Fostering Intercultural and Global Competence: Potential for Transformational Learning through Short-Term Study Abroad in Africa

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This dissertation titled
Fostering Intercultural and Global Competence: Potential for Transformational Learning through Short-Term Study Abroad in Africa

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Abstract

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Fostering Intercultural and Global Competence: Potential for Transformational Learning through Short-Term Study Abroad in Africa

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This study examined the intercultural experiences and learning outcomes of U.S. undergraduates participating in four different short-term study abroad programs in three different African countries. Whereas the design for this study targeted nontraditional destinations in general, it proved difficult to get responses from students from the two institutions who had participated in programs in other nontraditional destinations.

Utilizing a constructivist grounded theory methodology in the study design (Charmaz, 2006) qualitative interviews and participant journals /reflective papers were used as data sources. A total of 12 U.S. undergraduate students who had participated in short-term study abroad programs to South Africa, Botswana and Tanzania took part in this study. The study utilized the constant comparative method in the interpretation and analysis of data. From the data analysis, five dimensions of transformational learning in study abroad were identified: (a) positioning as learner, (b) situating the experience, (c) experiencing dissonance (d) resolving conflict and (e) making with other cultures. These dimensions provide insight into the learning processes within culturally disparate contexts that affect perspective change.
Dedication

To my dear departed parents, Raphael Gathogo and Jacinta Njeri for the sacrifices you made to keep me in school and with your values of hard work, patience and resilience, set the perfect example for me.
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At the end of a long and rigorous academic journey, I look back with a sense of profound gratitude, knowing that I would never have made it this far alone. I wish to particularly acknowledge my continued reliance on God for patience, strength and focus which He provided in abundance and for that, I am thankful to Him. I am eternally indebted to my dissertation committee members for their unwavering support. You created an easy and friendly atmosphere, yet without letting me lose sight of the intellectual demands of dissertation writing. Dr. Mather, as my dissertation chair, you provided me with intellectual challenge and support in equal measure and believing in me when I doubted myself energized me to bring my research to a timely and successful completion. Dr. Harrison, thank you for your constant encouragement and affirmation; you helped boost my confidence tremendously. You encouraged me to pay more attention to detail and gently critiqued my work without making me feel inadequate or incompetent. For that I am grateful. Dr. Martin and Dr. Pillay, you both provided the voices that I needed to help me venture outside what was comfortable and familiar when you challenged me to broaden my perspectives or think about specific issues differently. I am forever grateful for your invaluable input and the added value this has had on this dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Study abroad participation in the U.S. has increased rapidly within the last ten years. In its 2011 annual report on study abroad, the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicated that U.S. college students choosing to study abroad has more than tripled over the last twenty years. Prior to the year 2000, growth in the number of U.S students studying abroad was gradual but at the turn of the 21st century, there was a drastic increase and accelerated growth thereafter. In the 2002/2003 academic year, a total of 174,629 students studied abroad (IIE, 2004). By the 2012/2013 academic year this number had grown to 289,408 (IIE, 2014) an increase of 36.9 per cent in ten years. Goodman (2009) predicted that student demand for study abroad in the coming decade will increase, opening up more destinations and new program development to accommodate the demand.

Increase in U.S. college student participation in study abroad is fueled by two main forces: national security and globalization. The notable interest in study abroad in nontraditional destinations in the last ten years has been driven by greater concerns about the U.S. national security (Lincoln Commission, 2005). At the national level, the goals of study abroad are closely tied to national security. The 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon exposed the poor state of U.S. diplomacy and isolation from the rest of the world (NAFSA, 2007). In its 2003 NAFSA (2003) report Securing America’s Future: Global Education for a Global Age the association observed that the events of September 11, 2001, constituted a wake-up call—a warning that America’s
ignorance of the world is now a national liability” and that “vastly greater numbers (of students) must devote substantive portion of their education to gaining an understanding of other countries, regions, languages, and cultures, through direct personal experience” (p. iv). On the recommendation of the Lincoln Commission (2005) to expand study abroad to nontraditional destinations, the government expanded programs and investment to regions that were regarded as being of interest to U.S. national security. The National Security Educational Program (NSEP) identifies Africa, Asia, Central & Eastern Europe, Eurasia, Latin America, and the Middle East (Boren Awards Website, n.d.) as regions that are of such interest but are underrepresented in study abroad.

At the institutional level, U.S. colleges and universities recognize the fact that for their graduates to be competitive in what is now a global economy, they must have global skills. They also recognize that students are graduating into a more heterogeneous society than they did before and for them to navigate these intercultural environments, they need cross-cultural communication and intercultural competence (IIE, 2007). The need to integrate study abroad into mainstream U.S. higher education is critical considering the general lack of international knowledge among Americans. Goodman (2009) pointed out that Americans are disconnected and ill-informed about the world as evidenced by data showing that two-thirds of college-age Americans cannot find Iraq on a map—or Indonesia, Iran or Israel or name the President of Russia or the Secretary General of the United Nations (p. ix).

Study abroad is viewed as a tool that has the capacity to equip students with abilities to navigate culturally diverse environments both within and across national
borders (Pedersen, 2010; Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton & Hubbard, 2008). Also, study abroad is believed to increase individual’s competitiveness in the global economy (Brascamp, Brascamp, & Merill, 2009). Recognizing its importance in advancing the aforementioned abilities, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2007) recommended that all undergraduates should have an education abroad experience. Similarly, its importance is underscored by the revised college and university mission statements to reflect international goals of higher education (Lewin, 2009) including educating for global citizenship and instilling in the students intercultural knowledge and skills to successfully engage in the wider global community (Kelly, 2009; Knight, 2004).

The growing interest in study abroad among college and university faculty and administrators has in turn spurred research; current studies document the great benefits that accrue to students who participate in study abroad. Such benefits include second language acquisition (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009), identity development (Dolby, 2004; Savicky & Cooley, 2011), cognitive development (McKeown, 2006), professional development (Franklin, 2010; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004) and academic success (Malmgren & Galvin, 2008). Besides, study abroad is said to develop intercultural competence (Chieffò & Griffiths, 2004; Patterson, 2006; Pedersen, 2010) and global learning (Brascamp, Brascamp, & Merill, 2009; Douglas & Jones-Rikken, 2001). Concerned that only a fraction of the U.S. college student population which is currently just over 1% is participating in study abroad (IIE, 2013), colleges and universities are establishing more academic partnerships with institutions abroad, offering
study abroad in a wider range of academic disciplines, diverse locations and programs of varied durations to encourage greater participation.

Although participation in education abroad has increased significantly over the years, current trends in destination choice show that economically privileged White American students predominate travel to Europe, a trend that is reflective of 19th century trends (Lewin, 2009). According to the IIE Open Doors report (2014), more than half of the 289,408 U.S. students who studied abroad in 2012/2013 travelled to European countries including United Kingdom, Italy, France, Spain and Germany.

Although the number of students who choose to study in nontraditional destinations remains dismally low, this trend is gradually changing as more students opt to study abroad in traditionally underrepresented countries. In its press release, IIE (2011) reported that from a survey conducted on the study abroad trends in the previous year, there was a significant increase in the number of American students choosing to study in nontraditional locations. That year, of the top 25 study abroad destinations, fifteen were non-English speaking nontraditional destinations.

These destinations have experienced substantial growth in the last decade. In 2001/2002, for instance, nontraditional destinations hosted only 37.4% of all U.S. study abroad participants. Ten years later, in the 2011/2012 academic year, 46.7% studied in nontraditional destinations. This follows sustained calls by the international education community to expand study abroad programs to nontraditional destinations. The notion of studying abroad in less traditional destinations, Woolf (2006) points out, has become the “new orthodoxy” in international education (p. 135). Important to note, however, is that
in spite of these impressive gains, less traditional destinations remain severely underrepresented in study abroad.

*Figure 1*: 10-year annual percentages of U.S. students studying abroad in all regions

Source: Adapted from Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, 2005-2014

Returning students usually describe study abroad as a life-changing experience. Over the years, this positive effect has been backed up by research (e.g. Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009; Rundstrom, 2005). However, doubts about the capacity for study abroad to positively impact these outcomes are beginning to emerge. Research shows that common immersion strategies that have been used for years in developing programs are limited in predicting greater levels of intercultural development (Pedersen,
2010; Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). This has been attributed to program designs which do not incorporate intervention measures (Vande Berg et al., 2009) or allow for adequate interaction between students and the host culture (Cushner, 2009). This may also be attributable to the changed programming components of study abroad including program type, duration, location, housing options and student characteristics (Ogden, Streitweiser, & Crawford, 2014, p. 232). In view of the paucity of research on outcomes of study abroad in nontraditional destinations, there is greater concern about the lack of understanding of the impact that such an experience has on the participants (Wells, 2006).

This study explores U.S. undergraduate participants‘ experiences in nontraditional study abroad destinations, their perceived transformation of self and culturally different others, and their sense of global awareness and functionality. The study seeks to provide a basis for the conceptualization of students‘ study abroad experiences and program designs and their mediation of learning in less familiar cultural settings.

**Statement of the Problem**

Institutional mission statements indicate that one of the goals of a liberal arts education is to graduate students who are able to interact across cultures. Study abroad is identified as an effective tool that would help institutions meet this goal. By studying and interacting with different cultures, it is believed, students gain intercultural and global knowledge and skills that will make them not only economically competitive but also successful workers in intercultural environments (Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton & Hubbard, 2008). Institutions have gone further to provide study abroad opportunities in
nontraditional destinations with the view that students will understand the challenges faced by developing countries and their global implications; with such understanding, they gain empathy for the people and a desire to confront these challenges. In spite of this growing interest in these destinations, research that specifically targets the outcomes of such programs is lacking in study abroad literature (Che, Spearman, & Manidaze, 2009; Wells, 2006). Currently, conclusions on the effectiveness of such programs are limited to anecdotal evidence.

Theoretically, exposure to unfamiliar cultures of developing countries is associated with powerful and transformative effects. Study abroad in nontraditional destinations, it is presumed, provides greater cultural dissonance because of the novelty inherent in such locations. According to Che, et al. (2009), the great cultural distance challenges students‘ deeply held assumptions about themselves and the world; this re-evaluation forms the basis for transformation. With empirical evidence lacking to support these claims, skeptics are not short of reasons why the expansion of study abroad to nontraditional destinations is ill-informed. Perhaps the strongest opposition to the expansion of study abroad in nontraditional destinations is articulated by Woolf (2006). Woolf claims that this expansion is not motivated by sound academic goals but by an “attraction to the exotic, allied with a quasi-missionary zeal to engage with poverty” and the desire to go and “see the poor people” (p.135). He argues that if there was a credible rationale for expanding programs to nontraditional locations, it would first be evident and reflected in the growth of area studies in the U.S., which is not currently the case. On his part, Illich (1993) lashed out at U.S. international volunteers to developing countries
pointing out that they needed to drop the missionary mentality with which they approached developing countries. He challenged them to reexamine their hypocritical intentions and purported missionary agenda to serve third world communities. Zemach-Bersin (2009) views study abroad in developing countries as America’s commodification of other cultures which rich American students consume at a fee and Goudge (2003) asserts that students see their travel to third world countries as “an opportunity for adventure and a chance to engage with the exotic” (p. 15).

Expansion of study abroad to nontraditional destinations comes at a time when students’ demand for short-term programs is at an all-time high and institutions are popularizing such programs. Contrary to traditional practice where students studied abroad for at least a year, short-term and mid-length programs are currently the programs of choice for majority of college students. The Open Doors report (2013) indicates that in the 2011/2012 academic year, long-term programs accounted for only about 3% of study abroad participation. Short-term programs (8 weeks or less) alone accounted for over half of the participant population with 58.9% and mid-length programs (quarter or semester) accounted for 37.9% of all participants. Considering the complexity inherent in developing intercultural and global competence, there is doubt about the effectiveness of short stays abroad in developing such competencies, at least in the long term (Gullekson, Tucker, Coombs, & Wright, 2011; Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011; Nam, 2011). In the light of the increase in short-term programs to nontraditional destinations, it is important to pay attention to what students are learning in those locations and how they are learning it.
Understanding the outcomes of such programs would serve as an impetus for continued investment in program expansion to nontraditional destinations.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study sought to understand U.S. undergraduates’ study abroad experiences in culturally unfamiliar environments. This study also investigated how these experiences mediate the development of intercultural and global competencies. Finally, in view of emerging research data showing that immersion in a different culture does not necessarily translate into learning, this study endeavored to bring understanding on how various aspects of the study abroad programs facilitate student learning. By paying close attention to the various aspects and elements weaved into the program design, this study shed light on how various aspects of a study abroad program enhance or hinder student learning.

This study is therefore guided by the following research questions:

- How do U.S. undergraduates in short-term study abroad programs in nontraditional destinations make meaning of their intercultural experience?
- How do U.S. undergraduates in short-term study abroad programs navigate cultural intersections in nontraditional destinations?
- In what ways do short-term study abroad program designs impact the development of intercultural and global competencies among U.S. undergraduates studying abroad in nontraditional destinations?

To explore students’ study abroad experiences in the said locations, this study utilized Charmaz’ (2006) constructivist grounded theory methodology. The purpose of grounded theory is to develop theory that is grounded in empirical data (Glaser &
Theory develops and evolves throughout the research process through the close interplay of analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This methodology is considered appropriate for this study for two main reasons. First, it is useful in investigating what people consider to be of great significance to their lives including life adjustment (Glaser & Strauss, 1978). I considered study abroad as an experience that calls for adjustment to new cultural environments. Also, grounded theory is useful when little is known about a topic. Little, if anything is known about what and how students learn in nontraditional study abroad destinations. Charmaz (2006) points out that from a constructivist paradigm, the researcher and the respondent are co-constructors of knowledge. Constructivist grounded theory also assumes that individuals assign meaning to their experiences within a social context (Appleton & King, 2002) and acknowledges the existence of multiple realities (Charmaz, 2006) as opposed to a single objective truth.

The study is informed by Mezirow’s (1991) Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and the Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardoff, 2004). Transformative learning is predicated on the idea of causing change in the value systems and worldview of learners through exposure to experiences that challenge their existing perceptions, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes (Mezirow, 1991). It assumes that learners are socialized by their cultures to adopt a way of making meaning that is culturally-constrained. To move from a culture-constrained perspective to one that is more inclusive and accommodating of diverse cultures, the learner needs to experience something that fails to fit into his/her current frame of reference. The ability to change a culturally

constrained frame of reference in an intercultural context to one that is more accepting of and comfortable with cultural differences is indicative of development towards intercultural competence (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

**Significance of the Study**

This study has practical, theoretical and policy implications. First, it bears significance on higher education policy. The findings support the existing anecdotal evidence that study abroad in nontraditional destinations, such as African countries, impacts participants positively. This empirically-based evidence should encourage advocates of international education to continue investing in study abroad to nontraditional destinations.

At the institutional level, findings about participants’ experiences may serve as a guide in program design for programs targeting African countries. The study also highlights the importance of context (both location and programmatic components) and the influence it has on how participants make meaning of their experience. The study highlights the dynamics of the interaction between participant characteristics and the context to affect positive learning. Additionally, this study contributes to the existing literature on learning outcomes of study abroad, particularly the all-important development of intercultural and global competencies. The study shows that study abroad in African countries has the capacity to impart intercultural and global knowledge and skills.
Definition of Terms

- **Study abroad** in this study is taken to mean programs that provide U.S. citizens and permanent residents with the opportunity to earn U.S. academic credit toward their U.S. degree for study in another country (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumant & Klute, 2012). This study is concerned with programs that are sponsored by an institution of higher learning and are facilitated by a faculty member.

- **Nontraditional destinations** are regions of the world that are traditionally underrepresented in U.S. study abroad programs. This term is used in contrast with traditional study abroad destinations” which are regions that attract a lot of U.S. study abroad participants. Often, nontraditional destinations” is used synonymously with developing countries. In this study, the meaning adopted for nontraditional destinations” is regions of the world that are numerically underrepresented in study abroad and are in developing countries.

- **Transformative Learning** refers to the idea that an individual becomes aware of holding a limiting or distorted view [and] if the individual critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world” (Cranton, 2002, p. 64). My assumption is that study abroad is a profound life experience.

- **Intercultural competence** is the knowledge and skills that enable that guide effective and appropriate individual behavior and communication in varied cultural contexts. (Bennett, 2007; Deardoff, 2006).
• *Global competence* encompasses intercultural competence as one of its components. Beyond intercultural competence, a globally competent person should have historical, geographical and cultural knowledge of countries outside one’s own, recognition of the interconnectedness of nations, a global mindset, and an acquired sense of social justice that transcends local and national boundaries.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter, which is divided into five sections, presents a review of literature on study abroad. First, I discuss the conceptual framework adopted in this study and explicate the meaning of the two key constructs that are central to the study: intercultural competence and global competence. In the next section, I present the definition of “nontraditional destinations”, describe current trends in student mobility from the U.S. to nontraditional locations and provide rationales for study abroad in the said locations. In this section too, I include criticism leveled against program expansion to nontraditional destinations. In section three, I provide a review of factors that guide students’ choice of an educational experience in nontraditional destinations. After that, I review literature on the impact of study abroad on the development of intercultural competence and global competence and finally, I provide a review of literature on the outcomes of short study abroad programs is presented.

Conceptual Framework: Developmental Processes and the Role of Dissonance

Developmental theories serve as a guide to the design of this study and the collection and analysis of data from primary and secondary sources. Developmental theories emphasize the evolution of meaning making systems over time from an uncritical acceptance of knowledge to critically constructing one’s own perspective (Baxter Magolda, 2007). These theories often describe phases which individuals move through, where they are expected to demonstrate more complex ways of constructing meaning as they move from one phase to the next. Kegan (1994) conceptualized growth as evolving through stages or “levels of consciousness” where individuals move
progressively from subject-consciousness to object-consciousness. Kegan postulates that at the subject-consciousness level, our knowing processes are embedded in self, and so we lack capacity to take an objective look at ourselves. It is a stage where people are embedded in their own subjective perspective. However, as individuals’ ways of knowing grow in complexity, the subject is subsumed by the object. This means that what was once subject becomes the object of knowing and they are now able to reflect on and/or take control of the elements of their knowing. According to Kegan (1994), the development of meaning making processes culminates in the self-transforming mind. By the time individuals get to this level of consciousness, they have developed self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Kegan 1994) which is the integrated capacity to define their own beliefs, personal identity, and interpersonal relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2004). A self-transforming mind has not only achieved self-authorship but has also gained awareness of the existence of multiple points of view and is more tolerant of ambiguities and contradictions in the context of conflicting value-systems.

Progression towards more complex ways of meaning making is nonlinear and achievement of the same is not guaranteed. This developmental journey is characterized by transitional phases where individuals experience discontent when they encounter challenging experiences. At this point, individuals come to the realization that they cannot employ previous ways of meaning making to interpret new life experiences and their inherent contradictions (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Mezirow, 1991). This dissonance initiates “a personality struggle with the new demands of a specific environment” (Levykh, 2008, p.86), resulting, in some cases, in the formation of more complex
meaning making systems. In other cases, dissonance, particularly when experienced in a context devoid of support and affirmation, may operate as an impediment to growth (Miller & Winston, 1990).

Piaget (1975) underscored the central role of dissonance or disequilibrium to the emergence of new cognitive schemes noting that it is the most influential factor in acquiring new knowledge structures, which in turn brings about a reorganization of one’s cognitive schemes. Disequilibrium occurs when an individual becomes aware of inconsistencies in his/her schemes, and in turn this awareness leads to discomfort with one’s current cognitive state. Baxter Magolda (2001) identified this transitional phase as “The Crossroads” (p. 91). She theorized that when students enter college, they exhibit an epistemological orientation that favors “following external formula” (p. 91). At this phase, the developing individual has no self-defined system of belief and unquestioningly believes in other’s authority. He/she displays great reliance on authority and external forces to define him or herself (Kegan, 1982). In terms of how the individual comes to know, he/she exhibits an “absolute way of knowing” (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 95); that is, he/she views knowledge from the limited view of right or wrong and believes that the only source of knowledge are the authorities. As different experiences challenge their way of knowing, their definition of self and how they form relationships with others, individuals begin to realize that external sources of belief and definition are insufficient and that internal sources of belief and definition are necessary (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 93). They find themselves at the crossroads, torn between internal and external forces. At this point, they begin to search for ways to integrate internal and external perspectives
and expectations. Successful integration of the external and the internal manifests itself in self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Kegan, 1994). Self-authored individuals demonstrate an internal capacity to choose what to believe, who they want to be and how they want to relate with others.

However, not all experiences of discontent actually capacitate students to be authors of their own lives (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). According to Pizzolato (2005) students could cycle through experiences that leave them contemplating such a search and feeling dissatisfied with following formulas, but not acting to relieve their dissatisfaction in a way that helps them construct a new way of knowing (p. 622). Houser (1996) suggests that for dissonance to positively impact creation of new meaning structures, the developing individual must be supported within a safe, affirming emotional environment.

**Transformative Learning Theory.** Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000, 2009) is a theory that is partly a developmental process theory which explains how adults learn. According to Mezirow (1991) change is the essence of transformative learning. Transformation, he notes, can lead developmentally toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective and that, insofar as it is possible, we all naturally move toward such an orientation. This is what development means in adulthood. A strong case can be made for calling perspective transformation the central process of adult development. (p. 155)
TLT is premised on the philosophical assumption that meaning is constructed through past experience and our perceptions of those experiences. Our families, communities and cultures predispose us to certain beliefs, values, concepts, attitudes and associations that we acquire unquestioningly (Cranton, 2006). Mezirow (1991) refers to this collection as a frames of reference or meaning structures. Culturally imposed frames of reference include “distortions, prejudices, stereotypes and simply unquestioned or unexamined beliefs” (Cranton, 2006). Mezirow postulates that we use these culturally-imposed frames of reference to interpret and understand our life experiences. However, when we encounter new and/or unexpected experiences that do not fit into our expectations of how things should be, we may reject or question these expectations (Cranton, 2006). However, engaging in critical examination of our habitual expectations, revising them and acting on the revised perspectives leads to transformative learning.

Mezirow (1991) identified two dimensions of frames of reference: habits of mind and points of view. While the former are broad, durable and difficult to change, the latter are particular and temporary habits in the ways people think, feel, and act in responding to specific issues at particular times. These are easier to change than habits of the mind. Transformative learning strives to effect change in the both of these dimensions. By critically reflecting on current frames of reference that constrain interpretation of new experiences, we review them to make them “more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, Taylor, & Associates, 2009, p. 22).

The developmental process associated with transformational learning follows some variation of the following phases:
1. A disorienting dilemma (dissonance)
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills and implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

Transformation is initiated by a disorienting dilemma or dissonance which serves as a catalyst for change (Taylor, 2005). For this change to occur, an individual must experience something that does not make sense using the current frames of reference (Taylor, 2005; Mezirow, Taylor & Associates, 2009). Mezirow (1991) observed that this change is, however, not guaranteed but that the individual may respond in either of two ways: they start the process of transforming their perspective or reject the new incongruous perspective. Since transformational learning involves emotional discomfort, individuals may avoid transformation since there is a sense of security in maintaining the familiar (Mezirow, 1991). For this reason, Cranton (2006) cautions that individuals, even adults, do not have the skills for self-directed learning that can lead to transformation
Mezirow (1997) identified four processes associated with transformative learning which include: 1) elaborating current meaning structures; 2) establishing new meaning structures; 3) transformation of points of view and 4) transformation of meaning perspectives. The first learning process entails a search for evidence to support one’s initial bias on their point of view. An ethnocentric student in an intercultural environment may obtain further evidence that supports and reinforces their initial bias about the host culture (Mezirow, 1997). The second process entails establishing new points of view. For instance, when an ethnocentric student encounters a new culture, two things might happen in the learning process: he or she may focus on perceived shortcomings of the new culture and create new yet negative meanings or, focus on the positive elements of that culture and create new, positive meanings. The third process, transforming meaning schemes, involves changing one’s previously held points of view. When we encounter a new culture for example, we may reflect on our assumptions, the stereotypes and the misconceptions we have about that culture, and positively change our point of view with regard to how we previously viewed the culture in question. This gives way to a more understanding and accommodating attitude. The fourth process, transforming meaning structures, entails a transformation in our habits of mind (Mezirow, 2007). Such a change becomes evident when one becomes aware of and critically reflects upon a prior perspective, transforms the perspective and incorporates the new thought process in the interpretation of experiences. Transformation of meaning perspectives may result from
cumulative effect of life experiences or from a single experience but, whichever the case, exposure to transformational learning happens when we step outside of what we already know to be true (Mezirow, 2007).

