in programs located in Western Europe. Notably, this trend is similar with study abroad participation in general, as the Institute of International Education reported that over 45% of participants studied abroad in Western Europe in the 2013-2014 year. As such, further research that utilizes students from diverse programs is necessary to better understand the role a host country may play in the experiences of participants who live and study there.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Research question:

How does the transitional experience of studying abroad affect how college students conceptualize and negotiate their identities and roles?

Sub-questions:

1. Are there aspects of study abroad programs that are especially salient to students' identity?
2. Are there particular identities, roles, or statuses that college students transition between over the course of their study abroad experience?
3. Do first-generation college students conceptualize or negotiate identities, roles, and statuses differently than second-generation students?

Interview questions:

COLLEGE

1. When you were young, how did you envision a college student?
 - a. Was there something or someone that promoted that idea?
 - b. How did that vision fit with how you saw yourself?
2. When did you first start thinking about attending college?
 - a. Were there any expectations that you would attend college? From who?
 - b. Did you have any experiences that motivated you to want to go to college?
 - c. How did people around you (friends, peers, family, teachers, coaches, etc.) react to this desire?
 - d. How did you respond to their reactions?
3. Why did you decide to come to Baylor?
 - a. What does it mean to be a Baylor student? Why? Who or what is promoting that image?

- b. How does that image fit with how you saw yourself as a freshman? Now?
- 4. How did you see yourself when you first arrived at Baylor?
 - a. Did you feel like you could be yourself when you first got here? Did you censor or highlight certain aspects of yourself?
 - b. What groups were you a part of? Was there one you were most committed to? Did that affect how you defined yourself?
 - c. Who did you interact with most often? With whom or where were you most comfortable? Most uncomfortable?
 - d. How would you describe your thoughts and actions in those comfortable settings? In the uncomfortable?
 - e. Did you ever question your choice to come to Baylor or college in general? Was there something or someone that made you feel like you didn't belong in higher education?
 - f. Was / is there something or someone that validates your decision to be here?
- 5. From the time that you arrived at Baylor until you departed for your study abroad program, were there any changes regarding with whom or how you interacted?
 - a. What caused those changes?
 - b. How did you see yourself in the midst of these changes?
 - c. How did those around you respond to those changes? What was your response to their thoughts and actions?

STUDY ABROAD

- 1. When you were young, how did you envision an international traveler?
 - a. Did you know anyone that travelled abroad?
 - b. Did your family talk about travel when you were a child? Friends? What did they say? How did you respond to these ideas?
 - c. How did that image of an international traveler fit (or not fit) with how you saw yourself?
- 2. When did you first become interested in travelling abroad?
 - a. Was there someone or something that motivated or validated this desire?

- b. Did this desire mesh with how you defined yourself at the time?
 - c. Did how you defined the importance of travelling abroad change over time? How and why?
3. Why did you decide to study abroad?
- a. Describe how you made the decision to apply. Did you know other people that were applying? How did others respond to this decision? How did you react to their responses?
 - b. How did you choose a study abroad program? What motivated you to do so?
 - c. Did anyone question your program choice? Support it? How did you respond, and why?
 - d. Did you know anyone else that was studying abroad, in general or in your program?
4. Where did you study abroad?
- a. Leading up to your departure, did you have any expectations about studying abroad? Who or what influenced those expectations?
 - b. How long were you abroad? Describe a typical week while you were abroad. Did you travel to other countries? How often? With whom?
 - c. Who led your program? How and how often did you interact with your program leader?
 - d. Describe your most positive and most negative experiences while abroad. What caused these experiences? Who was involved? How did you react? Did these experiences shape your overall study abroad experience?
 - e. Did you study a foreign language while you were abroad? How well were you able to understand or speak the language? Did you speak with locals in their native tongue? If so, how often?
 - f. Did your language skills lead to any opportunities or barriers while you were abroad? How did you feel in those situations? How did you feel about yourself?
5. Who did you interact with most while abroad?
- a. Did anything influence the origin of these interactions?

- b. Did you interact with local people / students? How did you meet them? What did your interactions look like? How did you feel when interacting with locals or within the local culture?
- c. Did you feel like you could be yourself while you were abroad? Did you emphasize / deemphasize certain aspects of yourself? Why?
- d. While abroad, in what settings or around which people did you feel most comfortable? Most uncomfortable? What did your thoughts and actions look like in the comfortable settings? Uncomfortable?
- e. Did you feel any pressure while abroad to act, think, dress, or talk in a certain way? Who or what was creating this pressure?
- f. Did you observe any cultural roles or ideas while you were abroad? How would you describe and characterize those roles? Did you embrace or reject those roles or ideas?
- g. How did you connect with friends / groups and family that were not abroad? Did these relationships influence your thoughts or actions when you were abroad?