Educational practices that challenge students to think differently may impact students positively, if as Che, Spearman, & Manidaze, (2009) note, they are fostered within a safe, secure environment. Study abroad is one such educational experience; by being exposed to a different culture, it is expected that this exposure will challenge students’ ways of thinking about themselves and others. In conceptualizing the developmental process that leads to a change in perspective in an intercultural context, King and Magolda (2005) suggest that cognitively, individuals are initially naïve about the cultural values and practices of the host community, resist challenge to their cultural beliefs and view cultural perspectives that differ from their own as problematic or invalid. However, with more interaction with the host culture, they gain awareness of multiple perspectives and begin to gain comfort with uncertainty. Eventually, they gain the ability to consciously shift perspective and behavior in a way that reflects their evolved and multiple cultural views. Study abroad, especially in nontraditional destinations where cultural dissonance is greater, is assumed to be transformational. In this study, TLT was used to guide understanding of the evolution of meaning making processes among U.S. undergraduates who studied abroad in three African countries. By using TLT to inform this study, the researcher hoped to capture the unique ways in which study abroad participants interpreted their experiences at the intersection of American and African cultures.
Although TLT has been extensively in social science research, it has faced opposition for what some critics consider to be serious flaws in the theory. Newman (2012) thinks that the idea of learning being finite, with a clear beginning and end, as the theory suggests is erroneous. He also suggests that transformative learning is different from other forms of learning in degree rather than kind, contrary to Mezirow’s emphasis on the kind of learning. He postulates that any learning leads to change and the concern should be the depth rather than the kind of learning. Another criticism that has been leveled against TLT is that it decontextualizes learning and fails to examine the relationship that exists between the individual and the contexts in which they are situated. Clark and Wilson (1991) argue that context is the very element that brings meaning to existence; thus, in locating transformative perspectives within the individual and disregarding how the social and cultural forces influence meaning and interpretation of experience, Mezirow misses the point. Clarke and Wilson (1991) noted that failure to establish the connection between person, setting and learning activities restricts understanding on why some dissonance lead to change in perspectives while others do not. In later publications however, Mezirow (1996) explains learning as “situated” affected by social and cultural forces (p.168).

Newman (2012) questions the validity of TLT suggesting that “transformative learning may not exist as an identifiable phenomenon” (p. 36). Arguing that transformative learning is an overrated concept and he suggests that “good learning” be used as an alternative. In his review of several studies that use TLT as a theoretical framework, Newman suggests that although there is evidence of significant change, that
change is not exceptional but rather what is to be expected from any well designed and competently delivered program. His contention seems to be on the choice of verbiage rather than the effect of learning as he does not contest the fact that individuals experience significant change in various learning environments.

**Process Model of Intercultural Competence.** Socio-cultural practices specific to each society socialize people to think and act in ways that are unique to their culture. Tesoriero (2006) points out that cultural difference, differences in value and belief systems as well as in social practices is an indication that people have an array of world views which guide their interpretation of life experiences. Thus, there can be varying interpretations of the same phenomenon by different people. To move from a culture-constrained perspective to one that is more inclusive and accommodating, one needs to gain intercultural competence. In higher education, as in other disciplines, this need is reflected in the articulation of new learning outcomes to include intercultural and global competence (AAC & U, 2007). To be interculturally competent, an individual should develop a personal perspective that reflects and tolerance to cultural difference when engaging with different others (Tatum & Butler, 2010). Successful interaction with people from different cultures underlies the concept of intercultural competence (Deardoff, 2004).

Deardoff’s (2004) Process Model of Intercultural Competence suggests that intercultural competence is predicated upon internal outcomes that include knowledge, attitudes and skills and external outcomes that are exhibited through effective interactions among culturally diverse individuals. At the individual level, one needs to have an
attitude of respect towards, openness to and curiosity about other cultures. Highlighting the importance of these attributes, LeBaron and Pillay (2006) point out that curiosity about and openness to cultural difference are the two core elements of intercultural competence. Curiosity affords individuals opportunities to learn about cultural difference while openness helps develop multiple perspectives through which to interpret life experiences. These attributes contribute towards a better understanding of self and how one fits into the larger cultural context, which is an important step toward developing intercultural competence.

One also needs to be adequately knowledgeable in the cultural norms, beliefs, values and behaviors relevant to the culture of interest. The acquisition of cultural knowledge requires certain cognitive skills which include "the ability to listen, observe, interpret, analyze, evaluate, and relate" to difference (Deardoff, 2006; p. 252). In interactions, the individual should demonstrate a change in the frame of reference which internally manifests itself in the individual's increased flexibility to adapt to new situations and adapt his/her behavior to different cultural environments (Deardoff, 2006). Cross-cultural empathy is another internal manifestation of change in a frame of reference; individuals recognize other cultures as legitimate and accept them as viable alternatives to their own worldview (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).
Deardoff (2006) suggests that individuals demonstrate that they are interculturally competent by communicating and behaving effectively and appropriately in varying
cultural contexts. Based on this conceptualization of the development of intercultural competence, she defines the concept of intercultural competence as the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 184). Deardoff points out that effectiveness of communication and behavior is judged from the individual's perspective while appropriateness can only be judged by the interlocutor. Since this study only utilized data gathered from study abroad participants and not their interlocutors, the understanding of competence will be limited to effective communication and behavior but not appropriateness.

Deardoff (2006) maintains that intercultural competence is a developmental life-long process and at no definite point in time can individual become completely interculturally competent. This study is concerned with the process of how one acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes that launch them into the developmental path toward intercultural and global competence.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to weigh in on the inconclusive and sometimes disputed meaning of global competence, it is important to provide a definition that lends itself to the objectives of higher education. Several scholars and organizations have postulated the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for global competence. Lambert (1996), who is considered by many a pioneer in this field, describes a globally competent person as one who is knowledgeable about other cultures, empathizes with different others, has some foreign language proficiency and has the ability to appreciate that which is not familiar. Participants of a 1996 conference sponsored jointly by the
Stanley Foundation and the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE) concluded that a globally competent person is able to understand the interconnectedness of peoples and systems, to have a general knowledge of history and world events, to accept and cope with the existence of different cultural values and attitudes and, indeed, to celebrate the richness and benefits of this diversity” (p. 4). They identified three prerequisites for global competence: awareness of one’s own culture, interacting with other cultures and seeking to understand cultural norms, values and attitudes through different lenses.

In defining a globally competent individual, Olsen and Kroeger (2001) stated that such a person “has enough substantial knowledge, perceptual understanding, and intercultural communication skills to effectively interact in our globally interdependent world” (p. 117). Other qualifications that have been cited as being markers of global competence include having an understanding of the interconnectedness of global nations and of the necessity of being able to function in such an environment, having a sense of social justice and being proficient in a second language (National Education Association, 2010; NASULGC, 2004; Zeichner, 2010). Drawing from these definitions, “global competence” is understood as encompassing intercultural competence as one of its components. Beyond intercultural competence, a globally competent person should have historical, geographical and cultural knowledge of countries outside one’s own, recognition of the interconnectedness of nations, a global mindset, and an acquired sense of social justice that transcends local and national boundaries.
Nontraditional Study Abroad Destinations

In international education discourse, the dichotomous concepts of “traditional” and “nontraditional” are applied in the classification of study abroad destinations. The most basic criterion for these categorizations is the numerical count of American students who study in a given country. Nontraditional destinations are locations where relatively few Americans study. Often, developing countries, countries that are outside the European zone and are non-English speaking are considered to be nontraditional destinations (Wells, 2006). NAFSA’s (2007) list of nontraditional destinations includes Africa, the Middle East, East Europe and Latin America/Caribbean.

According to Che et al. (2009), countries outside Europe constitute nontraditional destinations. They however use the phrase “less familiar locations” to describe the degree of one’s physical and cultural proximity with a particular study abroad destination. They state: “Given the concentration of participation of study abroad programs in western Europe, it is likely that study abroad programs that seek to present students with experiences of less familiar cultures will turn to geographic regions outside Western Europe” (p. 106). They categorize Western Europe as a familiar location based on their understanding that the social studies curriculum has already familiarized students graduating from American schools with the cultural practices of Western Europe than with those of other regions.

However, these categorizations are problematic. First, although European countries are classified as traditional, there are regions in Europe that are not frequented by American students such as central and eastern Europe. Second, this classification fails
to capture emerging trends in student choices of study abroad locations. A number of
developing countries which did not previously attract U.S. college students now rank
among the most popular destinations. Countries like China, Costa Rica and South Africa
have, in recent years, become popular destinations with American students (IIE, 2013).
Third, if cultural familiarity is used to define a study abroad destination, this fails to take
into account student individual differences. Che et al. (2009) observe that the degree of
familiarity varies from student to student, depending on background and their prior
experiences; therefore, not all students comfortably fit, say, in the presumed familiar
European culture. For the purposes of this research, I use nontraditional destinations to
refer to developing countries that attract less than five thousand students annually as of
2011/2012 academic year.

The 9/11 effect on program growth. The growth of study abroad participation
rates in nontraditional destinations is attributable, in part, to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on
the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in September, 2001 (Salisbury, 2009). Even
though study abroad in the U.S. is not a new phenomenon having started in the 1880’s
with faculty-led tours to England, global education was a relatively neglected component
of U.S. foreign policy until 2001 (Twombly et al., 2012). In the wake of 9/11, the stark
realization that America needed citizens who had global knowledge if the country was to
secure its borders attracted attention to international relations and a shift in U.S.
international education policy. In 2002, the American Council of Education published
the American government to reverse what it called years of inattention to international
education and the study of foreign languages. Following the attacks, President George W. Bush spoke out strongly in support of study abroad:

By studying foreign cultures and languages and living abroad, we gain a better understanding of the many similarities that we share and learn to respect our differences. The relationships that are formed between individuals from different countries as part of international education programs and exchanges can also foster goodwill that develops into vibrant, mutually beneficial partnerships among nations. (NAFSA, p.5)

While there was great focus on study abroad in general, greater attention was given to study in nontraditional destinations. This was necessitated by the findings of the bi-partisan National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission), which identified lack of American graduates with knowledge of the Arab world as an obstacle to effective intelligence gathering. At the same time, former Senator Paul Simon, the Co-Chair of the Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad, observed that it was not just the Middle East that Americans knew little about but the world as a whole. Thus, there was need to increase study abroad participation especially to countries that are of strategic interest to the U.S. (NAFSA, 2003).

Recognizing the need to address this deficiency in international knowledge, the U.S. congress formed the Commission on Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship (Lincoln Commission, 2005) which was to act on Senator Paul Simon’s proposal to increase the number of U.S. college students participating in education abroad. The Commission proposed sending one million U.S. college undergraduates abroad by 2017.
It also identified diversification of study abroad locations, with particular interest in developing countries, as one of the areas that needed urgent attention. Among other initiatives, the Lincoln Commission was to make study abroad fellowship available for half a million college students to study abroad for at least a summer or a semester with preference being given to those who chose to study in developing countries (NAFSA, 2003).

In 2006, President George W. Bush proposed the National Security Language Initiative. Among the proposed initiatives was the provision of scholarships for study abroad in countries of national interest to the U.S. and the expansion of the National Flagship Language Initiative to enable language training of 2,000 speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Hindi and Central Asian Languages to advanced proficiency level by 2009. To increase language proficiency, the annual Gilman scholarships were to be increased by up to 200 by 2008 to enable needy students to study critical need languages abroad. The president also proposed summer immersion study abroad for up to 275 university level students per year in critical languages. The National Security Education Program (NSEP) articulated similar objectives and introduced maximum awards of $20,000 in Boren scholarships for U.S. undergraduates to study abroad in locations that are considered of critical importance to the national security of the country and are underrepresented in study abroad. These incentives have inevitably impacted the growth in study abroad participation in nontraditional destinations.

**Current study abroad trends in nontraditional destinations.** U.S. college students predominantly study abroad in developed countries, mainly Western Europe.
However, in the last ten years, the percentage of U.S. college students choosing to study in non-European countries has grown from 64,722 in 2002/2003 to 135,226 in 2012/2013 academic year, a remarkable 47.9% increase (IIE, 2004; 2014). A survey conducted in 2011 by IIE in partnership with the Forum on Education Abroad showed that in the 2009/2010 academic year alone, the percentage of study abroad students studying outside Europe rose from 38% to 47% with enrollment increases of more than 25% reported for a number of nontraditional destinations including. The report (2011) also showed that out of the top 25 study abroad locations, fifteen of them were located in countries outside Western Europe and nineteen of these were countries where English is used as a secondary language.

Asia has seen the most significant growth in the number of U.S. college students choosing to study there, with China leading study abroad in that region and ranks fifth most popular study abroad destination overall. Data from IIE indicates that in period of 15 years, five and a half times as many students studied in Southeast Asia. In the same period, students going to the Caribbean had doubled while the numbers to Sub-Saharan Africa had quadrupled, with majority of students going to South Africa. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region experienced a 61% rise (IIE, 2014). Over the years, Latin American countries have pushed their way to the top and today, they are among the top twenty leading destinations worldwide. In 2012/2013, Costa Rica ranked 7th, Argentina (12th), Brazil (14th), Mexico (15th), Ecuador (17th) and Peru (20th). This trend is evidence of a changed pattern in student choice of destination for education abroad experience. IIE (2007) observed that there is growth in the number of U.S.
students choosing study abroad destinations that provide an opportunity for them to experience different cultures and languages and adds onto their professional experience, all of which are essential for the current diverse global marketplace. Researchers attribute these increases to several factors. First, the changing demographics in the U.S., with an increasing number of immigrants, appear to be among the key driving forces. Increasing numbers of students interested in understanding their heritage may be attracted to locations in Latin America, Asia or Africa as opposed to Western Europe (Kavakas, 2012; Zachrisson, 2001). Second, language barriers that previously hindered students from choosing countries whose languages are less commonly studied have been broken with the introduction of English as the language of instruction. Students surveyed by Kavakas (2012) indicated that they would study in non-English speaking countries as long as instruction was conducted in English. Third, as competitiveness in the job market goes global, some students perceive experience in developing economies as a means of increasing opportunities for employment (Lane-Toomey & Moore, 2011), potentially giving them a competitive advantage. Fourth, government policy on study abroad has led to dramatic increases especially in China and Latin America. The creation of the “1000 Strong China” and “1000 Strong Latin America/Caribbean” Educational Exchange Initiatives to enable US students to study in regions that are strategically important to the U.S. is illustrative of such policies. China, Costa Rica and Argentina were among the top ten most popular study abroad destinations in the 2010/2011 academic year. Particularly, interest in China has grown significantly; in 1990/00, for instance, less than 3000 students were studying in China compared to close to 14,000 students studying there in
Finally, and perhaps the most significant factor that has continued to influence study abroad patterns in the last ten years, is the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center by Muslim militants of Arabic origin (Lane-Toomey & Moore, 2011; Zachrisson, 2001). The subsequent focus on less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) and the creation of targeted government funding initiatives has shifted focus to the creation of programs to less traditional locations. For instance, the Boren Scholarship Program which is funded by the National Security Education program (NSEP) makes funds available, up to a maximum of twenty thousand dollars, to U.S. undergraduates to study languages and carry out research in countries that are considered of critical importance to U.S. interests.

**Rationales for study abroad in nontraditional destinations.** NAFSA (2006) has compiled a list of justifications for studying in nontraditional destinations from several on-line resources. These include: 1) providing unique opportunities for meaningful cultural integration and intercultural learning, 2) offering unparalleled opportunities for students to pursue a variety of personal, academic, linguistic, cultural, and professional goals, 3) helping distance students from the average study abroad program participant, and 4) facilitating development of desirable job-market skills such as flexibility and complex problem solving skills.

Relying on current literature on policy and using theoretical analysis, Wells (2006) suggests that one rationale for study abroad in nontraditional destinations is increasing “openness to diversity” (p. 121). He reasons that when students step out of their comfort zone and are placed in an environment with social and cultural norms
different from their own, they learn and experience personal growth more than those who
do not (Wells, 2006).

Additionally, expanding study abroad to nontraditional destinations is presumed to improve an institution’s competitiveness. A study by the American Council on Education indicated that matriculating students and their parents reported overwhelming support for international education. It was reported that “more than 70 percent considered it important that the institution they attend offers foreign language and international courses, study abroad programs, and opportunities to interact with foreign students” (Hayward & Siaya, 2001, p. 2). Diversifying programs to less crowded destinations can allow an institution to create niche markets for itself (Wells, 2006) and leverage its competitiveness with its peer institutions.

Furthermore, understanding the interconnectedness of our nations and other nations globally has been cited as a rationale for study abroad in less familiar locations. Jenkins (2002) hypothesized that “nontraditional study abroad destinations can reveal the global interconnectedness of problems once thought to be local—from population growth to weapons of mass destruction” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 50). With this awareness, graduates may be more willing and engaged in collaboratively seeking solutions to global challenges with people from different cultures.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the U.S., studying in nontraditional destinations is “essential for national security” (Lincoln Commission, 2005, p. 83). Citing the challenges encountered in finding speakers of Arabic, Farsi and Pashto following the 9/11 terrorist attack, the commission pointed out that there was not a more dramatic
demonstration of the importance of study abroad than this. The 9/11 Commission recommended student exchange between the U.S. and Muslim countries, especially with Pakistan and Afghanistan (Wells, 2006). Also, the Lincoln Commission recommended that the U.S. encourage greater study abroad participation in nontraditional destinations. The need for increasing American students studying languages and cultures of nontraditional study abroad countries is demonstrated by increased government financial investment. Boren Scholarships, for instance, are exclusively available for students interested in participating in study abroad in nontraditional destinations and learning LCTLs.

**Criticism against program expansion to nontraditional destinations.** Even though study abroad in less traditional destinations has been associated with positive benefits (NAFSA, 2006) and sound rationales for studying there advanced by experts, some scholars express skepticism over the rationales for and effectiveness of such programs. Zemach-Bersin (2008) argues that study abroad programs in nontraditional locations lack the capacity to impart global knowledge and skills to American students owing to the power relations that emerge from economic disparity between students and their hosts. From her personal experience studying in India, Nepal, and Tibet for a semester, Zemarch-Bersin (2008) observed that power dynamics between the economically endowed Americans and their less endowed counterparts become more pronounced when American students embrace their privileged status and give handouts to the hosts. These relations, she concludes, can impede the attainment of educational goals. Describing her experience living with an impoverished Tibetan family, Zemach-Bersin
(2008) realized that offering the family cash in exchange for their hospitality represents the privilege of American visitors to consume commoditized culture: such an education may inadvertently be a recipe for the perpetuation of the global ignorance, misunderstanding and prejudice....[T]here is a vast discrepancy between the rhetoric of international education and the reality of what many students like myself experience while abroad (Zemach-Bersin, p.3).

Similarly, Woolf (2006) questions the motive behind U.S. program expansion to nontraditional destinations. He contends that proponents of study abroad in nontraditional locations are obsessed with the exotic, their main aim being educational tourism...motivated at worst by voyeurism in which privileged young Americans go to observe relative poverty in a developing country” (p. 136). From this perspective, American students are tourists who view less familiar cultures as a consumable commodity which they pay for, for their entertainment.

Also, Ivan Illich (1993) dismisses U.S. volunteerism in developing countries as an invasion” of other countries (p.456). In a thought provoking speech, “To Hell with Good Intentions,” Illich (1993) questions the very idea of international service-learning, arguing that study abroad programs in nontraditional locations have the potential to perpetrate colonial practices when students and program organizers adopt a missionary-like approach. Illich registers his disapproval of the North American "dogooders" in Latin American countries and their ill not-so-genuine intentions. He observes that under the veneer of volunteerism is the American's intention to vacation and sell the "American Way of Life" (p.457). He points out that if the Americans were honest about their
mission, they would go beyond volunteerism to engage the local people in finding practical solutions to the challenges that face them.

In a similar provocative attack, Woolf (2006) questions the academic merit of expanding study abroad programs to nontraditional destinations. He opines that the push for program growth in nontraditional locations is anchored on obsession with the “exotic” and “the shallow pursuit of the new” and not necessarily on “solid academic goals” (p.140). He suggests that it is hypocritical to take study abroad programs to nontraditional destinations while little is being done at home institutions to promote foreign languages and area studies. In his opinion, the non-academic agenda to “see the poor people” is currently driving expansion of study abroad to developing countries and it only serves to undermine the educational benefits of education abroad (Woolf, 2006, p.135).

Furthermore, some critics fear that overemphasis on nontraditional destinations could have detrimental effect on more popular destinations, including creating tension between both locations. Such emphasis, they argue, demeans the cultural value of Europe as a study abroad destination (Gore, 2005) while elevating that of nontraditional destinations. In agreement, Woolf (2007) asserts that seductive, exotic images associated with nontraditional destinations negatively impact Western Europe destinations by implying that students who study there get something that is “less valued, less ‘exciting’” (p.505).

Finally, some scholars have challenged the articulation of study abroad agenda in nontraditional locations in terms of national security. At the national level, study abroad is viewed as a tool for diplomacy and essential for national security (Lincoln
Commission, 2005). Nolan (2009) opposes the linking of the goals of study abroad to national security and advises that if study abroad is to meaningfully serve a true academic purpose, it must be divorced from the goal of national security. Woolf (2006) argues that when study abroad is framed in terms of national security, the true purpose of the educational experience is undermined.

**Influential factors in destination choice.** The paucity of literature on factors that influence college students’ choice of study abroad locations makes it difficult to understand why students choose some locations over others. While literature on why international students study in the West abound, studies on factors that influence college students from the West to choose study abroad programs in developing countries are virtually nonexistent. A comprehensive search of educational databases including Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Academic Search Complete, Educational Research Complete, as well as search through Google Scholar did not yield any study explicitly addressing factors that influence college students’ choice of a study abroad experience in nontraditional locales. However, a few studies suggest a number of factors that influence students’ choice of a study abroad location.

To begin with, students’ unfamiliarity with local languages seems to have great influence on students’ decision not to study abroad in less familiar destinations. In their review of policies and student exchange programs of 11 countries, Otero and McCoshan (2006) found that lack of knowledge of the local language(s) restricted study abroad participation in countries where another language other than English was the primary language of communication. Findings of research done by Michigan State University on
factors that influence students’ choice to study abroad (Hembroff & Rusz, 1993), African American students identified lack of proficiency in local languages and perceived cultural challenges as some of the major obstacles in their choice of a study abroad location.

In another study of New Zealand which sought to understand how knowledgeable freshmen and sophomores were of international student exchange programs, students showed preference for English-speaking destinations (Doyle, Gendall, Meyer, Hoek, Tait, McKenzie, & Loorparg, 2010). Interestingly, the participants thought that interacting with a different culture and language was a key benefit of education abroad. This paradox highlights the desire for an intercultural encounter on the one hand, and apprehension at the prospect of such an encounter on the other.

Even though study abroad programs in non-English speaking are not very popular with students (Van Der Meid, 2003), this is not always the case. In a study involving U.S. undergraduate studying in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Lane-Tooney (2012) analyzed factors that influenced students to choose MENA as their study abroad destination of choice. Results indicated that students precisely chose those regions because they were interested in learning Arabic and they believed that they would leverage the knowledge of Arabic and the entire experience to get into international professional careers.

Also, interest in learning about cultures that are different from a students’ own may contribute to the decision to study in culturally unfamiliar locations. Landau and Moore (2001) conducted a study to assess the assumptions of cultural sameness or
difference between African American, White American and Ghanaian students. White Americans were aware of their cultural difference with their Ghanaian counterparts and a majority of them indicated that their main motivation for studying there was their desire to learn about a culture very different from their own.

For racial and ethnic minority students, the quest for cultural identity is a motivating factor in choosing nontraditional study abroad locations. Ethnic minority students have the tendency to choose their study abroad location based on their cultural heritage. In their study, Landau and Moore (2001) found that in making the decision to study in Legon, Ghana, African Americans were motivated by their presumed sameness with Ghanains. In another study, Kavakas (2013) found that non-White majority prefer to study in Asia, Middle East and Latin America. This is corroborated by Van Der Meid, (2003) who reported that, Asian Americans predominantly studied abroad in Asian countries only with the exception of England and France. He concluded that location of a program in Asia encouraged Asian Americans to study abroad. Similarly, a big number African Americans choose to study abroad in African countries as evidenced by the numerous studies on study abroad and heritage learners (e.g., Beausoleil, 2008; Day-Vines, 1998; Moreno, 2009). This quest for one’s heritage is aptly summarized by an African American student studying in Legon, Ghana: “I was hoping to get more of a welcome home type of vibe. In terms of like, Oh, black American, welcome home, this is your home…” (Landau & Moore, 2001, p.6).

Finally, media reports of difficult or risky situations can serve as an impediment to study abroad in certain locations (Kavakas, 2012), or as an impelling force that
heightens students’ interests in such regions (Lane-Toomey & Lane, 2012). Citing North African, Middle Eastern destinations and Greece, Kavakas postulates that study abroad numbers have decreased significantly or vanished altogether in these regions due to media reports of instability. Lane-Toomey and Lane (2012) disagree noting that the Middle East/North Africa region (MENA) in particular has seen significant increase in U.S. college student study abroad participants, a trend they attribute to the growing interest among US college students’ to understand the events that have shaped the geopolitics of the region. Majority of the students studying in MENA reported that other than the fact that they had financial capital provided through scholarships, one major reason for choosing to study in volatile regions like the Arab countries was to understand what actually goes on in places like those. Having heard a lot of negative things from the media, they wanted to experience first-hand and learn about countries that are portrayed negatively.

**Intercultural and Global Competencies as Outcomes of Study Abroad**

The expansion of study abroad and the subsequent financial investment by the government, postsecondary institutions and organizations is based on the belief that various benefits accrue from an education abroad experience (Lincoln Commission, 2005). Various studies have investigated and reported the outcomes of study abroad. Traditionally, study abroad is associated with improved proficiency in a second language. A number of studies (e.g. Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Vera, Howard, & Lemee, 2009) have found a positive relationship between study abroad and second language acquisition. Additionally, proponents and scholars of international education have
associated study abroad with profound personal growth (Farell & Suvedi, 2003; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Institute of International Education, 2012). Specific dimensions of personal growth that have received considerable scholarly attention include identity development (Dolby, 2004; Kuh & Kauffman, 1985; Savicky & Cooley, 2011; Shames & Alden, 2005) and cognitive/intellectual development (Frisch, 1990; McKeown, 2006). Moreover, research findings show that participants developed professionally and were more clear and certain about career choice (Franklin, 2010; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Norris & Gillespie, 2009).

Recent research on the academic benefits of education abroad shows that contrary to popular belief that study abroad serves as a distraction from learning and could delay graduation (Booker, 2001; Kasravi, 2009), study abroad does contribute to persistence (Young, 2008), improved Grade-Point Average (GPA) (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Sutton & Rubin, 2010) and took less time to graduate (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Hamir, 2012). Studies also show that study abroad returnees are predisposed to general academic success (Malmgren & Galvin, 2008; Sutton & Rubin, 2010) as measured through such indicators as engagement (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005) and higher retention and graduation rates (Hamir, 2012; Kasravi, 2009; Metzger, 2006; Sutton & Rubin, 2010).

Perhaps the widest range of studies are on how study abroad impacts intercultural competence or any one of its dimensions: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural communication (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Gullekson et al., 2011; Patterson, 2006; Pedersen, 2010; Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton & Hubbard, 2008;
Other studies have explored the impact of study abroad on changed global perspectives (Douglas and Jones-Rikken, 2001; Ogden, 2010). Most of these studies indicate that the outcomes of study abroad in these respects are generally positive; participants demonstrate an understanding of their own culture in relation to other cultures, appreciate the host culture and have an expanded view of the world. The University System of Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI) project carried out by Sutton & Rubin (2004) to determine the learning outcomes of study abroad, participants reported they had gained more knowledge on the interconnectedness of the world, had improved knowledge of intercultural interaction with different others and relativity and knowledge of world geography (Sutton & Rubin, 2004). The study found notable differences between the study abroad participants and the control group on their understanding of cultural relativism, that is, “the cognitive realization that one ought not judge other cultures or respond to individuals from those cultures based on one’s own ethnocentric values and practices” (p.78).

In another study, the Georgetown Consortium Research project (Vande Berg, Connor-Litton, & Paige, 2009) comprehensively examined immersion and its impact on intercultural development and foreign language learning. The researchers examined data collected from students who had participated in 61 different study abroad programs. An analysis of the pre- and post-test scores for the both the treatment group and control group revealed that the study abroad participants exhibited some modest development in intercultural sensitivity in comparison to the control group. Similarly, Anderson et al.
(2006) examined the long term effect of a semester-long program on the development of intercultural sensitivity among business studies students studying in London. They surveyed participants using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer & Bennett, 2002) prior to studying abroad and after, just before they departed for the U.S. The researchers administered the same test four weeks later after the participants’ return to the United States. The results showed that in the short term, study abroad experiences have a positive impact on the overall development of intercultural knowledge and skills among participants. However, no evidence was found to support long-term impact of the experience.

Also, Paige, Cohen, and Shively (2004) probed the effect of the study abroad participation on among other things, participants’ intercultural development. 86 student participants who had studied abroad in either Spanish-speaking or French-speaking countries were placed either in a control or experimental group. The study employed three instruments: Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer & Bennett, 1998, 2001), Strategies Inventory for Learning Culture (SILC) (Paige, Rong, Zhang, Kappler, Hoff, & Emert, 2002) and Language Strategy Survey (LSS) (Cohen & Chi, 2001). The study also employed supplemental e-journals and interviews. Findings supported other studies that study abroad positively influences the development of intercultural knowledge and skills, particularly reduced ethnocentrism and increase in intercultural sensitivity. Important to note though is that the results reported in this study are inconclusive as the analysis of the qualitative data was pending at the time of publication of the preliminary findings.
Even though some studies positively link study abroad to reduced ethnocentricity, some studies indicate that this is not always the case. In a study conducted by Salisbury, An and Pascarella (2013) students did not demonstrate reduced ethnocentricity. The large-scale longitudinal study, the Wabash National Study on Liberal Arts Education, involving the participation of close to 1,600 students of the 2006 cohort, investigated the factors that influenced development educational outcomes of a liberal arts education. Data collected from students at 19 institutions at the beginning and end of their first year, and again at the end of their senior year indicated a positive link between study abroad participation and the development of intercultural competence, generally. However, the study found that this development did not happen in all the aspects of intercultural competence. Contrary to Paige et al.‘s (2004 ) findings, the results of this study showed that study abroad experience did not facilitate the transformation of students‘ perspective from ethnocentrism to ethnoretativity, which according to Deardorff (2004, 2006) is key marker of intercultural competence.

Pedersen (2010) assessed the intercultural effectiveness of a one year study abroad program to central England. The researcher compared three groups using the pre- and post- IDI measure (Hammer & Bennett, 2002). Of the three groups, one studied abroad and was trained in intercultural effectiveness and diversity. The other group studied abroad but did not undergo intercultural training while the control group remained at the home institution and did not have any intercultural training. Findings showed that there were statistically significant differences between the pre- to post-IDI scores between students in the first group and the other two groups but not between
Group 2 and 3. Students who studied abroad where intervention measures were put in place (Group 1) scored more highly than those who studied abroad without any intervention measures (Group 2). No statistically significant difference was found between the group that had an education abroad experience without intervention and the control group. Pedersen concluded that a year-long experience abroad does not guarantee positive development of intercultural competence if intervention is not incorporated into the program. However, Engle and Engle (2004) noted that the longer American students studying in France stayed in the host country, the greater their progress in cultural understanding and intercultural competence.

Other studies focus on the impact study abroad specifically on global learning. In their study, Brascamp et al. (2009) examined students’ holistic growth in global learning and development. Using a pretest-posttest design, the study measured changes in participants’ global perspectives during a semester-long study abroad. A total of 245 students from different institutions across the U.S. participating in ten different programs at different sites worldwide completed the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) (Brascamp et al., 2009) pre- and post-study abroad. Results showed that besides personal growth and cognitive development, students were more accepting of and more comfortable with cultural difference and had an enhanced sense of social responsibility. Students reported that they had increased respect for and greater acceptance of cultural difference. They reported greater commitment to becoming global citizens and to social justice.

Using the Sampson and Smith’s (1957) scale, Douglas and Jones-Rikken (2001) measured world-minded attitudes of students who had participated in education abroad.
They identified world-minded individuals as those who are not constrained by their ethnic or national perspectives in their interpretation of experiences but have the ability to employ perspectives. Students who had studied abroad reported that they were more globally aware than the control group who were not exposed to prior international travel. Golay (2006) was interested in finding out whether location and duration were correlated with the growth of global-mindedness. Students at the Florida State University who were enrolled in International Programs and were studying abroad in four study center locations and a non-study group completed pre- and post- surveys. Findings showed that a semester abroad and international education courses at home had the same effect: students were more globally minded after the exposure. In terms of the effect of location, the researchers found that it did not matter whether students were in one location or the other for them to become more globally minded. From this, they concluded that location did not have any impact on the development on global-mindedness.

The significant increase in short-term study abroad programs has diverted researcher’s attention from the effectiveness of long-term study abroad programs to short-term programs. The next section reviews literature on the impact of short-term study abroad programs on the development of intercultural and global competencies.

**Short-term Study Abroad Programs**

In recent years, short-term study abroad experiences have become the most common type of undergraduate study abroad in the United States (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Donnelly-Smith posits that short-term programs are becoming increasingly popular for various reasons including affordability and their appeal to students who are in
highly structured academic programs and would not commit a full semester to study abroad. As a relatively new phenomenon in international education, short-term programs have attracted substantial research interest, particularly the assessment of outcomes (Kurt, Olisky, & Geis, 2013). Despite sustained focus on the effect of short-term programs, researchers are divided on the capacity for such programs to positively impact learning outcomes, more so intercultural and global learning. Although some studies show that participating students develop in ways that students who do not participate do not (Anderson et al., 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004) in spite of the length of the program, critics suggest that short-term study abroad programs are devoid of expected academic rigor and therefore are ineffective in achieving learning outcomes (Altbach, 2004; Neppel, 2005).

One of the earliest studies on short-term study abroad programs was conducted by Chieffo and Griffiths (2004). The two researchers conducted an assessment of the effect of a short term study abroad program on students’ global awareness, which constitutes “intercultural awareness, personal growth and development, awareness of global interdependence; and functional knowledge of world geography and language” (p. 167). They administered surveys on 1,509 short-term study abroad and 847 students who had participated in a 5-week course on the home campus. The study found that those who had participated in short-term education abroad exhibited greater global awareness than those who did not. In spite of these findings, Gullekson et al. (2011) found that compared to a control group, students who had participated in short term study abroad did not report significant changes in ethnocentrism, intercultural communication.
Some studies indicate that while short-term programs have immediate positive effect on participants, the effect does not persist in the long term. For instance, Nam (2011) found that although students reported improved cultural sensitivity and changes in their worldviews after studying abroad for three weeks, this effect was short-term as no improvement on intercultural development was noted in the period of four months after their return home. These findings are supported by Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus‘ (2011) study which revealed that the positive effect of study abroad was short lived when participants did not accommodate the new experience in their lives post-study abroad. Although short-term study abroad is associated with positive outcomes, at least in the short term, research shows that those who participate in long-term study abroad programs report greater gains in intercultural learning (Dwyer, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Zorn, 1996).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have provided the conceptual framework that informs this study. I have also provided extensive review of literature of nontraditional destinations focusing on the contested dichotomous definitions of nontraditional destinations, the growth of programs and the 9/11 factor, the criticism against program expansion and the factors that influence decisions in study abroad location choice. Further, I have reviewed literature on the impact of study abroad on the development of intercultural competent, paying particular attention to short-term programs.

Although there is an abundance of such literature, many of the studies focus on traditional study abroad destinations. Studies that examine outcomes of study abroad in
nontraditional destinations are virtually absent (Wells, 2006). Wells observes that the sparse research on study abroad programs to nontraditional locations simply describes program activities and implementation. The little evidence on outcomes that emerge from these studies is inadequate in helping study abroad practitioners in understanding how students learn is such locations. More concerning, especially in the light of the increasing popularity of short-term programs, is the lack of studies on the benefits of such programs in these locations. In view of these concerns, this study specifically seeks to examine the outcomes of study abroad in nontraditional destinations. I hope that the study will contribute to the growing collection of literature on the outcomes of study abroad and shed light on the experiences of the otherwise obscure student experiences in nontraditional destinations.

Besides, the use of quantitative measures to assess intercultural and global competencies as evident in the reviewed studies is prevalent in study abroad research. Although a number of the studies provide evidence that study abroad participants develop intercultural and global competence as a result of that educational experience, they do not show us how students learn while studying abroad or what contributes to such learning. Passarelli and Kolb (2004) emphasize the need to understand the learning process in study abroad so that all who are involved in the experience can skillfully intervene to maximize learning. Besides, quantitative measures may not always induce accurate self-assessments. Some quantitative researchers have found that participants sometimes ranked themselves higher than the actual scores showed. In a study conducted by Medina (2008), the IDI revealed opinion inflation on the participants' degree of intercultural
sensitivity. It was noted that they rated themselves at least one stage higher than their actual level. Jackson (2013) also reported that a comparison of the pre- and post-test results for students who had enrolled in a post-sojourn intercultural transitions course indicated that “they still held significantly inflated self-perceptions of their intercultural sensitivity” (p.1660). Therefore, this study adopts qualitative methodology to investigate the transformational effect of short-term programs on undergraduate students who study abroad in culturally distant locations.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology and methods adopted in this study. First, I provide an overview of the methodological and epistemological approaches that support the study. Next, I provide a description of the data collection process and then explain the analytical and interpretive process. After that, I detail steps that were taken to ensure rigor and, finally I provide a researcher subjectivity statement in acknowledgement of the inclusionary position I took in this study as a qualitative researcher.

Through this study, I sought to understand how U.S. undergraduates in nontraditional study abroad locations made meaning of their intercultural experience and how these experiences mediated the development of intercultural and global competencies. The guiding research questions are: 1) How do U.S. undergraduates in short-term study abroad programs in nontraditional destinations make meaning of their intercultural experience? 2) How do U.S. undergraduates navigate cultural intersections in nontraditional study abroad destinations 3) In what ways do short-term study abroad program designs impact the development of intercultural and global competencies among U.S. undergraduates? To answer these research questions, I utilized grounded theory methodology in the study design and a constructivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006) in the analysis and interpretation of data.

Philosophical Background and Epistemological Claims of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory has its roots in the seminal work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), following collaborative research on dying hospital patients. In grounded theory methods, the development and evolution of theory happens during research...
through the constant iterative interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of this method is to ground theory in data that is systematically obtained and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The two researchers proposed this method to counter the methodological assumptions that dominated mid-century research, which adopted a purely positivist approach to social inquiry. They stated:

We would all agree that in social research generating theory goes hand in hand with verifying it; but many sociologists have been diverted from this truism in their zeal to test either existing theories or a theory that they have barely started to generate. (p. 2)

Constructivist grounded theory method takes an inductive approach to the data collection process and extends qualitative studies beyond mere description of phenomena to a conceptual level of understanding (Charmaz, 2006). This conceptual understanding is allowed to emerge from the data, free from the constraints of a priori knowledge. It adheres to established data collection procedures and to systematic guidelines in the analysis of data to enhance understanding of social processes that cannot be accounted for by other methods (Charmaz, 200). These procedures provide for the identification of patterns in data and through thorough analysis of these patterns, researchers can derive theory which is empirically valid and grounded in empirical data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Although grounded theory methodology bears similarities with other qualitative methodologies, it distinguishes itself from the rest by several distinct features: its
emphasis upon theory development, simultaneous data collection and theoretical analysis, use of theoretical sampling in the collection of data, constant comparative method in the analysis of data and the use of systematic coding procedures to ensure conceptual and theory development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Another distinct but controversial approach taken by grounded theorists is the delay of literature review until after analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1978). Some people have misconstrued this to mean that the researcher does not look into existing literature and enters the research field with a “blank slate” (Urquhart & Fernandez, 2006). However, Glaser and Strauss called for caution, particularly for new scholars, not to be carried away by previous literature in a way that “might stifle, contaminate or otherwise impede the researchers’ effort to generate categories” (Glaser, 1992, p.31).

In their later writing, Glaser and Strauss acknowledge that the researcher does not enter the field free from ideas. Strauss and Corbin (1990) observe that researchers “bring a considerable background in professional and disciplinary literature” to research (p. 48). On his part, Glaser (1978) suggests that “it is necessary for the grounded theorist to know many theoretical codes in order to be sensitive to rendering explicitly the subtleties of the relationships in his ideas” (p.72). Such theoretical codes, observes Charmaz (2006), can only be acquired from the literature from which these codes are derived. In fact, Glaser explicitly clarifies the place of literature when he states that existing literature may be used as “data” and like all other data, it should be subjected to comparison with the emerging categories and be integrated in the emerging theory (Glaser, 1992). Objecting
to the idea of a “blank slate” approach to grounded theory studies, Dey (1999) suggests that researchers approach grounded theory with an open mind not an empty head.

Even though grounded theory as originally envisaged by Glaser and Strauss (1967) has continued to evolve over the years, there are certain tenets that remain consistent across different versions of the methodology. These include: 1) concurrent data collection and analysis; 2) initial coding and categorization of data; 3) inductive and abductive analysis and construction of abstract categories; 4) writing of analytical memos; 5) theoretical sampling; 6) constant comparative analysis and ; 7) integration of categories into a theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2002).

**Charmaz’ Constructivist Grounded Theory**

In this qualitative inquiry, I adopted a constructivist approach (2001, 2006, 2014) in the analysis and interpretation of data. Charmaz (2006) defines constructivism as:

…a social scientific perspective that addresses how realities are made. This perspective assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate….Constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction (p. 187).

A constructivist paradigm is premised on four main assumptions. First, it assumes that individuals construct reality within the contexts they operate in (Appleton & King, 2002). Viewed this way then, meanings constitute the qualitative researcher’s and study participants’ social constructions (Walsham, 1995). Constructivist epistemology challenges the notion of objectivity in research noting that truth, as single objective phenomenon, cannot be measured through research study (Crotty, 1998). Choosing a
constructivist approach for this study is an expression of my epistemological belief that the meaning individuals attach to their experiences does not exist outside of a social context; rather, it is only through close interaction between participants (as informers) and the researcher (as an interpreter) can the meaning of participants’ experiences be unearthed and conveyed. This study adopted constructivist approach to offer insights into the various levels of meaning making for U.S. undergraduate students who study abroad in culturally less familiar locations.

Second, constructivism acknowledges the existence of multiple realities as opposed to a single objective truth (Charmaz, 2006). Guba and Lincoln (1989) stated that “realities are social constructions of the mind, and that there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals (although clearly many constructions will be shared)” (p. 43). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) assert that individuals’ constructions of reality may ultimately combine with those of other individuals to form a consensus. Additionally, individuals undergoing a similar experience (such as an encounter with an unfamiliar culture) make meaning of the experience in ways that are informed not only by the social context but also their values/beliefs, feelings and assumptions (Hatch, 2002). Therefore, to get a comprehensive understanding of participants’ individual realities from their own perspectives, the researcher must remain actively engaged in their lives during the research study. In order to keep the study focused on the participants’ experiences, non-structured, open-ended questions were used to minimize my own constructivist elements that I could unwittingly or intentionally bring to the interview. Glaser (1992) pointed out —if (that) data is garnered through an interview guide
that forces and feeds interviewees responses, then it is guided by and constructed to a
degree by interviewer imposed interactive bias” (p.10).

Third, constructivism focuses on interpretive understandings of participants’
theory researchers to aspire to construct a picture that draws from, reassembles, and
renders subjects’ lives” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 270). Consistent with the interpretive
paradigm assumption that people interpret the world and reality within historical and
social contexts, I assumed that the experiences of undergraduate students in the context of
culturally unfamiliar study abroad locations are subjective and are best understood in
terms of individual students’ subjective meanings as opposed to my objective definitions.
I considered that the onus was on me to render an accurate interpretation of individual
students’ realities, from their own perspectives.

Finally, constructivist grounded theory departs from earlier versions of grounded
theory in its adoption of a subjectivist paradigm. In Charmaz’s (2001) opinion, early
proponents of grounded theory viewed the researcher as an objective observer whose role
was to discover meaning that lay latent in the participant. However, in constructivist
grounded theory, the researcher plays an essential role in the research process as he/she is
an instrument through which data is collected and analyzed (Patton’s, 1992). As such, it
is crucial that the researcher explicitly reflects on his/her subjectivities and provides
evidence of how a priori assumptions may have shaped the research process (Murphy,
Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker, & Watson, 1998).
Various factors were considered in the selection of grounded theory methodology for this particular study. The study focuses on the process of developing intercultural competence, a process that King & Baxter Magolda (2005) described as complex, multifaceted and dynamic as it involves the interplay of various factors including perceptions, (inter)relationships, environmental factors, attitudes and personal experience. Charmaz (2006), and Jones and Alony (2011) suggest that grounded theory methodology is appropriate for the exploration and interpretation of complex life experiences. In an immersion context such as study abroad, the learning process is likely to vary from individual to individual, owing to their individual perceptions, the people they relate with, their attitudes and past and present experiences. Since the process of acquiring intercultural skills across cultures is not measurable, the researcher must choose methodologies that promote understanding of such a complex learning experience:

As more sophisticated questions are raised about the learning students achieve on college campuses, educators must design more sophisticated research studies to answer them…. Grounded theory (is) a powerful qualitative research method that can increase educators’ understanding of the complex student experience (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, Schneider, 2002; p. 1).

In addition, grounded theory is suitable for studies that seek to explore little known phenomena (Charmaz, 2006). Fernández and Lehnmann (2005) point out that for success in research in emerging areas, researchers must adopt alternative methodologies such as — *grounded theory building research* where the emerging theory helps explain, in conceptual terms, what is going on in the substantive field of research” (Fernández and
Lehnmann, 2005, p. 2). In light of the paucity of previous research on how U.S. undergraduates navigate unfamiliar cultures while studying abroad, there was need to adopt a research methodology that deepens our understanding of this largely unexplored topic. Since the goal of this study was to explore a little known phenomenon with a view to understanding the underlying processes that determine and define the developmental trajectory of students once they encounter an unfamiliar culture, constructivist grounded theory methodology was most suitable. It provided an alternative lens that minimized researcher bias that sometimes emerges from *a priori* assumptions and eliminated the possibility of deductive analysis that might have transferred inaccurate theoretical assumptions upon the studied phenomenon (Fernández & Lehnmanm, 2005).

**Sample and Sampling Strategy**

*Sampling.* Since grounded theory explores complex and little known phenomena, it is of critical importance to choose information-rich participants (Patton, 2002) who can illuminate the phenomenon under study. In light of this, I drew my participant population from undergraduate students who had participated in short, institution-sponsored study abroad programs in different nontraditional locations. The population was drawn from two public, four-year universities. All the participants were enrolled at the time of study. Participants were all 20-21 years old, which fits within the traditional age (18 and 25 years) of undergraduates (Jones & Watt, 1999; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). This age was of interest in this research as it represents a developmental stage during which undergraduates generally go through tremendous growth (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pizzolato, 2005).
Identifying participants. To identify participants, I employed purposeful criterion sampling (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002) and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Patton (2002) pointed out that criterion sampling entails the selection of cases that meet specific criteria of importance. Eligibility criteria for participants in this study included: a) being an undergraduate enrolled at a four year college; b) between 18-25 years of age; d) enrolled full time at the time of research and; e) participated in a college-sponsored study abroad program in the current or previous semester of enrollment. I also utilized theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Considered a critical element of grounded theory (Webb 2003), theoretical sampling was defined by Glaser & Strauss (1967) as:

…the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges (p.45).