RETURN AND REFLECTION

1. At the end of your study abroad program, did you have any expectations about your return to America? To Baylor?
 - a. Since your return, have your interactions changed? How? Are your friend groups and campus involvements different than before you went abroad? To what group are you most committed?
 - b. How do you talk about your time abroad with other Baylor students? With other friends? With family? Are there certain stories, experiences, or feelings that you highlight or censor between these groups? Why?
 - c. Did your vision of an international traveler change after studying abroad? How does that image fit with how you see yourself now?
2. How do you characterize the value of studying abroad?
 - a. Do you see yourself differently having studied abroad? Why? When did this shift occur?

- b. Did studying abroad change the way you think about or act toward others?
How?
- c. Do you think others perceive you differently because you have lived /
studied / travelled abroad?

APPENDIX B

Positionality Statement

My research project examines identity formation and negotiation in college students who have participated in a study abroad programs. I have adopted a symbolic interactionist approach to study this intersection, in hopes of describing identity processes, both internalized and relational, within and across situational contexts. I am therefore committed to representing the truest forms of these interactions, with my position as the researcher in mind. As a qualitative researcher, I recognize that I too am a part of the research process, and my interpretations and analysis shape my findings.

Through this positionality statement, I hope to be forthright about my own study abroad experiences, as well as any biases that may influence the research process. Notably, the recognition of my relationship to / biases within the proposed study promotes its trustworthiness, especially as it relates to credibility and confirmability.

Relationship to Study

As a sophomore at Pepperdine University, I studied abroad in Florence, Italy for an academic year. In Florence, I lived with 50 other Pepperdine students in a university-owned campus building, and my courses were taught by Pepperdine faculty from the Florence and Malibu campuses. While abroad, I had extremely positive experiences, intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. For example, while a number of my peers reported feeling less connected to their faiths while studying abroad, my faith was expanded and strengthened during my time in Italy. As such, I consider my time

abroad the most formative year from my overall college experience. Ultimately, this personal experience motivated my academic interest in the study subject.

As a current student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program at Baylor University, I have also had the opportunity to study college student development (through psychosocial, sociological, cognitive, and person-environment lenses), as well as reflect on and analyze my own development as an undergraduate at Pepperdine. As such, I have been exposed to a number of theories and understandings of identity formation and negotiation. Therefore, I did have some background knowledge of identity before starting work on this study.

Finally, in the proposed study, I wish to interview Baylor students in hopes of better understanding both their study abroad experiences and the identities and roles they adopted in or as a result of that experience. As aforementioned, I myself am also a current Baylor student, and I am interested in working in higher education after graduation. As such, I regularly interact with my study population, and I have a professional interest in my study topic as well.

Potential Biases

I have identified a number of potential biases that may influence the research process, from data collection to interpretation and analysis. The first set of biases relate to my own experience studying abroad. First, because I had a positive study abroad experience across multiple dimensions, I may assume that all students who study abroad had similar experiences. That being said, I must be cognizant that students may have struggled academically, emotionally, physically, spiritually, or in other ways during their own time abroad. Next, because I studied abroad in Italy, a first-world country, I may

want to assume that other students had similar experiences while abroad, like travelling via train or visiting multiple countries. That being said, I am aware that Baylor has study abroad programs in less-developed countries, as well as programs oriented to service, rather than travel. Connected to the first bias, because I had positive experiences abroad that shaped me throughout my college career, I am apt to assume that such growth or positive outcomes are consistent for all students who study abroad. As such, I must remember that while the benefits of studying abroad are well-documented in the literature, they may not be true for every student.

The next set of biases that I acknowledge relate to identity formation and negotiation. First, I mainly studied identity development from a psychosocial approach, and as such I am prone to assume identity as solely an individualized, internalized concept. Therefore, I should be cognizant of the sociological, situational factors that similarly influence identity processes. Next, I believe that identity changes do occur within and across the study abroad context, given my own identity-related changes while abroad. As such, I am tempted to assume that all students who study abroad go through such identity process changes. During the interpretation and analysis processes, then, I must be aware that such changes may be subtle or non-existent.

The final set of biases that I have identified relate to the study's general structure. First, students who did not have a positive experience abroad may not volunteer to share such experiences. As such, my research as a whole may be biased against such students and their experiences, since their voices would not be represented in the study. Next, I have adopted a conceptual framework for my study that delineates between four levels of identity that exist within a cybernetic feedback loop. Therefore, I must not try to fit

students' identities within these levels if it is inappropriate or unrepresentative to do so. Finally, a lack of prolonged engagement with student interviewees may not fully capture their experiences and roles while abroad. My study, then, may be biased in that it does not fully represent the intersection of identity and study abroad programs.

My Position as the Researcher

In sum, I recognize that as qualitative researcher, my position is one that influences the study process as a whole. Although I acknowledge my role, I ultimately want to emphasize the experiences and identities of my participants, namely Baylor students who have studied abroad.

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