As categories started emerging from the initial sets of research data, I used theoretical sampling for the purpose of explicating the emerging categories. This entailed selecting new participants and formulation of follow up questions based on the themes that had begun to emerge from previous data. This was an important step in the analysis as it allowed me to expound on and refine the initial categories by checking the new data against old data and confirming or disconfirming the identified categories. This process of collecting data, analyzing and comparing continued until no new information was found to add to the emerging categories. In total, I interviewed 12 participants. This sample size was considered adequate as no new emerged. Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007,
suggest that in qualitative studies, once saturation is reached, the sample size can be considered adequate.

Participants were recruited through the institutions’ Office of Education Abroad (OEA) and the specific study abroad program listserv. An email (Appendix B) with a brief explanation of purpose of the study and a list of target study abroad destinations was sent to OEA administrators and program faculty leaders to be sent out to all study abroad participants. My initial attempt to recruit participants while they were still abroad failed. After their return, I sent the same recruitment email through the study abroad coordinators of the specific programs of interest. After identifying potential participants, I contacted them via email (Appendix C), explaining further the purpose of the study, what their participation would entail, and potential topics of discussion. Details of compensation were also included; each participant received 20 dollars after the initial round of interviews. Additionally, all the participants were entered in a draw for a chance to win a 50 dollar Amazon gift card. I also sent a copy of the consent form (Appendix A) to each participant for review.

I sent another email (Appendix D) to each participant who had expressed to participate in the study to request for an interview. I sought their informed consent prior to the commencement of individual interviews. I reviewed the consent form with each participant and sought permission to use direct quotes from the interviews. I assured participants of confidentiality and to maintain anonymity, I asked each participant to use a pseudonym of his/her choice. After a careful review of the consent form, I requested them to sign it as an indication that they had understood the contents of the form and as
an expression of their free will to participate in the study. Each participant was also asked to fill out a demographics survey (Appendix E) and to choose a pseudonym that they would use throughout the life of the study.

**Context of Study Abroad**

The students who were interviewed for this study participated in four different programs in three African countries. These programs included Global Health service learning in Botswana, Global Consulting in business in Botswana, HIV/AIDS in South Africa and Kiswahili Language learning and Development Studies in Tanzania. Each program was uniquely different owing to their individual programmatic components. The Global Health program was 3 weeks long. The objectives of the program were for students to understand basic concepts of global health, experience hands on learning in a hospital setting as well as witness global medical issues. Nursing students worked in hospitals and clinics alongside local doctors and nurses, had a series of lectures on global health and also had a service learning opportunity at a residential school for children with disabilities. They also had excursions to the Botswana National Museum, the local craft area, the Gaborone Game Reserve. Students were housed in university hostels.

The Global Consulting Program was sponsored by the College of Business in one of the institutions. Business Studies students worked in teams with their counterparts at the University of Botswana to provide short-term consultancy services for local small scale businesses. The main goal of this program was to prepare students for international business environments through 1) working in consulting teams comprising of members from different cultures to provide solutions to authentic business problems 2) exploration
of the distinctive culture of Botswana, 3) experiencing and managing cross-cultural communication, 4) application of already acquired business skills. Participants in this program were accommodated at the University of Botswana exclusive from their local team members.

The 5-week HIV/AIDS program in South Africa, which is designed to provide first-hand experience of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the country, was located in Port Elizabeth. The program also expected students to gain experience of the prevention and awareness efforts being undertaken by various stakeholders as well as gain practical understanding and experience of the impact of HIV/AIDS and a society's response to the pandemic. Students had an opportunity to visit the townships and historical sites.

Some of the program highlights included having direct contact with community members and outreach workers, enjoying lectures and seminars from experts at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, immerse in South Africa's culture and traditions and opportunities to network with relevant people and organizations. Also, the program incorporated an internship where students worked in areas of their choice. Students were housed in apartments approved by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University which coordinated the study abroad program locally.

The Kiswahili Language Learning and Development Studies program in Tanzania was a 6-week program intensive academic program combining language classes and area studies in Dar es Salaam with extended travel to Arusha. The program participants had opportunity to do internship based on individual student’s area of study and interest. Classes taught by local faculty took place at the University of Dar-es-Salaam and
students lived with host families. This meant to offer students important insights into Tanzanian daily life and culture and get opportunity to develop friendships with local residents. In Arusha, students did internship and visited important political and historical sites met with representatives of local non-governmental organizations. A three- to four-day safari was built into the program.

Data Collection

In this study, I relied on two data sources: in-depth interviews and unsolicited participant journals/self-reflective papers. The primary data collection method for this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The choice of data collection method was guided by my understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of research, which differ depending on the goals of the research. The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the complexities of an intercultural experience and therefore took a constructivist approach. Since qualitative research aims at discovering meaning and understanding, I viewed my role as that of describing the study abroad experience as experienced and interpreted by and from the perspective of the participants. This phenomenological philosophy implies the need for in-depth interviewing in order to generate descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon under study (Wengraf, 2001; Seidman, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews were conducted with each of the 12 participants. Initial 60-90 minute face-to-face interviews were done, which according to Creswell (2012) is sufficient for a start to explore participants’ experiences. Researchers consider qualitative interviews to be conversations that allow one to explore the experiences and interpretations of informants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2006).
Roulston (2010) postulated that in-depth semi-structured interviews serve as a useful tool to help the researcher deeply explore the interviewees' points of view, perspectives on and feelings about their experience (Roulston, 2010). Unlike in completely informal conversations, semi-structured questions are utilized to give some structure to the interviews (Patton, 2002) while allowing the researcher flexibility to pursue lines of inquiry that may emerge from the ongoing conversation as he or she deems it appropriate and relevant. I utilized a flexible outline of questions (Patton, 1992) and the initial interview protocol (Appendix F) was only used as a guide in the interview process. Where deemed appropriate, I followed the interviewee’s leads with probes into emerging issues and sought clarity through follow up questions. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), such an approach encourages participants to use their own words to describe their worlds and in so doing, help others understand their experiences and the meaning they make of that experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The experience of study abroad participants in culturally less familiar locations can only be fully understood within its social context. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) theorized, qualitative interviewing is a quest for comprehension of how research participants think, feel and respond to their social environment. In concurrence, Seidman (1998) suggested that interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior….A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience
(and therefore) interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action. (p. 4)

Charmaz (2006; 2014) recommended intensive interviewing for interpretive inquiry as it provides room for new ideas to emerge and for ideas not explored through the questions but otherwise relevant to the study to come to the fore. The concept of intensive interviewing is central to the constructivist approach in its ability to elicit individual participants' interpretations of their experience. As the interviewer, my primary task was to ask each participant to describe as well as reflect upon his/her experience. In this way, I was able to delve deep into the described phenomenon to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings they attached to the experience.

Charmaz (2006) recommended that the interviewer has an interview guide that comprises of open-ended, non-judgmental questions which are informed by literature and theory. Previous research and literature on transformative learning and intercultural competence informed and guided the creation of the interview protocol. In the creation of the interview protocol, careful attention was be given to Hatch’s (2002) guidelines in order to ensure that questions 1) were open-ended, allowing interviewees to articulate meaning and their unique perspectives, 2) used concise and clear language familiar to informants, 3) were clear enough for participants to understand, while communicating the researcher’s expectations 4) were neutral and do not seek to lead the interview in a pre-determined direction, 5) respected the informants’ views and acknowledge that they have valuable knowledge to share, and 6) were aligned to the stated research objectives so as
to generate relevant answers. The secondary data source was participants’ unsolicited participant journals. Every participant who kept a journal was requested to provide it to the researcher for analysis.

**Participant journals.** This study utilized unsolicited participant journals (also referred to as participant diaries) and self-reflections as secondary data sources. Participants were requested to share their journals/reflection papers after the completion of each interview. In all, four personal reflections and five journals were obtained. Participant journals are a useful source of data because they are a channel of communication through which students explore events in their life that they consider significant (Ibarreta & McLeod, 2004). The students who participated in this study used personal journals to record and reflect on their perceptions of the various situations they encountered (Brown & Sorrell, 1993). The journals were all self-initiated and were not a requirement of the course curriculum. Participants documented their experiences on site. In contrast, self-reflections were part of the course curriculum and were, for the purpose of this study, considered a programmatic component.

Researchers use either solicited or unsolicited journals as sources of qualitative data and each has a specific focus. Solicited diaries are produced for the purpose of research and are researcher-driven. The researcher tailors them to elicit specific information relevant to the research (Kenten, 2010); therefore, he or she is an active participant in the construction of participant experiences through the design and analysis (Bell, 1998). Bell defined solicited diaries as "an account produced specifically at the researcher's request, by an informant or informants" (p.72). Solicited diaries can be
structures or unstructured. Structured diaries provide specific guidelines for participants (Alaszewski, 2006) while unstructured diaries give leeway to participants to write freely without the restrictions of guidelines (Thomson & Holland, 2005). Jacelon and Imperio (2005) opine that the solicited journal, by virtue of its structured format, encourages participants to pay attention to and reflect on daily activities. Although both provide a means for participants to express themselves, less structured diaries are considered a richer source of qualitative data (Elliott, 1997; Milligan, 2001).

Since participants are constantly aware of the demands of the researcher and therefore keep him/her in mind (Elliott, 1997) and the research participant writes with the awareness that the researcher will read and interpret the solicited diary, the concern is usually that the writer may not provide a true representation of their experience (Kenten, 2010). However, Holliday (2000) argues that this should not be a concern for two reasons. First, participant representations of their reality can never be ‘considered accurate’ or ‘direct’ representations of ‘what really happened’” (p. 510). Second, solicited diaries are not different from other sources of data such as interviews and focus groups which are not devoid of self-censorship.

Unsolicited journals unlike solicited journals usually reflect the writer’s perspective on their lived experiences. The journal is usually a private document that is not intended for public view. Jones (2000) defined unsolicited diaries as ‘a personal document, written without overt financial or other inducements, that attempts to construct a picture of the actor’s perception of social reality with regard to events or constructions of events’” (p. 558). That means that writers include topics in their journals that are of
most importance to them (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005. Unsolicited journals are a rich source of qualitative data as they can provide clues on the importance that a writer attaches to events and their attitudes towards those events (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005).

Participant journals have been used extensively in health studies as a data collection tool but are not prevalent in the field of education (Harvey, 2011). However, Harvey notes, researchers in the field of education are using them with increased frequency and are being used mainly to reflect on teaching and learning processes by faculty and students. A study by Ibarreta & McLeod, (2004) explored the use of journals as a requirement for second year nursing students in their clinical practicum. Faculty provided structured guidelines on journal writing to students who were doing a practicum; they were to record events, observations, feelings, and their contexts. The study found that reflections through journal writing encouraged students to think critically about their experiences. It also found that students were more self-directed in learning as a result.

Landeen, Bryne, & Brown (1995) utilized journals to identify important issues that nursing students faced while doing psychiatric clinical. 18 juniors in the program maintained journals describing and reflecting on the impact of the significant events that occurred each week. The study found that keeping a journal provided the students with an opportunity to become more self-reflective in their nursing practice. It also found that meaningful learning occurred and that the students were able to reflect on their relationships with their clients.
Scanlan, Care, & Udod, (2002) were informant-researchers in their study that sought to understand how reflection impacted classroom performance. Data collected over two years from classroom observations, written autobiographies, journals and de-revealed that by using journals in teaching helped students make connections between the theory taught in the classroom, their experiences and assumptions they held about the topic under discussion. They also found that emotions and context had influence on reflection.

Unsolicited journals are recognized as a valuable source of data for health and social scientists and psychologists (Jones, 2000; Malacrida, 2007; Mendelson, 2006). Critics of use of unsolicited journals question the use of diary that is not intended for public view citing ethical implications (Furness & Garrud, 2010). Before asking participants to share their journals, I consulted with each one of them to establish whether or not there were portions of their diaries that they were concerned should not be made available to me. None of them expressed discomfort or unwillingness to share their journal.

Participant journals have been used with a variety of research methods including grounded theory (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005; Milligan, Bingley, & Gatrell, 2005). Use of journals was considered useful for this study as they provide immediate information about ongoing experiences (Milligan et al., 2005), thus reducing the bias associated with retrospective interviews (Milligan et al., 2005). Since this study was concerned with meaning making processes, participants' journals were considered as a data source because through journals participants could reflect on, express their emotional states and
make meaning of their study abroad experience (Bingley, McDermott, Thomas, Payne, Seymour, & Clark, 2006; Pinnington, & Stanley, 1999; Milligan et al., 2005).

Furness and Garrud (2010) highlighted the usefulness of journals in revealing change, transition, and process. This study was concerned with transformational learning processes; as such, diaries provided deep insight into the learning process in the context of study abroad. Harvey (2011) suggests that journals introduce a longitudinal dimension to research study; in this study, they revealed consistencies, tensions and contradictions (Duck, 1991) within participants’ representations of their study abroad experiences. They also provided validation for some of the categories identified through interview analysis.

Jones (2000) points out that data from either solicited or unsolicited journals may show elements of bias if the documented events do not represent the totality of the experience. A journal biased journal may represent an under-recording or over-recording. For that reason, it is important for the researcher to assess the quality of each journal. In making decision on whether each journal was appropriate for use, I used Macdonald and Tipton’s (1993) criteria for quality appraisal to evaluate the documents. These included authenticity (that is, if it was consistent and a reliable source), credibility (who the writer was, when they wrote it and the context in which it was written, representativeness, that is, if could reasonably be assumed that the journal was a typical example of similar documents from the same experience) and finally the meaning (whether or not the journal had surface and deeper meanings). Following the appraisal, I selected five of the six journals that had been submitted.
Data Analysis

In consistency with grounded theory methods, analysis of data and data collection progressed simultaneously (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2012). I employed the constant comparative method of analyzing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Glaser, 1998). I analyzed the initial set of data as soon as it was collected and transcribed. After transcription, I entered the interview data and corresponding participant journal/self-reflective paper as separate documents into Atlas.ti, which is data analysis software. I started the coding process which entailed coding line by line and segment by segment. This initial coding referred to as open coding (Charmaz, 2006), entailed comparison of empirical indicators in the data for similarities and differences and paying attention to emerging patterns from the data. This process was repeated with each subsequent set of interview transcripts and journals/self-reflective papers. I identified new codes and compared them with previously identified codes. I used theoretical coding to establish relationships between various codes. Once I identified conceptual categories, I applied theoretical sampling in order to identify the properties and dimensions of the developing abstract categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The new sample guided the kind of data to be collected. The iterative process of collecting focused data, analyzing and comparing them against these established categories to check if the categories remained constant continued until the emerging hypothesis was accounted for by all the existing data (Charmaz, 2006).

Throughout the analysis, I kept a reflective journal as a means of keeping track of the categories, properties and emerging hypotheses as well as questions that emanated from the analytical process. Corbin & Strauss (1990) assert that memos are not a mere
record of ideas; rather, they are an integral part of the research process of formulating and revising emerging theory. These memos were integrated in the analysis of data to inform the developing model of learning. Through comparison of cases and reassessment of codes, I came up with conceptual categories that represented transformational learning in study abroad.

![Flow chart of Constructivist Grounded Theory Analysis procedures](image)

**Figure 3.** Flow chart of Constructivist Grounded Theory Analysis procedures

**Establishing Trustworthiness and Validating Findings**

The quality of any good research, regardless of its methodological approach, lies in its credibility. Assessed against quantitative research, qualitative research is often
assumed to be lacking in rigor; therefore, its trustworthiness is put to question.

Proponents of quantitative methods question the validity and reliability of qualitative research (Kvale, 2005) dismissing it as radical, subjective and non-rigorous (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). However, a number of qualitative researchers oppose the transference of quantitative terms to naturalistic inquiry, arguing that these terms are not pertinent to the qualitative inquiry because the philosophical perspectives of the two approaches differ (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Lincoln, 1995). While validity and reliability address the concerns of quantitative research, that is, generalizing results from a random sample to a wider population, they do not serve any function in qualitative inquiry since the focus of the latter is the understanding of the complexities of human experience in social settings (Cohen, 2011) and not generalization.

Some researchers proposed the adoption of new criteria for determining validity and reliability in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Specifically, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) proposed constructs namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability which have been widely accepted among qualitative researchers as valid criteria for ensuring robustness in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). These criteria will be applied through different procedures in the research process. The study will employ several credibility techniques which include: (a) member checking; (b) triangulation of data sources; (c) thick description (d) peer debriefing and (e) reflexive journaling (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).
**Member checks.** In recognition of my role as an active participant in the research process and the need to render participants’ experiences accurately, I conducted member checks to evaluate the extent to which my understanding of the participants’ experiences corresponded with their own understanding. I presented research participants with the initial analysis of data consisting of descriptions, themes and quotes so that they could evaluate whether or not the emerging themes accurately captured their experiences (Creswell, 2012). In qualitative research, this process is most critical in establishing credibility when the researcher’s interpretation of data is confirmed to be a true representation of the participants’ perspectives as they described them (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). When the interpretations are validated by the same people whose views are recorded, they gain greater credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants reviewed the initial themes and supporting evidence. Each participant who did the review acknowledged that the analysis was a true representation of their study abroad experience.

**Triangulation.** I utilized triangulation as a strategy to increase the validity of research findings. Triangulation is the search for converging evidence from multiple methods, data sources, theory and analysts (Patton, 2002). Utilizing multiple data sources and data types supports the principle of qualitative research that the phenomenon of interest be explored and understood from multiple perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Consistent with this view, this study used data from two main sources. The primary data collection method used in-depth semi-structured interviews aimed at getting a
comprehensive understanding of the participants' narrative and experiences. The study used unsolicited participant journals/self-reflective papers as secondary data source.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended the use of triangulation as this can eliminate the weakness and/or intrinsic biases inherent in a single method of data collection. By combining different methods, the deficiencies of any one method can be overcome, thus capitalizing on their individual strengths (Creswell, 2012). Comparison of collected data allowed me to find points of convergence of ideas as well as confirm findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It follows then that when corroborating evidence that gives insight into themes is derived from multiple sources, it helps validate the researchers' findings and increases researcher confidence.

**Rich, thick description.** The notion of rich thick description is a key aspect of qualitative research, which allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The qualitative researcher is concerned with the applicability of the research findings to different contexts. This can be achieved through thick description which this entails the presentation of a clear picture of actions, context, emotion, and meanings of interacting individuals (Denzin, 1989). In this study, I provide detailed description of participants and their actions and capture their thoughts and emotions as they were revealed during the interview and through their recorded journals. I also provide interpretations of the experiences and include extensive quotes to support interpretations of the participants' experience. Stake (2010) pointed out that a description is considered rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details (p. 49), which I have provided in the next two chapters.
Peer debriefing. I utilized peer debriefing during the data analysis phase. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the concept of peer debriefing as a "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). It is a process that allows for extensive discussions between the researcher and an impartial peer on data collection and, preliminary and final analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). My peer debriefers were a group of graduate colleagues in a graduate writing support group. The peer reviewers came from different academic disciplines and therefore were considered impartial in their feedback. My peer debriefers read, raised questions and challenged my conclusions in ways that brought awareness to bias in my interpretations and the conclusions are made. Revisions were considered and corrections done. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) support this process as a means of increasing the credibility of the research study.

Reflexive journaling. The qualitative researcher cannot divorce herself from the research process, because she is the instrument of data collection (Patton, 2002; Roulston, 2010). This positioning of the researcher has the inherent risk of bias which Creswell (2009) identifies as the greatest threat to the trustworthiness of research findings. To minimize bias on the outcome of this study, I included a commentary on my past experiences, biases and prejudices that are likely to influence the interpretation of the study (Creswell, 2012). Also, throughout the study, I kept a journal in which I documented my reactions, thoughts, interpretations and conclusions and continually reflected on these. According to Schatzman & Strauss (1973) this process of sustained
A documentation of key research decisions and emerging ideas provides the researcher with an ongoing, developmental dialogue between his roles as a discoverer and a social analyst” (p. 9). It also helps the researcher gain an analytical distance from the research, thus reducing bias (Gilbert, 2002).

**Researcher Statement**

In qualitative research, the researcher plays an instrumental role, serving as the instrument of inquiry (Patton, 2002); therefore, as an integral part of the research process, she cannot be divorced from the process (Seidman, 2006; Kvale & Brinkman, 1996). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) suggested that research into a phenomenon requires that the researcher chooses a topic that is engaging on both an intellectual and emotional level so that he or she will be invested in the research process. As I embark on this research journey, I am acutely aware of the bias that I could bring to this study owing to my positionality as an international student. I came to the U.S. five years ago on a scholarship to study Applied Linguistics. Coming to the U.S., I brought with me my biases of the American people and their culture as I understood them from Hollywood movies. My knowledge of their lifestyle was limited to the stereotypical descriptions I had heard repeated by people who had never been outside Kenyan borders, not to mention the U.S. As I reflect on my transition journey, it is not surprising then that my first months of being in the U.S. were riddled with disappointment, frustration, loneliness, regret and discomfort. Finding myself in a small rural setting shattered my image and expectations of the U.S. Nothing would have made more sense for me at the time than to return to the suburbs of Nairobi, Kenya’s capital city. I wanted to escape
from the unpleasant experience. However, that has since changed. My growing
familiarity and interaction with diverse others have changed my view of the American
people and their culture. The initial negative attitudes and feelings have since waned.
This international experience has become the core of my doctoral academic and research
interest.

An exploratory study that I conducted with nonstudent wives of international
students a year before designing this study, clarified my research interest. The study
revealed their social isolation, and their search for a sense of belonging drove them to
seek the company of those most like them, further shielding themselves from the
discomfort of the unfamiliar. This helped me understand better the difficult and
sometimes painful process of embracing a different culture. This and my own experience
piqued my interest in a reverse scenario: how do Americans students who get an
opportunity to travel to developing countries interact with the unfamiliar cultures? How
long does one need to be in a country to feel comfortable being in a different cultural
environment? Is there anything to gain from short-travel educational trips? Could they,
like me in my initial months of being in the U.S., be wallowing in feelings of
disappointment and frustration to a point where meaningful engagement with the culture
becomes impossible? When students travel in groups comprising of other American
students and faculty, what is the chance, that unlike the international wives, they will
seek out people from their host country or opportunities to engage with the new cultures?
These questions, combined with my interest in student learning, have defined this
research topic.
So I came into this research well aware that I had an emotional and intellectual stake in it. I am consciously aware of the discomfort of confronting and navigating an unfamiliar culture. I am also familiar with the distinct cultural differences between American culture and the cultures of developing countries. From my own experience, I am also aware of the possibility for change as a result of interaction with a different culture. Drawing from my initial experience in the U.S., I have assumptions about the capacity of short sojourns to affect cultural awareness and understanding. So I embarked on this research fully aware of the need to set aside my beliefs, assumptions and biases and to listen attentively and objectively to the study abroad participants.

I come from Kenya, which is a developing country. Coming from and having studied in Kenya and now studying in the U.S. has made me increasingly aware of the disadvantaged position developing countries hold as far as global exchange of education is concerned. I am cognizant of the issuance of the oftentimes unwarranted travel advisories by the U.S. government to developing countries, which have affected U.S. student travel to some of those countries, including Kenya. Besides, I am not lost on the negative perceptions of a section of the western population about developing countries, especially African nations. Images of disease, poverty and insecurity pervade western media. In my search for literature on the experiences of American students in developing countries, I came across blog post that spoke of students’ experiences in such locations in terms that are far from glowing. Because of this knowledge, I might be inclined to be presumptuous and make premature conclusions about how American study abroad participants perceive their experiences in developing countries. This could in turn impact
my interpretation of those experiences. Constant reflection on any presumptions and intently focusing on the participants’ perspectives enabled me reach solid and authentic conclusions about participants’ experiences and growth.

As a researcher I must consciously reflect on biases that I might bring into the research, whether they relate to existing outsider attitudes towards developing nations or my notion of how a study abroad experience changes an individual based on my personal experience. This requires a careful balancing act between subjectivity and objectivity. Maykut & Morehouse (1994) describe the qualitative researcher’s role as perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one’s own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123)

Understanding that my biases, attitudes and perspectives could affect my understanding and interpretation of participant experiences is important because as Sipe and Ghiso (2004) advise ‒ unpacking our positioning makes clear the lenses we are drawing on as we grapple with our data and relate to participants at our site” (p. 474). Consequently, I embrace this research journey well informed of the importance of bracketing in mitigating the effects of bias which might jeopardize the credibility and validity of the study.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodological approach adopted for this study. I have provided a detailed description of the participant selection, the methods of
data collection, procedures use in data analysis and a reflexivity statement with regard to this research study. This study seeks to understand the experiences of U.S. study abroad participants in intercultural contexts. By investigating these experiences and how they impact two central outcomes of higher education: intercultural and global competence, the study hopes to contribute a unique perspective on the learning process and the factors that influence the process with regard to study abroad in culturally distant countries. This study makes significant contribution to fairly neglected area of research in terms of theory and practice. It is considered timely in the light of the concerted efforts at both the national and institutional levels to expand programs to these regions.
Chapter 4: Participant Synopses

In this chapter, I present the synopses of each of the 12 study abroad students who participated in this study. Participants in this study were U.S. undergraduates who studied abroad in three African countries, namely South Africa, Botswana and Tanzania for periods ranging from 2 to 6 weeks. The average age of the participants was 20.4 years. 8 participants self-identified as Caucasian, 2 as African American, 1 as Nigerian American and 1 as Latina/Hispanic. The 12 participants were drawn from two public universities and different programs including Nursing, Business Studies and International Studies. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants‘ demographics.

Vickie

Vickie was a 21-year old nursing student who identified herself as Caucasian. At the time of the interview, she had just entered her senior year. At the end of her junior year, she studied abroad in Botswana for three weeks. Although it was her first time to study abroad, it was not her first time to travel outside the U.S. Previously she had travelled with her father to the Dominican Republic on a Mission trip where they stayed for one week. Immediately following her education abroad in Botswana, she travelled to China for three weeks through yet another program organized by her Nursing program.

Choosing a study abroad location. Vickie’s choice of Botswana for her education abroad experience was informed by her previous experience travelling abroad as well as the experiences of students who had studied abroad in Botswana. Vickie mentioned that peers who had travelled to Botswana the year before shared their experiences and that had a big influence on her decision to study abroad in Botswana.
Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>College Level</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Duration/ Weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Management Information Systems</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>International Economics</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Sports Mgt &amp; Business Econ.</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Psych/African American Studies</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
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<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josefine</td>
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<td>Hispanic/Latina</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Psychology/Global Studies</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirk</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
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<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
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<td>Botswana</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vickie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Besides, a mission trip to the Dominican Republic had exposed her to the differences that exist between cultures and she wanted to have that experience all over again. Talking about what motivated her to study abroad in Botswana, Vickie said, “They had a group of kids go last year to Botswana and during one of our classes some of the girls came and gave a presentation on the program and why they went and how they thought it was a great experience. That really influenced me. Also, when I was younger—when I was in high school I went to the Dominican Republic with my dad on a mission trip and it really opened my eyes on how America is completely different than other countries just to see the drastic change in people and the environment I just wanted to experience that again.

Although she had had a previous experience abroad in a developing country, she was attracted by the novelty of an African experience as she pointed out, “I was like wow, I’m going to Africa—it was like I’m going to a new continent, I’m going to Africa…. it was like awesome just to say I went to there.”

**Touching lives; making a difference.** Making a difference in the lives of people that she encountered is at the center of Vickie’s career as a nurse. Vickie identified taking care of a family that had been involved in a fire accident as her most meaningful experience in Botswana. The family members, including their infant were being treated in different wards and seeing the pain of the mother not being able to hold her baby made her feel that taking care of the mother as best as she could was her way of contributing to their reunion. She narrated:
So the baby had been burned like this little, I wanna say, 3 or 4 month old. So the whole family had been affected by this and I was in talking and the lady was smiling like nothing’s gonna happen. This innocent little baby had got burned which was terrible. And so I was talking to them and the sister told me how the grandma would take the baby up to the window so the parents could see her and when the mom could make her head turn and turn to the window she can see her daughter. That was really like so emotional for me just knowing that I’m helping make this patient better so that eventually she can be with her daughter. The baby is not allowed inside the hospital because of infections for the baby. That was very a good experience for me, I think.

Vickie viewed her cultural experience as an asset not just for herself but for the patients that she would be working with in future. One of her objectives for studying abroad was to be able to learn about a different culture so that she could apply her new knowledge in her work to make a difference in the lives of patients from different cultures than her own. She explained,

For me it was about understanding the difference in culture because I’ll be a future nurse. Hopefully in a year I might have some of these people as my patients so it is important to understand their different values and what they do at their hospitals so that way I can accommodate them to my patients to make them feel more at home vs a complete change of environment.

This deep concern that Vickie had for her patients was also captured in one of her journal entries. In this entry, she reflected on the danger that she was exposed to while
taking care of HIV-infected patients. Although she was concerned about her own safety, she chose to put the needs of her patients first, reasoning that they deserved the same amount of care and attention that she gave to her patients in the U.S regardless of the health risks involved.

For some reason I am more worried about getting TB than I am about getting HIV. In the states I am extra careful about sticking myself when giving injections, so why would it be any different in Botswana? No matter what, I am going to take the correct precautions in order to not stick myself. So taking care of a patient with HIV should be no different than taking care of a patient with any other illness, they all require the same type of respect and care that I would provide to any other patient. (Journal entry: June 18th, 2015)

**Accessing local culture.** Vickie considered the local population an asset in accessing Tswana culture. She was of the opinion that had her program provided more opportunities to interact with the local culture, they would have gained much more cultural knowledge. She felt that the program had, to a high degree, shielded them from the real cultural experience:

I think it would have been better if we had some community service or they took us to an event that was going on at that time- I don't know how to explain that but so that we're immersed fully in the culture. Just to see how they did things like when we went to dinner and it was just us we didn’t go to dinner with anyone else. Each night we had dinner at the university a couple of times we went out but it would just be our group of people there vs other people from Botswana.
In Vickie’s opinion, the program was so focused on the consulting project that they spent a lot of time on it and did not have opportunities to interact with other students on campus other than those in their group project. This is what she had to say:

In essence we got to talk to the graduate students that lived with us but they were busy, they were studying too so when we did see them we talked to them and then it was like hi, how was your day because we were up early and back late and they were studying so we didn’t see each other very much. It would have been cool to have a Botswana roommate to get more opportunity to talk and share.

**Pondering the American identity.** Interactions with the hosts brought the American identity into focus; Vickie constantly reflected on her identity as an American and questioned some of the hosts’ actions wondering whether their actions were influenced by their identity as Americans. Vickie shared her thoughts saying:

Me and my friends thought that the night there (at the bar) was similar but different vs here in Athens where people just go out to drink but we were enjoying the dancing part and the fun part about it probably because we’re white American whenever we turned around there was someone else that wanted to dance with us. So that was fun too and we got to really connect with those people.

Although Vickie seemed to suggest that the attention they got at the bar helped them connect with the people, she was skeptical about the true intentions of the local people in pursuing friendships with the American students. She felt that their real motivation was for personal gain as she explained:
They’re very caring people like they want to make that relationship with us it was not about I don’t know if it is just because we’re from America that they wanted to make that connection with us. Some of the people wanted us to bring them back with us and stuff like that. It’s understandable, I guess. They wanted to establish that connection so that if they were ever to come to America they’d have one of us-one of us can guide them…”

Perhaps because of an expectation that they would be eating local food, Vickie observed that the food they were served every night was “Americanized” and wondered whether the decision to give them that kind of food was based on their American identity. She said, “I don’t know if the food was Americanized for us-the stuff that we were served every night but it wasn’t like anything like I’m not gonna eat that.” Overall, Vickie read people’s actions through her identity as an American and sometimes concluded that people’s actions were dictated by their recognition of her and her peers’ identity as Americans.

**Communicating in cross-cultural contexts.** Vickie considered successful communication necessary for connecting with the local population as well as in working in cross-cultural contexts. In a few instances, she encountered communication difficulties owing to the lack of a shared language with her patients, which made her feel inadequately prepared to work with them. Describing some of the challenges she encountered while in Botswana, Vickie identified language barrier as one.

The language barrier I mean it wasn’t bad because a lot of people did speak English but we had patients that had no clue what we were saying and I had no
clue what they were saying because they only spoke their native languages so if I'd have it would have been helpful to take a Setswana class or something along those lines so that that way I could have had some sort of basic communication with my patients.

Vickie realized that not having a common language was not the only obstacle to effective communication. She observed that knowledge of English did not always guarantee smooth communication because even when the Batswana spoke English, she found it difficult to understand due to what she described as their “heavy accents”.

I questioned about how the accident occurred. These people can speak English, but their heavy accents make it really difficult to understand. After asking the friend to repeat herself several times, I was finally able to make out that the patient's husband was also involved in the accident. (Journal entry: June 10th, 2014)

As she shared here, she used repetition as a strategy to overcome communication barriers. She also reported having relied on local nurses at the hospital to translate for her when she could not communicate with her patients. She explained:

I needed to find a nurse or a student that did know English and could translate for me. So at the time I always had someone with me or I'd have to go find someone to understand what they were saying or figure out what they needed.

Vickie observed that although there were communication difficulties, the experience it did not take away the value of the interactions stating that “every interaction
was fun and exciting and even when it was hard to communicate with people we tried to put our point across if they did not understand us.”

Rethinking nursing as a global career. Vickie believed that her visit to Botswana changed her ideas about her future career path. Her experience in Botswana challenged her to reconsider expanding her focus from local to global nursing. The main reason she considered this shift was because she wanted to help in countries that had greater need. She said the experience

... just opened my eyes to how fortunate we are here and personally it changed-in nursing I wanted to work in the states and be a nurse here but now I think I wanna do some kind of global nursing because some of those people they need help. People in the United States need help but the diseases that are affecting them are way worse than some of the things that we’re suffering from.

Experiencing novelty. Working as a volunteer at a public hospital in Gaborone, Botswana exposed Vickie to nursing practices that she had not encountered in U.S. hospitals. The American nursing protocol that requires nurses to wear gloves and wash hands after attending to each patient was nonexistent at this hospital. Describing this situation, Vickie said,

In the states it is routine to glove and wash hands between patients. In Princess Marina, soap is a hot commodity. They asked use several times why we washed our hands so much. After we explained our reasoning they said we should stop because they do not have enough funds to buy soap and paper towels. Needless to
This encounter with scarcity of resources and seeing how the local people went around the problem taught Vickie that lack does not necessarily mean incapacitation. She observed that the nurses dealt with the situation with amazing ingenuity.

There are definitely things that they do that we could learn from and things that we do that they need to learn but just like the little things like using the resources that they have when things were not readily available they would find something that they had right next to them and use it. For example a lot of the IVs you like hang and drain it to your body they didn’t have IV poles to actually hang IV bags so they’d take gloves and tie the bags on to the glove and hang the glove from the wall some kind of nail from nearby. So just to realize that it’s not all the time you gonna have all you materials available but you need to make do with what you have. So just like impulse thinking the quick thinking that they had …to be able to apply that to mine.

Vickie’s day at a pediatric clinic opened her eyes to new methods of healthcare education, assessment and therapy. She considered her new knowledge an asset in her own career, noting that she had gained techniques and strategies that she could apply thereafter to her nursing practice. Having extensively described her experience interacting with HIV infected children of different ages at the clinic and observing the different strategies healthcare professionals used to provide HIV/AIDS education, Vickie concluded:
It helped me to realize how important patient education by healthcare professionals truly is. I was able to learn from the residents and supervising doctors' different strategies for assessing these patients and different forms of therapeutic communication that I know I can successfully implement into my own practice. (Journal entry, June 12th, 2014)

**Embracing Tswana culture.** Vickie observed that some Tswana cultural practices differed markedly from those of the U.S. One of the things that impressed her was the welcoming and friendly nature of the Batswana. Reflecting on this, she noted that the Batswana were friendlier than people in the U.S.; she attributed her easy transition to the friendly nature of the local people.

Everyone was very welcoming and sometimes walking around America people have their headphones on and not really excited to talk to you but there everywhere we went people were always talking to us and saying hello and wanting to hear about why we were here and what we were doing. I don't know-I felt at home in Botswana I think just because everyone was so welcoming. Right from the beginning I didn’t really feel like a stranger.

Another notable difference that Vickie picked out was the Tswana concept of time. Vickie observed that unlike in the U.S. where life is fast-paced and schedules are dictated by time, it was not the case in Botswana. Here, the pace was slow and schedules highly flexible. For Vickie, this was a welcome change which she embraced wholeheartedly.
…the people they’re not like—they are very relaxed in terms of time. Like if you have a meeting at noon it could start at like 3 so it was kind of go with the flow which is fine with me. Like I’m ok with that….

**Rejecting given knowledge.** Prior to going to Botswana, Vickie’s perception of Africa was shaped by what she had heard from others and seemed to be limited to stories of war and insecurity. During their orientation, the issue of personal safety was further emphasized; however, being in Botswana reshaped Vickie’s idea of Botswana and Africa in general.

So there in Botswana I didn’t get any negative vibes about fighting or anything like so it did make me realize that Africa is not a bad place, it’s welcoming and it shouldn’t be scary. We were told not leave rooms at night because it’s dangerous unless you have someone with you that you know, so not to travel at night which is anywhere you go through because even here my parents don’t like me out at night without—even when I’m here my mum says I call her until I get all the way home but it’s not a negative environment like people would associate Africa with, I guess.

Neither her health courses nor the pre-departure orientation had equipped Vickie with accurate information on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana. Knowledge of HIV/AIDS acquired from a book their program coordinator had asked them to read prior to departure proved inadequate to explain the HIV/AIDS situation when she got to Botswana. Vickie noted that the book gave the impression that infection was rampant because people practiced irresponsible sexual behavior. She was also under the
impression that not much was being done to curb the epidemic. Being in Botswana and witnessing firsthand the efforts in place to prevent, control and treat HIV/AIDS helped Vickie see how unreliable the information contained in the book was. In her opinion it was distorted and did not represent the Botswana reality:

Because HIV/AIDS is huge epidemic there and we were learning about it and we read that book and they were telling us about how a lot of the people will have affairs and multiple partners and that's how the disease is spread. I didn't really think there was much going into it. I didn't think there was enough education or things going on about it. I just thought it was there and they were not doing anything about it. But really they're doing a lot about it. They are giving the people—they're giving children free medication and always wanting to check up on it.

Rachael

Rachael was a 20-year old female student who identified herself as Caucasian. At the time of the interview, Rachael had just completed her junior year in Communication Sciences and Disorders. She participated in a faculty-led study abroad program in Botswana for three weeks. Prior to her study abroad experience in Botswana, she had only been outside the U.S. once when she and her family went to Canada for two weeks on vacation.

Choosing a study abroad location. Rachael’s participation in the Botswana program was almost accidental. She revealed that Botswana was not her first choice but several factors seemed to have come together to determine it her study abroad destination.
choice. Her first choice location was Scotland but she could not join the program as the trip coincided with her brother's wedding. Then one of her professors recommended her to a director of the program that was going to Botswana and because it was related to her major, considered it as a possibility. The availability of a study abroad scholarship solidified her intention of going to Botswana.

I had been wanting to study abroad and looking at programs. I went to the study abroad office and all the programs that they possibly had I couldn’t go to. One of them was in Scotland but one of my brothers was getting married this summer so I couldn’t skip his wedding. And one of my professors in the college of and Health Sciences suggested me to our program director to go on this trip and there were three other girls, undergrads who were given a chance to go. And this was the only program that was related to my major as well so I really wanted to go and the fact that my professor suggested me for it then I was like yes I definitely want to go… and then I got a scholarship for it which kind of solidified my intention of going.

Experiencing novelty. Rachael expressed shock at how under-resourced Botswana hospitals were compared to American hospitals. Although she expected them not to be up to the standard of American hospitals, she found it difficult to comprehend the abject lack of basic resources in local hospitals. Narrating her experience, she said, We were going to work in healthcare and stuff like that and it really surprised me just how under-resourced they were. I knew going in I didn’t expect them to be like in America but going to the hospitals, they didn’t smell very pleasant which
not all hospitals do any way, but like in the men’s surgical ward it’s just like a big room with 8 beds in it and there is no machine hooked on to anyone. It was just a stand holding the fluid bag and so it was just shocking and it was just- that part just shocked me.

Rachael also observed that the Tswana concept of time was quite different from the U.S. idea of time noting that the American lifestyle was rushed as opposed to the more relaxed Botswana lifestyle. By juxtaposing the two opposing ideas about time, Rachael came to appreciate the merit of a less rushed sense of time.

In Botswana their sense of time is a little more slowed and here in America we are very rushed. There you’re not rushed at all. In Botswana we joked all the time that we’d have tea when we came back because every day at 10 [o’clock], it didn’t matter where we were we had to have tea time and they made sandwiches. They had like cookies and small biscuit things and tea and coffee for us and then lunch time-lunch was always 2 hours. Besides the hospitals, lunch was 2 hours which was crazy to us because lunch can never last 2 hours even when you go out for lunch somewhere. It doesn’t last 2 hours! So that was different for us. We loved tea time though. Like the break and the tea-everyone really liked it. Yeah, just the tea and just how relaxed their sense of time was.

Although disconcerting at first, Rachael quickly adapted to the idea of a slowed lifestyle and identified her new understanding of time as a personal gain. Describing how this new experience had changed her, Rachael said, “Before I’d say may be rushing through
things—I would think about the big picture but I think I try to relax more when it comes to a sense of time and stuff like that.”

Limited access to the internet provided Rachael with an opportunity to reflect on the value of social media in her life. Being deprived of access to social media changed the way she thought of and used technology thereafter. By the time she was able to access social media after several weeks without it, she had developed a different perspective on what should be of concern to people and what should not be; she did not think that the content that people posted on social media was necessary, not having been in a country deprived of many necessities.

And in Botswana the first week in Gaberone we didn’t have good wi-fi. The wi-fi would take like 30 minutes to log onto, it was sporadic it went off at any time and so I wasn’t using Facebook, well I wasn’t using the main social media that I usually use. I was using Facebook when I could to contact my parents because we didn’t have cellphones there either. So I wasn’t using any of that and I got used to it and then when we got to Francistown our hotel had great internet and so I go get on twitter and I started reading through it and I got annoyed. It was like people were talking about all their problems and things like that and it was like it’s not important! You realize it’s not important any more after you like have been in Gaberone for all that time and not having it. It’s just a waste of time.

She shared that this experience had degraded the importance of technology in her life which was reflected in her new habits in the use of social media after her trip to
Botswana. She said, “I’m still using them but not as much as I did before. It is no longer that important to me.”

**Communicating across cultures.** One of Rachael’s greatest causes of pre-departure anxiety was lack of knowledge of the local language. Although from the orientation sessions she knew that the Batswana spoke English as well, she realized on arrival that not the entire Botswana population spoke English. She identified lack of knowledge of the local language as one of the main challenges she encountered and regretted that she had not prepared herself better in that respect.

The first couple of days we went to Camphill which was where they had a lot of children who did not know English at all, so there was definitely a language barrier there and I think knowing more would have really, really helped a lot there. The other places it wasn’t as bad.

She admitted feeling frustrated when some of the locals initiated conversation in Setswana in spite of their proficiency in English. She considered this an unwelcome challenge from the local people for their inability to speak Setswana. Expressing her frustration, Rachael said,

I wish I had known the language a lot better because people would come up to us and start talking to us like at the markets and usually they would know English as well. But they would start with Setswana to kind of test us but I wish I had known the language a lot better. It was frustrating particularly knowing that they knew English but they chose to speak in their language. I wish I knew a little more.
Later in the interview, she identified “knowing their language” as one of the ways in which she could have engaged with the local culture better.

Being able to communicate effectively meant a lot to Rachael. That was why she associated her most meaningful moment in Botswana with her ability to go beyond the linguistic barriers when working with deaf children. Being able to use American Sign Language which the children had been taught gave her the power of communication that her knowledge of the English language had not. Describing a photograph that she thought captured the essence of her study abroad experience, Rachael said,

This one [photograph] is really important to me because I am interested in sign language and they sign like the American Sign Language. So I was able to sign some things with them so it was like really awesome for me so. I really liked that.

Responding to ambiguity. While in Botswana, Rachael and her peers were caught up in the middle of two conflicting cultures and when they acted in what they considered culturally appropriate according to American norms was considered inappropriate in Botswana cultural context. This became a source of frustration as Rachael described in the following excerpt:

And then one other particular thing I can remember is that we were touring a school and it went from all the way from toddler all the way to vocational school and we were going to the vocational side school and our tour guide was taking us to the classrooms. We’re from America and we walk in quietly so we won’t disturb them and when we left that classroom he told us that we needed to walk in and say hi because it really looks rude by not announcing our presence when we
walked in. So that was kind of surprising. And he was kind of frustrated with us which kind of frustrated me because we didn't know that going in there.

**Happiness**

Happiness was a 21 year old female who self-identified as African American. She was a senior studying Psychology and African American Studies. Happiness studied abroad in South Africa at the end of her junior year for 6 weeks. This was her second trip abroad, having participated in another one-week study abroad program in Costa Rica in her sophomore year.

**Choosing a study abroad location.** The greatest influence for Happiness' choice of a study abroad location was her identity as an African American. Happiness shared that going to an African country was a dream come true as she had always wanted to visit the continent of her heritage:

> It was more so just going because I always wanted to go to Africa in general, just because it's like as an African-American, you know that your family trace line is back to there, so it's we commonly call it the motherland, so it's good to just, I've always wanted to go to the motherland.

But it was not just heritage seeking that Happiness was interested in; she also wanted to gain experience in her chosen career field. As an aspiring counselor, she believed that working and gaining work experience in a different cultural context would equip her with marketable professional skills that would help improve her job prospects in future.
I would say that they [expectations] were exceeded as well, just because, like I said, going in, my only goal was just to, I don’t know, go to the motherland, build a resume, and maybe get some experience underneath my belt in counseling, so I got all of that and more.

Additionally, Happiness was attracted to the program because it was slotted at a time when participation would not disrupt her academic program. As an actively involved student with campus activities, she could not afford to be away for a semester. Being away part of the summer was most convenient for her because besides accumulating a good number of credits within a short time, she would be able to graduate on time.

… another thing for me is, I, with my involvement on campus, I don’t like being away for a semester, so the timeframe had a lot to do with me picking that program, just because it was something that was over the summer that wouldn’t take away from my fall or my spring and then I also got nine credit hours for being there during the summer, and it was only for the second part of the summer, so I was also able to take some credit hours from the beginning part of the summer, so it was just overall a good decision as far as helping me to make sure I’m graduating on time but make sure I have enough credits.

Happiness suggested that developing countries are a good choice of a study abroad experience because it gives one a complete picture of the challenges that these regions of world face. Happiness also considered the overall cost of the program; she suggested it was cheaper to travel to a place in Africa than to any of the more developed countries.
I also try to tell people to study abroad outside of just the typical Paris, London, Japan, like Tokyo, Japan. Just because I feel with those places, they have great cultures but at the same time, you don’t get a chance to really see the impoverished side of things or the places that need help. I think that by me going to Paris would be like more of a vacation. I’d probably be spending all the money out of my pockets just to make ends meet and enjoy my time there, whereas in South Africa, I had plenty of money and I was able to give back.

**Responding to cultural conflict.** A few times, Happiness found herself entangled in conflict of opinion and ideology with people in the host country. She identified her most stressful moment while in South Africa as a time she had a difference of opinion with a young Dutch man. She was upset at his blatant expression of racism.

I feel here in the United States, if a Caucasian American, they might feel some type of way about me because of my skin color, but they don’t say it, whereas when I was there, I actually had an account where a guy was talking about how he feels about you. It’s just he doesn’t understand, he goes, ‘I don’t understand why they’re able to do so much when they didn’t have that, ‘We built this country up,’” thinking like really rooted in this thought that black South Africans had nothing to contribute to South Africa…. Maybe even if they think they did-but it seems like they came in here and said what they wanted, and then they used the natives there to help build it up, and so I feel it just stressed me out….
On a bus tour around Cape Town, Happiness heard this narrative repeated. She shared her frustration at the failure of the Afrikaners to acknowledge the role played by Africans in strengthening South Africa’s economy.

… we did a double-decker bus tour, and it’s like this automated system of the tour, but they talk about, they don’t really ever touch slavery or touch the aspects of just the fact that people were pushed out of their land. They tip-toe around it and say, –Oh, well, you know, the Dutch came in. They built these great highways that make this -these cities so much better,” and so it frustrates you because I feel you can’t teach people to understand how people are hurting unless they know what really happened in their history, and I feel it just frustrated me to see that a lot of people did neglect the role that Africans did play in building up the economy.

Even though Happiness was aware that their program leader did not want them to get into serious and/or controversial political discussions, she was so frustrated by the Afrikaners’ perception of black South Africans that she decided to offer a counter argument.

It was definitely a conversation that carried on, just to try to give him a different perspective of us, –Well, you have to remember that long before Dutch settled, there were people like the Khoisan people, they were vibrant about South Africa, the Khoisan, and I think the two, I don’t want to say this, I don’t want to say the wrong thing, but there were different communities there before the settlements happened, and so I just had to remind him that you have to remember, they helped
with building all this too. They played a role….. I spoke my mind, but at the same time, they were so deeply rooted in what they knew and what they thought they knew that it was just going in circles.

Happiness was frustrated to see that Black South African employees experienced racism but lacked the ability to speak up against it.

I did notice that they were more afraid to speak up about it, so like I said, in the United States, if I go to a restaurant and I feel I’ve been discriminated against, I have no problem with, and not in a rude way, but just saying, “Hey, you served everyone besides me and I feel this might have something to do with my race,” but there, they can’t do that …. I feel like a lot is unfair.

She was also frustrated that she could not do anything to address the unpleasant situation.

One thing I did notice there is just trying to look at the situation, you realize that there are so many problems that it frustrates you to even think of how you could even help or make the situation better, because it’s just too much.

**Rejecting given knowledge.** Prior to her travel to South Africa, her perceptions of the country had largely been shaped by the media which portrayed Africa as ravaged by poverty; therefore, she expected to see poverty all around. However, having been in South Africa for six weeks, she realized that the media was biased in its portrayal of the country

I expected to honestly see just poverty. The only thing I knew about Africa was what the media portrays, and Africa is a place of high need. It’s just the way that America is set up. They only highlight that high need, which I think is important,
but I also think it’s important to recognize the strengths of a country. Going in, I didn’t see those strengths as far as how civilized South Africa was, and so I’m just like, “Oh my gosh, am I even going to have pillows?” So I packed pillows, sheets, I packed like extra coats and different things that I probably—that I found out I didn’t even need when I got there. I was like almost getting ready to pack pots and pans because I wasn’t sure what was going to be there, but I didn’t expect a lot of civilization going into the trip.

Her expectations of the kind of reception she would get once she arrived in South Africa were viewed through the narrow lens of African Americans’ past experiences. She assumed that because the South Africans had suffered invasion from the Dutch, they would project their anger on outsiders like her. However, through close interaction with the local people, through interacting with the local people and seeing how happy they were that in spite of their impoverished state, she was able to redefine her understanding of ‘happiness’.

Another thing that I also didn’t expect was just like kindness-people showing kindness. I didn’t know like because of everybody being in these sad situations if anything, like learning about the effect of apartheid. I’m like, I think of African-Americans now and me as an African-American. I see a lot of rallies and different things are happening just because the community is outraged with what’s been happening to it, so I’m thinking, “Oh, they went through all this. They’re probably not going to be happy with us Americans coming in… so I had a little
bit of hesitation with getting into the culture before going, but definitely going there, a lot changed.

**Experiencing novelty.** Of the many differences between South Africa and the U.S., a few stood out for Happiness. One was the covert expression of racism in South Africa. Happiness offered that although racism is practiced in the U.S., seeing it being expressed so covertly was a new experience for her. Strongly opposed to such practice, Happiness stood in solidarity with the black South Africans at one point identifying herself as one of them. Upset that a young Afrikaner would dismiss black South Africans as passive in the development of the country, she came to their defense and gave him “a different perspective of *us.*”

I feel there is definitely still a lot more discrimination that exists, and not even, I feel a lot of it exists still in the States, but a lot of people aren’t as discreet about it. I feel here in the United States, if a Caucasian American—they might feel some type of way about me because of my skin color, but they don’t say it, whereas when I was there, I actually had an account where a guy was talking about how he feels about you….we were trained before leaving to avoid going into serious conversations. It was definitely a conversation that carried on, just to try to give him a different perspective of *us*;

Exposure to the daily life of South Africans in townships and interaction with people living there provided Happiness with an opportunity to learn the true meaning of *happiness*. Prior to travelling to South Africa, her understanding of happiness was
limited; she thought of happiness as a being dependent on one’s condition of affluence or poverty. However,

Going in, when I first got there—because like I said, one of the first few days we did Nelson Mandela, then we went to the township, I was like really emotional and sad and everything, so at first I went in, —This is like, you know, oh my God, this is so terrible, everything is so bad,” and I was thinking like, —Bad, bad, bad, bad,” but by the time I got a chance to interact with the people in the township and we—I definitely—I understood like, —Okay, this situation is very bad, but these people are actually a lot more happier than people living in mansions,” so it definitely did make me realize that sometimes your situation doesn’t necessarily have to determine your happiness and the joy that exists in your life.

**Making human connections.** In Happiness’s opinion, interaction with the hosts proved to be the most valuable in terms of gaining cultural knowledge. She identified the ordinary, seemingly mundane experiences as being the most meaningful.

One guy, he was telling us how his mom wanted to meet us all, and so we got a chance to meet his mom and his dad. They came to dinner with all of us one night, and so we also got a chance to learn about just the role that siblings play in the household, what he played in the household as a sibling, so pretty much all my interactions just taught me a little bit more about the culture, and so he was just like, —Yeah, I have to take my sister to school.” There it’s perfectly normal for your older sibling to step up and help out your parents…. We also got a chance to learn about how they did have to ride on public transportation, a lot of people
didn’t have- they just don’t have their own car, their access because of the money and how much it cost to get a car….  

On another occasion, she and her teammates had an activity in their itinerary that brought them together with some of the women who had participated in the struggle for South Africa‘s independence. This encounter not only provided her with a historical perspective of apartheid but it also revealed the gap between her expectation that she would encounter people who had become bitter and angry as a result of past oppression, and the reality that in spite of their past suffering, they were compassionate and self-sacrificing. This encounter helped her reconcile her pre-departure expectations and the reality, and challenged her to revise her previous ideas on conditions that encouraged or discouraged positive behavior/feelings:

The part that I would say I liked the most would be the day we spent at the Backpackers, at their red location with the mamas, just because they like to sing songs with us, they cook for us-they call them Mama Africa. One of them shared her story about how she was arrested during the apartheid and the importance of making sure that all of those kids in her township are getting an education, and so that was definitely my favorite experience. It was very humbling, just because it’s like to see that you went, that someone could go through so much and despite of all the anger you think they might have, they still turn around and show compassion and show that they really want to help their community because they don’t want them to ever have to experience what they did.
Natasha

Natasha was a 20 year old junior majoring in Marketing and Management of Information Systems (MIS). Natasha self-identified as Caucasian. Natasha had not studied abroad prior to her travel to Botswana but she reported having visited several European countries and Canada for periods ranging from day trips to over 2 week stay. She had visited Canada, Germany (which is her country of heritage, her mother being German) and France and Austria where, like Canada and Germany, she had travelled with her family on vacation. The Botswana trip was the first one she was taking alone without the company of other family members.

Choosing study abroad location. Natasha’s choice to study abroad in Botswana was based on her perception of the uniqueness of a nontraditional experience. She opined that Botswana would offer a very different cultural experience unlike European countries. She thought that “European culture is not much different than here”; therefore, she wanted a new and different experience.

I chose it because it was a nontraditional study abroad experience so it was one of the many reasons that I did wanna go there. I was really excited, happy they announced to say because I feel like traveling—there’s been—many people get a chance to travel on vacations but not as many people go to Botswana and so I really wanted a unique experience I didn’t think I could get as easily….It was the first time the school did the Botswana site so I thought this was a great new opportunity. They don’t have many other sites like that in more developing countries and that it was in Africa which is a continent that many people don’t get
a chance to travel to other than may be South Africa which can be kind of more like European….I wanted to experience a culture very very different than what I’d seen before-kind of culture shock different.

Natasha also considered the level of impact that their consulting project would have, concluding that their contribution would be recognizable in a small country like Botswana. She was of the opinion that their work would make more economic sense in Botswana than it would in developed countries.

I also liked the idea that Botswana is a smaller country and I thought we would have more impact with our projects because they are small like smaller than other companies in other place-like in Italy or somewhere it would be like a drop in the bucket. Companies would appreciate our consulting work if we could help these smaller companies. So I felt like in our project we would have more significant economic impact.

**Being open-minded.** Having had no prior experience travelling to a developing country, it was difficult for Natasha to set specific expectations and thus chose to remain open to learning whatever her trip presented her with.

Preparing for GCP, I was not quite sure what to expect. I tried not to form many expectations either because I figured I had no way to anticipate what this journey would be like. My expectations that I did have that were met included getting to see and experience a very different culture and becoming friends with new people.
Natasha identified lack of access to the internet as a challenge that she grappled with particularly in researching for her consulting project. She shared the impact that experience had on her saying:

It has made me open minded in view of these challenges and be more trusting … I like to see a lot of facts and I can be like I like to argue my position sometimes and when I got there I realized I didn’t know much about the culture and there was information for me to find online so I was like well I will go and research and then I couldn’t like there’s no sense of data in Botswana like here so my teammates said — this is how it is.” I just have to accept it and I’m like — hope you’re right.”

**Experiencing novelty.** Like many of her peers, Natasha found the local people to be more socially oriented than Americans are. She observed that unlike in the U.S. where people are too busy to create time for casual interaction, the Batswana did not only reach out to strangers but they also created time for socialization.

Culturally people were a lot friendlier than I’m used to and like afterwards I went and stayed for summer in New York and it was like everyone has somewhere to be, everyone has to walk past. There [Gaborone] when we went to the mall it was like people would stop and would like talk to us and like get phone numbers and they were like- ooh they were like friends and we could hang out.

She learned, however, that even though this Tswana nature encouraged greater interaction with the local people, not all interactions were initiated with good intentions; one needed to be cautious as there was the risk of some people taking advantage of this
otherwise positive aspect of Tswana culture to target foreigners for robbery. She observed that

...people are very very friendly but you have to watch out for theft and other things-like we were not allowed to go climb on this hill close to the road because some American students got robbed there so there are risks but also be open and friendly to everybody as you can gain a lot from talking to them.

One of the greatest cultural differences that Natasha noted between the U.S. and Botswana was the concept of time. Although she knew from her orientation sessions that time was conceptualized differently in Botswana, Natasha was unprepared for the degree of fluidity of Tswana time.

We heard about Botswana time-like African time. Before we went over they tried to warned us and then when we got there it was like everything is not like-it is at this time, it's going to end at this time. It's more like a free flowing thing, like going with the flow. So that was kind of new for me because I’m like punctual with everything.

Natasha observed that it was not just time that was more relaxed in Botswana. She noted that Botswana lifestyle was different in other aspects; there were less stringent rules and procedures and their work ethics was different. She, like her peers, struggled to understand this idea especially when applied to the business work environment where they expected their clients to be more involved and prompt.

[a] lot more relaxed like with the time-like Botswana time and not just that but procedure- everything has more strict set of rules over here-this is how this and
this and that is done. Then even while working with our clients we would like ask them —Oh let’s see your financials” and they were like —we didn’t make that one and then we would be like what do you mean?”

Although Natasha takes punctuality seriously, she found the Botswana relaxed approach to life more appealing because in her opinion, it does not only reduce stress levels but also allows people to socialize more. Being in an environment where life was more relaxed was a welcome break from her academic environment which is highly demanding:

[I]t was also good because it kind of takes down the stress level and when you walk around it feels more calm and where everybody is friendly and not rushing around to get somewhere else so you can stop and talk and take time. Here it is like everyone has almost always somewhere to be and especially since I told you I was in New York this summer and even here most of my friends in Business School have schedules that are really packed, like with classes and meetings.

**Responding to ambiguity.** One of the major challenges that Natasha and her peers encountered while consulting for a small business company in Gaborone was ambiguity. She pointed out that the obscurity of their client’s expectations, coupled with their unfamiliarity with Tswana business culture made it difficult for them to define the scope of the consulting project. The resulting constraint was that they spent much more time on the project at the expense of cultural engagement.

… [w]hat happened was that we got very very vague projects from our clients so that we were all struggling trying to get the scope of our project-trying to figure
out what to do with it and we wanted it pulled together nicely but since there was that vagueness, that obscurity with our projects it created more work so we were all working a lot which kind of limited the time to go out and interact and see more of the culture so I guess more clear parameters for the clients and the students have more of a direction and lengthen the time frame.

Natasha felt that the success of their project was constrained by the ambiguity that characterized their interaction with their Botswana client. This problem was compounded by their client’s inability or refusal to share important information on his company’s financial performance or present accurate information when the consultants required it. The discrepancies between the information that the client gave and the information the consultants had gathered added to the ambiguity of the project expectations.

So like I said the financial document they could not keep records as we’re used to so I was like when are we going to get this statement? And like questions we could tell there are times they could not give us straight answers so we could tell they are trying to make their business sound better trying to boost the status…not completely honest. Like when we ask them — *what is this part?*” they were like *Oh it’s really really great*” and I’m like but *If you look at the facts that you guys gave us earlier we shouldn’t be doing.”*

In spite of this unpleasant experience, Natasha used these ambiguous situations as opportunities for learning. Developing trust in her teammates was her main way of dealing with ambiguity. In the absence of online information, she realized that if the project had to be done, then she had trust that whatever information the Botswana
students provided was correct because she had no way of verifying it. In any case, she thought, they belonged here and they knew better.

Following those lines, dealing with such ambiguity caused me to learn to trust my teammates a great deal more. Usually if a teammate would tell me something and I did not trust how accurate it was, I could find it on my own. However if my teammate from UB told me something about business in Botswana or a local custom, I had no information whatsoever in my arsenal to validate it or deny it. I had to put complete trust in what they told me because they lived there; they had spent more time in the area than I had.

**Rejecting given knowledge.** As a Business student, Natasha relied heavily on the internet to gather information about companies and their practices. However, when she arrived in Botswana, she found that this was no longer possible as internet access was limited and unreliable. Adjusting to this new technological environment proved stressful for her:

[The most stressful experience was] getting that project done because as I said I'd get stressed when I could not find information when-as I'm used to. The internet went completely down one day and we were working on google docs-that was very stressful. I have a picture where we all plugged our flash drives on the one wall computer-definitely the project because we wanted to make sure that we did well with it but there was so much like obscurity.

In spite of the stress generated by the lack of internet services, this experience provided a great learning opportunity and transformed the way Natasha viewed her
sources of knowledge. In the absence of what she had hitherto depended on as her most reliable source of knowledge, Natasha had to review what she considered to be reliable sources of knowledge and upon understanding how limited those sources could be, she had to adjust to other knowledge sources:

Conducting business in Botswana was a radically different experience from what I expected or had seen in the past. The first lesson I learned is that I am far too reliant on technology and take it for granted. I was accustomed to being able to find almost anything I needed to with a few searches on the internet or through a database. However, hardly any businesses in the area had a website or any sort of information online. There was no way to find census data such as average income because even if that information were accessible, apparently most citizens prefer not to report their incomes. Without the internet as a crutch, I had lost my main path to information. I learned that we take our access to technology and information greatly for granted. Secondly, this taught me how to deal with ambiguity a great deal and put more faith in what people told me. If my teammates told me something about the culture or city, I could not find anything online to either defend the statement or prove it wrong. When our client described how that industry worked, I had to trust in what he told me because information on the "medical cleaning industry in Botswana" is not a search that will return much useful information, no matter how many different ways you try to phrase it.

Accessing authentic culture. Working on a collaborative project in a business environment, Natasha had the opportunity to interact with students from not only
But also other African countries. She identified this as one of her most meaningful experiences as she was able to learn not only about Tswana culture but also all the other cultures represented in her group. Members of her consulting team included students from Botswana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

I was really lucky I got along very well with my group. There was only one other OU student on my team. Most of the students in the other teams were from Botswana but my team was like-it got people from all over on it because we had a grad student who was from Botswana, we had a guy whose family was originally from Nigeria but they’ve moved to Botswana and the other one was from Zimbabwe and I there was one I think from Lesotho-a very diverse team. We interacted with the students a lot and that was a great cultural thing. Like the one girl from Botswana-one day I forget-they called it the station because it was kind of like a bus station which became a mall and a flea market station-the one girl took us there on the combi after work and she would show us around there. So that was a different piece of Tswana culture so we got to see.

Every day activities also provided learning moments for Natasha. The most profound lesson on cultural difference that she learned was in an ordinary everyday activity. On the last night, all the students came together to play a game of “Catch Phrase”; Natasha observed that in spite of the fact that they came from different cultural backgrounds, they were able to successfully play and enjoy a game which were not necessarily familiar to all the participants. She noted:
There were so many different cultures represented in that room all playing a game based off of context clues. That was a truly meaningful experience. Even though many of us came from different places, we were all enjoying the same game. Sometimes those of us from different cultures understood each other’s clues right away, and other times we had no idea what they meant. Either way we were all having fun together. (Journal entry, June 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2014).

From these two experiences, Natasha learned that similarities draw people together and so do differences. She observed that it did not take elaborate cultural performances to facilitate cultural learning but that simple, genuinely authentic experiences can be powerful in transmitting cultural knowledge. Summarizing the powerful impact these experiences had on her, Natasha said:

The main lesson I learned from this experience was that people from all different cultures are more alike than we are different. We enjoy many of the same habits and pastimes and we do not need to understand each other’s clues or contexts in a game like catch phrase to have a good time together. While we may be more alike than we are different, our differences can be a source of bonding and fun for us. This will affect my behavior towards new experiences in the future because I will appreciate the smaller ways of bonding more. You don’t need a fancy time with bells and whistles and great shows of culture to appreciate each other’s backgrounds. (Journal entry, June 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2014)
Communicating across cultures. Natasha reported that while working on their business consulting project, communication was sometimes hampered by a language barrier and difference in learning approaches.

Sometimes we had difficulty communicating with one teammate since their English was broken, and sometimes we had to stop and explain what we were talking about or how we had learned to do things. Sometimes the UB students would want to take an approach that we had been taught against so we would explain the argument for each side of the issue to each other.

Natasha reported having gained a better understanding about working with teams in an intercultural environment. Particularly, she learned that identifying and harnessing individual strengths when working with a diverse team is a prerequisite to successful completion of tasks. She also reported having developed better communication skills as well as managing challenges when working in a team.

I am proud of the understanding I believe I have gained of handling issues and challenges when working in teams. I’ve learned better communication skills, dealing with cultural differences, and how to leverage our unique strengths. Delegating tasks became simpler as the project went on because we all recognized when one of our teammates knew a certain topic especially well. I’ve also learned how important bonding and developing a team friendship is. It makes the work more enjoyable and alleviates each other’s stress levels.

While it was easier to get around the problem of broken English and different learning approaches, it was much harder to get around the language barriers while
interacting with people outside of the college environment. Natasha’s lack of knowledge of the local language and the hosts’ lack of knowledge of English constrained communication between them. Explaining that she did not initiate much conversation outside of the campus environment, Natasha said, “I noticed it was difficult because when you got away from campus Setswana was much more predominant. So farther from college there was more of a language barrier, so that became an obstacle to having conversations with some locals.”

Owing to these difficulties, Natasha concluded that knowledge of the local language would have been important in connecting with the local people better. She noted that when she and her peers used the little Setswana they had learned, people would become very friendly” and it also “helped you get around pretty well.”

**Adapting to new culture.** Besides the professional and cultural knowledge that Natasha acquired during her brief stay abroad, she reported having had personal gains from the experience. Natasha reported that she had become more open minded and trusting as a result of some of her experiences abroad, particularly those that were most challenging.

It has made me open minded in view of these challenges and be more trusting. I like to see a lot of facts and I can be like-I like to argue my position sometimes and when I got there I realized I didn’t know much about the culture and there was information for me to find online. So I was like well I will go and research and then I couldn’t like—there’s no sense of data in Botswana like here so my
teammates said —— this is how it is.” I just have to accept it and I’m like — hope you’re right.”

She also learned how to respond to and be comfortable with cultural difference. Although she admits to having struggled to process the difference when working with her diverse team, she appreciated that difference can be a source of team strength and provide cultural learning.

I had an especially diverse team; everyone on the team except for [name of American student] and me were from different countries. I quickly saw that everyone had a different research, writing, and presentation style as well. At first I had to remind myself constantly that just because their way of doing things was different from my own did not mean that it was wrong. After all it was a multicultural experience, if we all did everything the same way none of us would have learned so much. In the future, I am confident that I will be a more trusting teammate that is appreciative of differences among the team because of this project.

Kirk

Kirk was a 21 year old senior who identified himself as African American. At the time of study abroad in the summer, he had just completed his junior year as a nursing major. He studied abroad in Botswana for three weeks. Kirk had not studied abroad before but he lived abroad in England with his family until the age of 6 when the family moved to the United States. He mentioned that he had experienced a lot of local travel across most of the continental United States.
**Choosing a study abroad location.** Kirk’s choice of Botswana as the location of her education abroad was partly influenced by her mother’s previous visit to Mozambique, Africa. She had described it as “a life-changing experience” and he too wanted a similar experience. He also relied on past participants’ positive testimonials.

Well, my mother she’s in the military. And she was actually in Mozambique …I believe for a couple of months and she said the experience changed her life and I wanted to follow in her footsteps and see everything she experienced that’s why I chose Botswana. …

Like his peers, Kirk was seeking novel experiences. Particularly, since he had only heard about HIV/AIDS in his classes, he wanted to have a better understanding of the disease and its impact on the Tswana community. He was also curious about the country which had gained the reputation as one of the fastest developing African country.

I have travelled a lot in my whole life and I just like new experiences and such so I just wanted to get that experience, I guess. Also, the fact that it is also a developing country and Botswana is on the come up like they are developing pretty quickly and wanted to see how the social structure is going on over there, the effect of HIV/AIDS in the area because I haven’t seen anything like that. Just like how many people have the disease and how it affects every day life and how it affects these communities. You don’t see much of that here especially of something as terrible as HIV can be. So I think it was kind of me wanting to learn and be immersed in that kind of environment.
**Experiencing novelty.** Among the many new experiences that Kirk had, one that stood out was the difference between American and Botswana hospitals in terms of resources. Kirk expressed shock at the level of need at the hospital where he worked as a volunteer burse.

There are some of the best hospitals that I’ve had clinicals in the U.S. with. But this one, the hallways are outside, you couldn’t find hand sanitizer, it was hard to find soap, the patients were kind of all over the place because they were over booked. So they had patients lying on the floor, of course on a bed but it’s just that people were so crowded and crammed together.

Kirk expressed sympathy for nurses at the hospital and even though the hospital was unhygienic, he absolved them form blame arguing that it was beyond their ability to keep it clean with the state of understaffing that he witnessed.

The hospital, it was something I’ve not seen before, I mean you can look all around the United States here and not see some of the things I saw over there like they were short-staffed they were…. So there was one nurse for every 8-10 patients and it was very difficult for them because they had so many people so many things to deal with that they couldn’t take care of those smaller details like hygiene or making sure everyone is ok like we do here because like here you have two nurses for every three four patients. It was just, it was not their fault, it was just that they were understaffed and they needed help with that.

Kirk had difficulty understanding how nurses managed to work under such poor conditions but acknowledged their resourcefulness: I was just awestruck and didn’t
know how they operate-how they are doing it. They were doing with what they had. They were doing a fair job of it.” Comparing the state of U.S. and Botswana hospitals, both sitting at extreme ends of economic divide helped Kirk appreciate the work the nurses were doing in spite of the severe lack of resources.

Kirk reported that this experience was going to impact how he practiced nursing in future. He observed that unlike in the U.S., nurses at the hospital provided care to patients without making reference to the patient’s medical history. This got him to reflect on how much he took for granted the availability of patients’ medical history, admitting that he made reference to them in a the superficial manner. That the nurses had to make do without a patient’s history reminded him of the importance of such documents in medical practice. As opposed to his approach where he is more interested in offering curative solutions, Kirk said that he would pay more attention to preventative options informed by patients’ medical history.

Since I’ve been back I haven’t really practiced nursing but thinking about disease and the patient as a whole I feel like I derived from Botswana like there you got a snippet of their medical problems, like you don’t have a complete history of the patient like we have here and so now when I see patients’ charts and everything about them since they were ten years old I think it helps me holistically in medicine. I didn’t think of that before like last year I’d go –Oh you’re here with pneumonia? Then let’s just think about pneumonia.” Now I’m gonna think about what caused you to catch pneumonia, and how can we stop it from happening
again. So basically going to the heart of the problem as opposed to just fixing the problem and that’s it.

Encountering HIV/AIDS patients was a heartbreaking experience for Kirk and to think how pervasive it was was overwhelming. His sense of helplessness is captured in this reflection:

AIDs is a crazy disease. It can and seemingly has affected every type of person you can think of. I mean you have the sick dying old man in the hospital with HIV, but when you see a mother (infected) with an infected child or a couple 12 year old seemingly normal boys, it makes you feel something, and it is unexplainable, you want to cry, you want to help or sometimes just sit there speechless, not understanding that the illness that the person is carrying in front of you has changed countless lives and taken many more (Journal entry: 12/6/14)

It was all the more painful for Kirk to see the effect of HIV/AIDS on an infected young boy whose parents had died of the disease. He tried to understand the gravity of being sick and not having parents through the eyes of a big brother who had younger siblings, admitting that the situation was difficult to comprehend. The intensity with which he experienced the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS was captured in a journal entry which read:

[Name of patient]. I’ll never forget him. 13 years old, seemingly great kid. I never cry, but today I was close. [Name of patient] got great grades at school he was in. They call it Form 1…. Dr. [name of doctor] asked him if his parents were at the clinic, to which he replied, “No, my parents are dead.” That struck a nerve, I had
to turn around and wipe my eyes and compose myself. I don’t know what it was. I cannot imagine 13 and no parents. All I could picture was [name of participant’s sibling] and [name of another sibling]. He said it so nonchalantly, like it was nothing. I can’t imagine what he had been through (Journal entry: June 12th, 2014).

The Tswana concept of time was new to Kirk. Although he was tolerant of his peers being a few minutes late, he was critical of the relaxed manner in which the Batswana conducted serious formal events. He disapproved of people showing up late at formal events and not being apologetic about it.

No one was in a hurry to do anything. Our joke was like yeah we have a meeting at 3 but don’t worry, it is Botswana time so we could show up 15 or 20 minutes late and still be on time. We had a couple of speakers from Botswana who would come in and talk to us and they would say we gonna be there at 4 o’clock or 4:30 and show up at 5 thinking nothing was wrong and they’d go hey everyone and ask why are you all here already? What is going on?

Once Kirk learned that the idea of time was generally accepted, he found it easier to adjust to it. He shared how his attitude had changed: “It was almost refreshing because no-one was uptight about it. It was generally accepted. I’m sure some people might have felt like we were wasting time but I enjoyed it, I enjoyed that. I was like –Wow this is something new.”

**Communicating across cultural contexts.** Kirk expressed that he had encountered a language barrier while volunteering at a local hospital. Although he had
tried to teach himself basic Setswana prior to departure, he found this was inadequate to facilitate communication with his patients.

One of the biggest things I realized was the identification bands so they didn’t have anything in terms identification of patients-like when I was trying to look for a patient there was also a problem of language barrier so I couldn’t even find who I was supposed to be attending to half of the time.

To overcome this challenge, Kirk took it upon himself to pick up a little Setswana to help with simple conversation, particularly with his patients. He said,

I learned enough to say hi and ask simple questions. I started to be able to ask if they are in pain like how to ask if there is anything I can do to help them. It was tough though. It was kind of very broken but I could get the point across.

In addition to being a tool of communication, Kirk considered the ability to speak the local language as a symbol of respect for the speakers of the language. Talking about his pre-departure preparation, Kirk said:

I tried on my own to learn a bit of the language because I wanted to be able to at least communicate with them even though English is their secondary language I thought it would be more respectful to use their language like I’m going to another country I’m not gonna use my language.

Although language could be used for positive impact, it was also isolating. Kirk felt left out when people spoke Setswana in his presence and not knowing what they were saying made him more self-conscious of his vulnerable position where people could be possibly be talking about him without his knowledge.
And again hearing people speak a different language one where when they are speaking fast I have no idea what they are talking about or what they are saying about me—it brings a bit of self-consciousness that makes you think are they talking about me, like what’s going on, like this is an awkward position.

He suggested that pre-departure preparation with the language would be most helpful for students going on a similar program: “Maybe if you wanna prepare them with the language better, if you wanna give them some Setswana lessons like that but there really nothing else that you can do unless you’re seeing it for yourself.”

**Pondering American and other identities.** While in Botswana, Kirk was constantly aware of his ‘outsider’ identity because of his skin tone which matched neither that of his White peers nor that of the typical Batswana. But what he did not anticipate was that he would be assigned an identity as the local people tried to understand his identity. They referred to him as a ‘colored’, a term that is used in Southern Africa to describe children of mixed race between blacks and the Dutch. He understood that in assigning him that particular identity, they were only trying to make sense of who he was; therefore, he embraced it without taking offence.

But it was also interesting to see like how I was perceived like there weren’t many people of my skin tone there, there were a lot of darker people. I just didn’t know how I would be received. I was referred to as-what was it—‘colored’ and I just thought it was so interesting that I was referred to as a colored and people were like—yeah you look—you’d be like a second or third generation colored and I had never really thought about it like that. And I was like yeah, I guess I am, aren’t I?
They were just trying to understand my identity since I was different than them as they had much darker skin and the other students I was with were way more light.

Kirk had difficulty making sense of the friendly nature of the Batswana; in an attempt to gain understanding of this cultural behavior, he reasoned that there had to be a hidden motive behind it. He speculated that they thought of him as a benefactor from whom they can get donations.

I can't read people here. At face value everyone seems nice, but I can't help to think that there are hidden motives behind these friendships as I said earlier everyone wants something. [Name of another student] was asked for her phone today, I just can't wrap my mind around it. Each nursing student wanted things, some were truly grateful and others just seemed to want to talk to us for individual gain. And then there is a patient I gave my watch to. I had not spoken to him for long before he asked for it. After I told him I'd give it to him before I left, he remembered my name and my promise. He claimed to want the watch to always remember me by” Journal entry: June 18th, 2014).

Evidently, Kirk had travelled to Botswana with the notion that the local people would be expecting handouts from them. He said, “I expected them to be-to think like look at all these Americans and they’ve got money and everyone expecting that these are rich people these rich tourists and be able to hand out everything we had.” This speculation might have shaped Kirk’s interactions with the hosts. He treated their expression of interest in friendship with suspicion and questioned their intentions of pursuing friendship with him. Kirk adopted the identity that he imagined the local people
had assigned him. He justified his adoption of the benefactor identity saying that he had
gone to Botswana willing to “give up a lot.” In one of his journal entries, Kirk reflected
on his role as an American who is expected to come to the aid of the poor Batswana:

…everyone looks for “handouts” or for anything you have to offer. I won’t refuse;
I came willing to give up a lot. It is just eye-opening how many people seem to
need so much. But their need and desires are little things such as a patient wanting
my watch, or nursing students pushing for my scrubs. We are looked at as if we
are some foreign gods of money by some (Journal entry: June 11th, 2014).

**Rejecting given knowledge.** Kirk’s perceptions of Botswana were partly shaped
by “what we are taught or spoken about about Africa” and so his image of Botswana was
that of an impoverished, uncivilized country. However, through his own experience, he
realized that that narrative did not hold, acknowledging that it is weaved out of ignorance
of the real situation. The sources he had relied on hitherto had not offered accurate
information about Africa in all respects.

Sad to say there’s a level of ignorance that I think that comes with that. I expected
to see more uncivilized areas I mean like huts and what not because that is all
we’re told over here but again we were in the city and on the outskirts there was
that general connotation of Africa where there were just these ten shacks and
these barely built fences just to keep livestock and other animals out. So there was
definitely some confirmation of some things that we’re taught or spoken about
about Africa but a lot of that is not correct whatsoever.
He also shared that unlike many Americans who had not had a chance to travel, he was better informed about HIV/AIDS and how it is transmitted. Kirk acknowledged the limitation of the knowledge he had about HIV/AIDS transmission prior to studying abroad in Botswana but noted that he was better informed about the different ways that the disease is spread than a lot of Americans.

Definitely I think I have a different perspective on HIV/AIDS than a lot of people here in the United States just because I have been to Botswana and I realized that it’s not just your decision. It’s not like you had unprotected sex or something like that but a lot of people were born with it. Actually there was this case of this gentleman’s son. He had surgery and if I’m taking his word for it he said his son acquired HIV through transfusion. And so that’s another thing that I didn’t even think of as a way of transmission that you can just get it from unsanitary surgical situations.

**Decreasing ethnocentrism.** Although Kirk considered himself comfortable with other cultures, he reported that going to Botswana had raised his comfort level and put him in a better position in terms of responding to different others.

I understand more where people are coming from as a result of going to Botswana and not automatically assuming that this person does this, or that person does that. Looking at their past seeing where they’re coming from and understanding that portion of it more…. To be able to connect with someone and listen to what they have to say. I think it’s me trying to see where they are coming from than me trying to make them see where I’m coming from.
Kirk also felt that going to Botswana had prepared him for better interaction with other cultures, regardless of what part of the world he would visit.

I think I would be more comfortable to study abroad anywhere else again because I already have had an experience I’d know what to expect you know the kind of looks I’d get, how to communicate with someone just try to find general things that you guys can meet in the middle on and help communication out. I feel like I can go to a lot of places in the world now and have an easier transition. Not necessarily Africa it can be anywhere I feel like I’d just be able to transition better than someone who has not had that experience outside of the United States.

**Developing a global outlook.** Going to Botswana had made Kirk realize that there is much more to visiting another country than just being physically present. It involved the mind too; it meant having a willingness to see beyond one’s national boundaries and recognizing the existence of a larger community than one’s own.

I’m sure there are people who go there [abroad] and decide this is not how I want to think about things like it’s not for them, they wanna stay in the United States and just think about the United States but there are other people who are like yeah there is a lot more out there than what we’re experiencing here. I think it’s an eye opener.

Studying abroad in Botswana was a formative life experience for Kirk. He reported that after coming from Botswana, he had developed keen interest in global affairs and was more attentive to global problems and issues.
After Botswana, I'm more interested in what’s going on around the world… looking at the bigger picture of what's going on around the world as opposed to just where I come from, thinking about worldly problems outside of the United States because I've realized that well I don’t watch the news much but now I look at news much more elsewhere as opposed to strictly what is going on in the United States. Like I'm trying to follow what's going on and keep up with Botswana.

Julie

Julie was a 20 year old junior studying Psychology and Global Studies of Africa. She identifies herself as Caucasian. At the end of her sophomore year, she studied abroad in Port Elizabeth, South Africa for five weeks. Julie had not studied abroad before neither had she travelled outside the U.S. prior to her travel to SA. She mentioned that her interest in South Africa dated back to middle school where she first did a project on Nelson Mandela and then later in high school she did a project on the country.

Choosing a study abroad location. Julie chose to study abroad in South Africa out of curiosity. She wanted to see how it's been twenty years after apartheid was abolished. She alsoe wanted to see the relations within the South African Community.” Her decision was also based on advice from her academic advisor for her Global Studies major. She introduced the program to her, helping her understand how it related to her two majors in Global studies and Psychology. Julie also shared that the volunteerism aspect of the program appealed to her. –The volunteering aspect most definitely played into my decision. We got to choose where to volunteer and it was an HIV/AIDs program.
We did a report and a presentation about an aspect of HIV and AIDs.” Additionally, Julie wanted to have an authentic cultural experience where she would work with the disadvantaged in society and the program was going to help her achieve her objective. She explained, “I wanted to work at the lower levels, not just have the touristy experience that some of the study abroad programs have.”

Owing to her limited knowledge of the country, Julie could not form any expectations because “it was just so far out of my imagination. I couldn’t imagine what would happen.” She avoided making presumptions on what she would find and chose to keep an open mind choosing instead to focus on her learning objectives for the study. She said, “I tried to have an open mind whatever I was going into. I was more interested to see how people relate with each other within the community.”

**Responding to cultural conflict.** One of the major challenges that Julie encountered while in South Africa was the apparent lack of labor regulations to guide workers’ compensation, which in her opinion, left workers vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. She thought it unfair for employees to be required to share their tips with the employer in view of the low wages they got.

The working class is not being treated as well as working class people should be treated. The people I connected with and my other girls that went with me connected with—we made friends with the receptionist and then a couple other waiters at a restaurant that we would go to eat. They would talk about how much, not necessarily the amount that they got paid, but compared with some of their friends that do different work, they were not being paid as much. They talked
about having to pay 10% of their tips back to the owner of the restaurant. I'm like "That's not how that works." Just different aspects like that. I don't think they have a minimum wage is, I didn't ask what the minimum wage was.”

Most disturbing for Julie was the existence of servants in White households. Narrating her most stressful experience during the study, Julie talked about her group’s visit to an Afrikaner’s farm, an experience she described as shocking and sickening. She was not only disturbed by the existence of servants on the Afrikaner’s farm but was also disgusted by their sense of self-importance that came with their position as masters.

The hosts were not only obnoxious but also exploitative because of their advantaged position. What I didn't enjoy as much was the farmers' visit experience but I'm glad that it happened…. We went from the township to an Afrikaner's farm which was very high end…. I was shocked. I was sick to the point that I couldn’t speak…. I was just shocked at what they kept saying. The first thing that she said, the woman, it was a couple. The male was the main farmer and the woman was kind of like the in-house, helped a little bit with the farm as well. The first thing that she said to us when we got off the bus was that "We're not a bed and breakfast. You're coming into my home, you have to respect us. This is so just so you be respectful to us." But it was in a very condescending tone. I'm like "Oh, thanks. I'm so welcome." That was interesting. Then they just rushed us because we were late. We scarfed down lunch and then we go into her kitchen to put dishes away and there's two women in matching uniforms of color washing the dishes. I think that was the first "Oh my gosh, are you kidding me
right now." I just came from this beautiful place [the township] and then now! I haven't seen servants or anything like that in the States as much, I guess. It's not open and in front of my face like where I come from.

Julie withdrew from the situation choosing to remain silent for the entire time that they were visiting. Talking about her response to the situation, Julie said, "I just sat there- I didn't have to think or speak at all." She felt that even after she had had time to process the entire experience, she would have responded in similar manner: "I would like to respond differently or not like speaking and shutting down but I don't think that I would speak up. It's in their home. I just don't think I would."

Also, Julie was baffled at the existence of racial tensions in South Africa. Coming from what she described as community that is highly integrated where race has not been an issue, she found it "strange" that racism was an open practice in South Africa in spite of the end to apartheid. Reflecting on the difference in race relations between South Africa and her hometown, Julie said,

Even though apartheid is over, there is definitely a race aspect within the society and it's sad that it still happened. The town that I come from is very integrated from my opinion and so I don't see race as something that is an issue when it comes into any aspect. Over there, it definitely was. Even if it was subconscious, if they asked about someone, it's like first thing they would ask about them is what the color of their skin was. It was always brought up within conversations, it was strange.
Communication across cultures. Although use of English facilitated communication with the local people, there were times that accents came in the way of effective communication. Julie narrated an incident at a local restaurant to demonstrate some of the communication challenges she and her peers grappled with.

One time in a restaurant there was a waitress that couldn't understand what we were saying at one point. One of my friends she ordered something but I didn't understand what she was saying at first and then I finally understood. She wanted bacon and then didn't want bacon but something with bacon. She didn't get bacon and so she asked for bacon. Then she, the waiter is like "Oh, that's fine." So she goes back but then the manager comes up and is like "I'm sorry about our accent, she doesn't understand English as well." And it's like it just rubbed us wrong. It just wasn't necessary for her to come and bash her that way to us. She knew that from our accents that we were not from around there ….

Also at the crèche where she volunteered to work with children, she had difficulty communicating with one of the caregivers because she did not know English. To resolve the challenge, Julie resorted to using body language to connect with her and to give her reassurance of her commitment to work with her.

We talked to Joyce more because they [other mothers] were with the younger children and so we didn't talk as much. That's where the language barrier was-the woman who was with the babies-the ones who couldn't walk. She could barely speak English but she would hand these children over to use and we would be like "Oh, children!" That's how we would connect. I'd give her hugs and talk to her,
touch her and we would laugh and giggle at what he babies would do and stuff like that. Just have these connections that way, more of a body language way. When I get there I'd give her a hug just to know that I was there and working together and different things like that.

Evidently, Julie could not always communicate with the children that she worked with and she needed a translator at such times. Also, she made effort to pick up the local language from the children when she had the opportunity to. She felt that using the local language created a stronger bond between her and the children.

Since I wasn’t feeling all too great to begin with I just hung out and told the kids that today was their day to teach me. We sat down outside and I would just ask how to say things in isiXhosa and then I would repeat the sayings to kids that would walk by. The smiles I received were beautiful. I felt so connected and that I was gaining more respect from them, than I had already received. It was a very simple day, but it had amazing results. Linathi in particular was having a great time. She was the translator for most of the smaller children and I feel like we really connected. (Journal entry: August 8th, 2014)

**Developing interpersonal relationships.** Julie’s visit to South Africa gave her an opportunity to reflect on her interpersonal relationships and she discovered that her existing relationships were weak and temporal. She resolved to create healthier relationships and she viewed the places that her education will take her as fertile grounds for nurturing such relationships.
I was super independent this summer and I have come to many realizations as to who is actually in my life, permanently, and it is not a lot of people at all. I struggled with it earlier in the summer, but it is life and I will move on and grow stronger and create relationships where those people will be in my life permanently, no matter the circumstances. I am excited for where my education at an institution will take me and I am even more excited to where my education outside an institution will take me. I can’t wait. (Journal entry: 7/25/14)

This deep need for satisfying relationships set Julie off on a search for an intimate relationship. Previously, she had doubted her ability to create concrete relationships but after meeting a young South African man with whom she started a romantic relationship, her doubts were dispelled. This brought back her confidence and she felt that she was in a better place as far as her interpersonal relationships were concerned.

The long car rides to and from Cape Town I was able to have some awesome conversations with [names of other students] about some of the people. Mainly about someone I had just met before we went to the Farmer's. His name is Sicelo. We are meeting up later tonight (me, him, [names of students], and some of his friends) and I am more than excited. I really like him and it is very strange the connection we have. I am young and I think that is one thing that I have really grasped onto during this trip. What I mean by that is that since I was 16 I have felt 5 years older than my actual age. It hit me that I am only 20 years old. That is so freaking young. This is relevant because my dating life has been non-existent. I have had one long-term boyfriend (2 months) and other than that there has been
casual dating and such, but nothing concrete. I thought there was something
—wrong” with me and very negative about the situation. Talking to Sicelo though,
is something that I have never encountered before. Our connection is so strong
and so real, it feels like it is a dream and that I am crazy. I am not going to have
that scare me away though. (Journal entry: August 3, 2015)

The fact that there seemed to be a strong connection between Julie and her new
friend seemed to validate her as being normal, contrary to her own perception of
inadequacy in establishing intimate relationships. In spite of that, she was apprehensive
about the future of their relationship considering the distance but she hoped that
technology would facilitate communication.

Also, I am thinking about returning [to South Africa] over winter break. I don’t
know exactly how I am going to do this, but I just want to come back and see
Sicelo. I am selfish, but I really miss him already. I have never felt so safe and I
am going to miss that a lot. Technology is beautiful though, but still.

Julie’s concern about healthy interpersonal relationships was expressed when she
expressed fears that the people she had met and made friends with at the Backpackers
would perceive her negatively if they discovered that she was not religious. She felt that
such disclosure would threaten the relationship they already shared.

I do have to make a note on how it kinda sucked to know that if [name of South
African friend] or Mama A or any of the Mamas for that matter knew that I was
not religious they would probably be disappointed or say that God will find me
eventually, or give pity on me or say that I am young and will be religious soon
enough or that I just haven’t found Him yet. I am a very very unique person. I do not like at all to talk about religion with others because my beliefs upset many. But I am very curious to see if they could tell I am not religious. That is something that I have lived with the majority of my life, though, but I do have to say it just sucks that they would probably look at me differently if they knew for sure. (Journal entry: July 25th, 2014)

**Accessing local culture.** Volunteerism gave Julie the best opportunity to engage with the people and the local culture. She cited some of her most meaningful moments in South Africa as those she had at the Creche where she worked with children as a volunteer. Working at the Creche, Julie had an opportunity to learn about the imbalances in the South African educational system. While helping children with their homework, she noted the difference in the quality of work from the children in the townships and those in schools outside of the township.

Once the older kids got back from school, we would work our homework and there'd be English and Math. Third grade I think was the oldest that was there all the way down to kindergarten which was grade R in their system. It was interesting to see and not all kids came from the same school. So it was interesting to see the township school compared to the school that was a couple of miles away outside of the township and to see the difference in the work that they were doing. Even though the kids in the townships do not do quality work, they all love to learn and wanted to learn so much. It was just so really beautiful.
In addition, this experience contributed to the clarification of her career goals. Julie shared about her restless in the search of what she really wanted to do in life. For a while, she did not know exactly what she wanted but after going to South Africa, she confirmed that she wanted to work with children in Africa.

I started out in the visual communications department here at the university, doing scripts and informational graphics and publication design. Then I switched over to psychology and then I added Swahili as a language and I fell in love with that type of culture. And then I added the global studies of Africa major on top of my Psychology major and this is kind of where I am. I did that really fast so I didn't know if I was in love with what I was learning and what I was taking class-wise. I just more or less secured the answer that I was looking for, what I want to do for the rest of my life…. I want to “grow up” and be a psychologist (counseling psychologist) and work with children in East, Central, and Southern Africa and have a specialization in Art Therapy. That is my explanation sentence of who I want to be and before this trip it was just words and a direction that I was heading in, but now I have gotten a small, very tiny taste of what my future could be in working with people and I want more, more, more. I now have emotions, and visual images of people's faces, locations, home life, food, and survival techniques and I am so hungry (starving even) to learn and experience more. I haven’t even started my placements yet and I know this is what I will be doing for the rest of my life and I just want it to start now. (Journal entry: July 21st, 2014)
Julie identified her interactions with the people she met at the Backpackers as another meaningful experience. Here, she had the opportunity to meet women who had actively participated in the struggle for South Africa’s freedom and who had been incarcerated as a result and she felt privileged to hear firsthand accounts of that historical aspect of South Africa. Besides, her visit here affirmed her interest in working in Africa and took her interest in learning more about African cultures a notch higher.

Being at the Backpackers was the push I needed for a realization that I will probably move and live here once I receive my education at an American institution. I think I already knew this is where I am going to end up but this was the push I needed. I still want to travel Africa and learn all of the different cultures this continent has, but I am thinking that South Africa is going to be my “home base” rather than the United States. I have felt more at home here than I ever had in the place where I was born and even Athens (which is really hard to say). (Journal entry: July 25th, 2014)

Josefine

Josefine was a 21-year-old senior studying International Relations. She identified herself as Hispanic/Latina. She has been in the U.S. since the age of 2. Last summer she studied abroad in Tanzania for 6 weeks. She and her group of 11 other students also travelled to Zanzibar, an island off the Indian Ocean and a semi-autonomous part of Tanzania. It was her first study abroad experience although she had previously travelled to Mexico on vacation for two weeks.
Josefine’s decision to study abroad in Tanzania was influenced by its novelty. First, she felt that unlike most other parts of the world which are accessible because of their use of a familiar language, Africa seemed inaccessible to her and so in her own words she wanted to go — somewhere I’d never been to before, and somewhere that I felt was inaccessible to me.” She was also curious to learn about a continent she knew very little about. The fact that the program had a foreign language component also appealed to her.

I wanted a place where I could learn a new language, somewhere I'd never been before, and somewhere that I felt was inaccessible to me…. I was like if I wanted to go anywhere in Latin America or Central America, even the Caribbean, I feel like I could go in terms of language, if I wanted to go to Brazil I could learn Portuguese a little easily, things like that. If I wanted to go to Europe I think I would be OK, it seems accessible, Asia seems a little more accessible too. The continent, I knew very little about is Africa and would be fascinating since all my education, I want to learn more about this amazing place! Tell me more!”

Not knowing what to expect helped Josefine keep an open mind about Tanzania, its culture and its people. —For me I was like I am ready to have this new experience, I have no idea what to expect, so I left with an open mind.” After her encounter with difference, Josefine concluded that the reason why the things she learned stayed with her was because —I went in with an open mind [which] allowed me to record all of those things in my head.”
Communicating across cultures. Josefine’s smattering knowledge of Swahili served her well as she was able to connect with the local people through simple conversations.

I didn't know any Swahili before going and then once I was there I feel like I picked up enough to know what wanted to eat, know where I needed to go throughout my day. I really miss Swahili. I wish I could speak it here…. Like I said, learning Swahili in general is awesome, and getting a chance to speak it and connect with local population was great, and to practice it too.

Although speaking the local language helped her get around more easily, Josefine reported that because she did not know that language very well, her fear of offending the local people for using culturally inappropriate language inhibited her from initiating conversation with them.

I think it was that I didn't know Swahili well enough and that they maybe didn't know English well enough. It was a language barrier but also the sense of if I say something in Swahili and it's wrong I don't want to offend them…. I don't want to disrespect anybody or things like that. I don't want them to say, "Oh my gosh that American!" It was a language barrier, it was also a sense of I don't want to disrespect you….  

Accessing the local culture. Josefine started gathering cultural knowledge before travelling to Tanzania. Besides the trip logistics, orientation covered discussions on Tanzanian culture and what the students needed to do
We talked about how dressing, especially as a woman, needs to be different, you dress conservatively and things like that. We also talked about where we would literally be living and stuff. In our second orientation was about cultural differences and so the possibility of possibly being called *mzungu* and what that means. They're like, you have to keep going about your day and be like *Habari za leo? Nzuri.* That time they were just like, be open to this experience. We talked a lot about gender dynamics too, especially being a girl….

One of the most effective ways by which Josefine acquired cultural knowledge was through her internship. She shared her experience as an intern at the John Hopkins satellite campus in Dar-es-Salaam, noting that the experience deepened her insights into gender issues and maternal healthcare in Tanzania. She also learned how mobile technology was being leveraged to empower women in taking charge of their own healthcare, which to her was a totally new concept.

I learned about the various programs like *Wazazi Nipendeni* [my parents love me], where mothers get text messages as to what they're going to bring when they're going to deliver like, "Oh do you need your shots?" That for me is awesome because it's a different way to reach women and educate them and leave them empowered, things like that. Here, we use mobile phones for social networks. I had not thought of mobile phones in that way-it's an innovative way to reach women and educate them on their health even in the most remote areas.

Fascinated by the new knowledge, Josefine sought people who would help her learn more about mobile technology. The interactions she had with a Rwandese refugee-
turned-successful businessman with an interest in mobile technology opened up new career possibilities that Josefine had not considered prior to visiting Tanzania. Previously, her interest was in international security but after her experience at the hospital and then meeting the prominent Rwandese businessman, her interest shifted to women, business and development. Describing her most meaningful experiences, she said,

I dove deeper into mobile technology and I got a chance to meet with [name of CEO], He's the CEO of the Mara Group. He's originally from Rwanda. He was a Rwandan refugee. His story is fascinating because he ended up growing this huge business, like from age fifteen and now he has this conglomerate in many states of the African continent which is phenomenal. He's very interested in this idea of mobile technology so I got a chance to really understand what it means for businesses in Africa to use this amazing piece of technology just to empower people. I learned about M-Pesa and things like that which was cool. At some point that also changed my perspective in terms of what I was studying. Here at [college] I do international relations but I focus on security, like international security and things like that. After my experience in Tanzania now, I care about development and business and women. It really changed my perspective on a lot of things.

Besides internship, Josefine thought that interactions with her host family opened up opportunities to learn about the local culture. Besides discussions over dinner, she had a chance to participate in a Tanzanian wedding ceremony which exposed her to a cultural practice that was alien to her: polygamy.
I also got a chance to meet part of my ... My host mom's, not their family, but they hosted a wedding so I went to a bridal shower and that was awesome. It blew my mind in some ways because she was going to be the second wife and I was like, "Oh my gosh." When I got there I was like, "Why am I here? This is crazy to me." Also she looked like Rihanna, she was so pretty and she was so nice. She invited us to the wedding, we got a chance to-she was like, "You need to wear this dress," so I have my dress from that. That was amazing to still have and wear when I want to.

**Staying in the American social bubble.** One of the regrets that Josefine had was that they did not maximize their cultural immersion because of their inability to disentangle themselves from each other. This limited their interaction with the local people, a face that made her appreciate the events that she and her host family had attended.

That's a disappointment because we didn't really get a chance to engage a lot with all the people. We hung out a lot with ourselves and with our TA's and with our professor, but other than that it was very ... Our bajaj friends, the ones we would call and be like, "Hey do you want to hang out with us?" Things like that, or our host families but other than that we didn't really get a chance to interact with that many people. I wish we would have. That's why it was cool when I went to the wedding and saw a Tanzanian wedding that was cool, but I really wished we had gotten the chance to know more people.
Josefine felt that the program organizers could have made this possible by creating opportunities for the visiting students to interact with peers at the local university where they were taking language classes as well as other study abroad students.

They should have taken advantage of the school infrastructure because we were at a university. I am sure there's a Swahili department or some type of social something that could have been organized to meet students. We weren't the only Americans there, or foreigners there, there were students from Princeton University that were there, and then there were, I am thinking some French students that were there too.

They should have taken advantage of the school infrastructure because we were at a university. I am sure there's a Swahili department or some type of social something that could have been organized to meet students. We weren't the only Americans there, or foreigners there. There were students from Princeton University that were there, and then there were, I am thinking some French students that were there too. It couldn't have just been for us, it could have been for everybody and local students and just get to know each other. With the school that would have been really easy to do.

**Rejecting given knowledge.** Prior to going to Tanzania, Josefine’s knowledge of African issues was informed by classroom theories and those shaped her reasoning on urgent needs of the continent and appropriate interventions. She considered that the availability of resources was all that was needed in addressing these needs. However, after being in Tanzania for six weeks, she realized how naïve it was to base her assumptions of economic interventions that would work for Tanzania on classroom
theory. While she previously thought that money was all that was needed to address the country’s economic situation, she realized that more than money, utilizing the human potential, which according to her was abundant, would be more effective. She shared how her assumptions were challenged in the following excerpt:

It [being in Tanzania] opened my eyes a lot more to the theory in classrooms. It's funny because we're in a bubble. We think about all of these problems, issues, theories, and concepts. Prior to going I remember being like, "If I were an MP or the Prime Minister or in charge of any type of political influence in Tanzania what would I do?" Immediately I would funnel money to infrastructure and things like that, when I got there I was like, that is actually really difficult, here are all the challenges. Then it's also the beauty of seeing the human capital potential too, people are phenomenal, they're so hard working. I had an experience, we were on the way to the airport at four in the morning and the markets were getting ready. Oh my gosh, I was like where is this happening? For me I was just so amazed because I remember even asking my TA and she was like, "Yeah I get up at like five." She takes care of her watoto [children].

**Experiencing novelty.** Josefine thought it unusual not to have women in the streets in the evening. This baffled her and in attempt to make meaning of her observation, she realized that the absence of women in the streets at that time could be a revelation of the different roles that women and men play in Tanzania. She thought that this could be attributed to societal expectations that women play a more domestic role.
…when I first got off at the airport I got into a taxi and was going to chuo kikuu and I noticed that there were no women out, it was mostly all men. I was like, where are the women? I want to see the women. It was a lot of men everywhere. It was towards the evening, around four or five. I forgot what that is in Swahili talk. It was towards dinner time. I was surprised to see that. And I thought, —Maybe they’re home making dinner.” The only thing that came to mind was that women here are expected to be home early to cook dinner for their husbands and children. Otherwise how can you explain like that there are no women in the streets at 5 pm?

Like her peers, Josefine was appalled by young men’s display of inappropriate behavior towards her. Narrating her most stressful experience in Tanzania, Josefine revealed,

There were two older than me guys that were being what would be considered here very, very, very inappropriate. Certain comments, I remember one of them was like, "You should just call me husband." I am like, "Absolutely not." He told me that in Swahili and I didn't know what that word meant, but I looked it up in my dictionary and I was like, —No, not cool.”

Upset by the behavior of one, Josefine stood up for herself and spoke out against his unwelcome advances.

For me, I consider myself very vocal and extroverted and slightly sassy so I was able to stand up against that and be like, "This is ridiculous, are you kidding me? No. And I am much younger than you, so absolutely not.” It's supposed to be a
professional setting so that was very stressful for me. I was like wow, this is
crazy.

**Reflecting on cultural difference.** One of the cultural aspects that struck Josefine
as being distinctly different than U.S. culture is the Tanzanian's understanding of time
and how people relate to time. She observed that the pace in Tanzania was slowed
because people did not allow time to dictate their lives unlike in the U.S. where life is fast
paced. She said:

> Time is valued. Time is the servant of the person in Tanzania. In America the
> person is the servant of the time. Everyone is always racing against the clock,
going crazy, basically what happened to me this morning, things like that. I don't
> think that would happen, for example, in Tanzania. People sit down, enjoy meals,
it's a lot more relaxed.

In terms of time, slowing down and time being the servant of the person, I liked
that because it allowed me to look at life differently in terms of enjoying people
and being present instead of always having to worry about what's next or what's
the next thing, you know like the futility of the next thing on my schedule, this is
weird. Now when I plan stuff I am like OK when am I going to do whatever and
live in the moment and not have to be go, go, go.

**Communicating across cultures.** Josefine found that the use of the local
language greatly eased communication with her hosts, helped her and her peers make
connections with the local people.
We went out a lot, the twelve students. We're 20-21, so we're like, "We have to go out and party!" We went out a lot. Getting home at five in the morning we were like, "How are we going to do that?" Using Swahili, people were like, "OK yeah, I won't charge you as much as I would" or it would be like "Oh, rafiki [friend]" - they would give us their number, the drivers and stuff, it was awesome. We would be like, "You're so cool we're going to pay you more anyway." It allowed us to establish friendships with other young students which was really nice.

Josefine considered the use of the local language as serving a greater purpose than just facilitating dialogue between her and the local people. In a way, using it was a way of communicating her respect for them and their culture and a window into the culture of the people:

Like I said, learning Swahili in general is awesome, and getting a chance to speak it and connect with local population was great, and to practice it too….Whenever I could use Swahili I did because I wanted to be able to relate with the people. I really miss it. I wish I could really connect with it…. I also think it adds respect in saying I am here so I am going to speak your language, I am in your home so I want to fully respect being immersed in your culture.

Asked why she did not pursue interactions with the local people, Josefine said that the language might have been a barrier as she was not quite fluent in the local language and she also did not want to say something that would offend the people. She explained: I think it was that I didn't know Swahili well enough and that they maybe didn't know English well enough. It was a language barrier but also the sense of if I say
something in Swahili and it's wrong I don't want to offend them. Or for example, accidentally not saying [foreign language 00:41:56] I don't want to disrespect anybody or things like that. I don't want them to say, "Oh my gosh that American!" It was a language barrier, it was also a sense of I don't want to disrespect you, I don't want to bother you, will you be bothered if I talk to you? Things like that.

**Developing a global orientation.** Josefine’s discussions with the CEO of Mara group also made her aware of how closely connected countries that are in disparate parts of the world are.

… another really meaningful experience I would say was when I got a chance to speak to Ashish Thakkar. That was really cool because it opened my mind to the relationships East Africa has with India and Dubai. I am like –Wow this world is so connected, I am fascinated.” He is Indian, a refugee from Rwanda, lives in Uganda and does a lot of business in Dubai. That was amazing!

Her Tanzania experience also brought to her attention issues of global significance such as international cooperation and the need for countries to come together to address global challenges that different countries face.

It also made me more aware about the greater issues. For example, there was a lot of conversation about the continent as a community and for me that was really cool. Now I think about almost the community in a sense where it's like nations can help each other out. I am processing this as I speak in terms of development and in terms of international cooperation, what are our goals as a global
community? International Studies is my major so this is something I think about a lot, but how can we help each other, especially in terms of trade and infant industries and comparative advantage and helping. How big macro policies affect that one partner and that one person. I am very hyper aware of that now from my experience there.

**Essence**

Essence was a 20-year old junior studying International Economics. She identified herself as Black/African American. Essence participated in a language-based study abroad program in Tanzania in summer 2014 for six weeks. She had pre-departure orientation but reported there was no other form of preparation prior to travelling abroad. Orientation was mainly on travel tips and health. Prior to studying abroad in Tanzania, Essence had travelled to Nigeria at the age of 9 to visit her relatives. She was there for a month. She had also travelled to Canada for a week on family vacation. Essence and her parents came to the U.S. from Nigeria when she was 3 years old.

**Choosing a study abroad location.** Several factors played into Essence’s decision to study abroad in Tanzania: her interest in economic development, to have an African cultural experience that she could compare with her native Nigerian culture, the timing of the program and the fact that the program had an internship component.

So I wanted to study abroad-basically I'm majoring in international economics and then like I'm interested in economic development in, in my particular region is like Africa. So I wanted to study abroad in an African country, not only because of that but because since being Nigerian people are always like talking about
Africa like one place. So I feel like I need to see like another country within the continent, so that I could see how similar or different it is. It's like people, because people like to group it as like one. Monolith. I'm-but because of my major I don't want to study abroad during the semester. So I was looking at summer programs. And tan-, the Tanzanian program is the one summer program that they offer that's within Africa. So I chose that. And they also they also offer like-and it turned a small internship tied in along with the program. So basically I was just, I was intrigued by it being in Tanzania, not necessarily because I wanted to study Swahili.

Experiencing novelty. Unlike her White American peers who took time to understand Tanzania's concept of time, Essence did not have to adjust to what many of her White peers considered different. Having a Nigerian background had exposed her to this concept of time which is marked by great flexibility.

In Tanzania like people would show up late to things, like maybe, I forgot-Tanzanian time's what they call it. I even have my own personal word for it. I call it CP time, which is-stands for colored people time. But that was like applied to like Americans-like to them that's like new but to me that's not new. I think I've experienced it. Like coming, showing up late to things. I show up late to things all the time. You know, so that's nothing new. But I guess in like-but I feel like for White Americans, they show up-they're more like, punctual than like other American cultures.
Even though Essence easily identified with Tanzania's concept of time, she found it interesting that the practice did not cut across all of Tanzania's lifestyle.

In contrast to the fact that you can show up late to things, when it comes to like work I feel like it's the complete opposite. Tanzanians are very like on time. I mean like they're about their business. So I felt like that was an interesting like sharp, like turnaround. Kind of like, don't be late. Like it was like something formal. Don't be late, don't show up late. If it's like work they're like right on time.

She was critical of the lax manner with which the Tanzanian transport system operated. Comparing it with the orderly American transport system, Essence concluded that the lack of order in the Tanzanian system was a reflection of their understanding of time as free flowing.

I guess you could say the public transportation system isn't like as, um-I feel like-that's the thing with American culture, everything, everything has to be like completely ordered. And like in place, and they freak out if something's out of place. And like, Tanzanians are more laid back. I feel like that's like, um, manifested in the public transportation system, how like at one time you see three at a time and another time you see none. And I, I just thought it was funny….Like I didn't, I mean sometimes it was annoying especially when I was late for class and like, okay, like where are you, like come on.

**Accessing local culture.** Living with a host family enabled Essence to clarify cultural knowledge she had acquired from her professors. Explaining what helped her
most to engage with the local culture, Essence talked about her first cultural contact as well as the role of her host family saying:

I would have to say like with my host, I always would asked them questions if I was, like, confused about something. I remember I had asked them about the Maasai because you know they're like-you always see pictures of them.

Essence considered her host family a credible source of cultural knowledge and an alternative to her existing sources of knowledge: her professors. She felt that her hosts provided her with a more informed perspective about Tanzanian culture than the limited view of her professors. Talking about how useful her host family was in clarifying cultural knowledge, Essence said,

With our host parents- it was pretty meaningful because like they gave us like average Tanzanian perspective versus like what we would be told by other [name of college] professors. I remember one time our host father, he said something about Christians and Muslims-there being in equal amount of each in Dar es Salaam. And I told him-I was like, oh, that's not what they told us at-that's not what the-our professors have told us. They told us that it's a little bit more Muslims than it is Christians. And it, it was like three kinds, like Muslims, Christians and the traditional religion. And he was really surprised that I said that. So I guess you could say, I really appreciated just like hearing things from like a personal perspective I guess.

Interacting with the local people also provided Essence with opportunities to learn about the local culture. While visiting an elementary school in Tanzania, she got more
insights into the Maasai culture particularly the position of women in this patriarchal community.

The elementary school was ran by the NGO. So the NGO is for Maasai women. Like empowerment-economic empowerment and things like that. And I just remember, she [school head] was just saying how like because apparently the Maasai culture is like patriarchal a lot of the times the women don't get the opportunity to get the official education and like you know, maybe get a career outside of like the domestic domain. So that's why they like instituted a school.

Essence felt that there were certain elements of the program that came in the way of cultural accessibility. She was of the opinion that the university environment that they were in in Dar es Salaam did not give them a rounded picture of Tanzanian culture because it was exclusive to the upper class. She thought that the program organizers did not make effort to expose them to life outside of this environment while they were Dar es Salaam.

…the thing with Dar es Salaam, because it's like a city-it's more urban…the area is very-just like a mixture of just like an urban class, I guess you could say. And on top of that a lot of times we were in the expatriate part of Dar es Salaam where there were like a lot of Western type of people. I could tell there was definitely a difference of the rest of Dar es Salaam but in terms of like activities, I felt like they did that more when we were in Arusha than they did when we were in Dar es Salaam. I just felt like they made no effort in Dar es Salaam for there to be activities.
Also, Essence blamed their inability to break away from the American social bubble on their limited cultural exposure while in Tanzania.

We were usually on campus, on University of Dar es Salaam campus, just hanging out, you know, with the American students. Not so much with the Tanzanians. It was hard to break away, I guess. It was really easy to just be with the American students because we were familiar with each other. And there was just like, I guess—a little bit of shyness and nervousness. And just like, "Hi. I'm an American student. I'm wanna make Tanzanian friends," it's just like—that's so like hard to do, you know.

Noting that the program did not have activities that allowed them to interact with the local students, Essence said,

...that's one thing that I would criticize the study abroad program in general about.

That they, the program doesn't give us the opportunity to interact with other Tanzanian students. Like it's, it's up to us to like do it. But the program itself doesn't allow for, doesn't have any like activities for that.

**Breaking away from the American social bubble.** Although there were opportunities to engage with the local people and their culture, Essence expressed dissatisfaction over her program's inability to facilitate interaction with the local people. In spite of obvious difficulty, she chose to push herself out the comfort zone and seek out friendships with a few Tanzanians. That way, she was able to break away from other American students. She narrated:
… it was hard to break away, I guess. It was really easy to just be with the American students because we were familiar with each other. And there was just like, I guess, I'm a little-have a bit of shyness and nervousness. And just like, "Hi. I'm an American student. I wanna make Tanzanian friends," it's just like that's so hard to do, you know. Yeah, so it was usually … that's one thing that I would criticize the study abroad program in general about. That they, the program doesn't give us the opportunity to interact with other Tanzanian students. Like it's, it's up to us to do it. But the program itself doesn't allow for, doesn't have any activities for that. They expected us to just walk up to someone. I mean I know, I was, I was able to make a couple of friends because I was like, I'm not gonna be in Tanzania and not make friends. So what I did, because other students, they had a host brother that was like I think 18 or 19, so like right around our age. And he had like cousins and one of his cousins was female so like I befriended her and she would like take me out and stuff like that.

During her internship, Essence chose to maximize on the study abroad experience by engaging fully in the activities of the NGO. On the contrary, her peers did not want to push themselves if the circumstances allowed it.

I said the internship started very late. So I was only working there for I think two and a half weeks. So it was three of us that worked at the one I was at…. what she wanted us, what the director wanted us to do, they were working on this fundraising project to bring books to 20 primary and secondary schools in Dar es Salaam. And she wanted us to contact different companies that might be
interested in sponsoring the fundraising project…. And I, I'm gonna be completely honest. The other two [college] students, they didn't want to do it…. And like their, their excuses were, they didn't know what to say to the companies and things like that. And I felt like they were making excuses. And like, I called one company. Um, it was a hotel. And he gave me like a tentative yes. And basically what I did was I just told him like how to follow up with the director because I was gonna be leaving.

**Pondering Nigerian/American identity.** When she was in Tanzania, Essence found her identity being challenged. Prior to going to Tanzania, Essence considered herself Nigerian so when she was in Tanzania, she wanted to identify herself with the Tanzanians as their –African sister”. However, she questions about her identity and the dilemma they posed on whether she should identity herself as Nigerian or as American heightened her awareness of her American identity which she had rejected hitherto. She realized that as much as she wanted to appear truly African, her American identity came in the way. Consequently, she decided to embrace the Nigerian-American identity she had previously refused to adopt. Describing some of the challenges she encountered while in Tanzania, Essence said that one of the challenges was

…definitely trying to explain where I'm from. Like when you're like a Nigerian but being American. Half the time when people ask me where I'm from, I wasn't sure how to answer the question… it's just like it heightened in Tanzania because it's like –Oh, like I'm like your African sister but then not really because I'm American.” So I don't know, I guess after being in Tanzania I've settled on the
term Nigerian-American. So I definitely would say that being in Tanzania made me see myself as like someone that's like just I can't put myself ... So I definitely would say that being in Tanzania made me see myself as like someone that's like just I can't put myself out there as just Nigerian. But like I knew I was like Americanized obviously but I would always-I was like, I'm Nigerian. Period, you know. I feel like I need to accept that part of me.

**Openness to new culture.** Essence thought that to have a truly meaningful experience with another culture requires openness and flexibility.

I am open to new cultures… I know one of the students-he had like hard time just like enjoying Tanzania. But I feel like part of the problem was he like he was not open to the culture. Like he was very-I remember when we went to the, to the nightclub he would complain that they're playing too much African music. And I was like, “But you're in Africa. And he was like, “I just want something that I'm familiar with.” And I was just like “don't, that's not-I don't know why you're expecting that.” Like, I don't know why he was expecting that. It's like he wants-he-you want to study abroad somewhere but still have everything the way you're familiar with it. That's not the point of studying abroad. And I, I told him like that's, that was, I tried to tell him that that's not, that doesn't make sense basically. Essence shared the importance of acknowledging that different groups of people do things differently from what one is used to.

It's, the thing is I can't tell you that for every single person. I don't know how they behave, how they believe in. What they do for every single culture. But like
I'm open to the idea of it's different from what I'm used to. So that if you went to a completely different country, they're not doing things that you well, you know they're doing their own things the way they do them. After studying about Tanzania, I was like now-I was like I wanna go to like the Middle East and South East Asia.

**Carol**

Carol was a 20-year old junior studying Nursing. She self-identified as Caucasian female. Carol studied in Botswana for three weeks in the summer. She had not studied abroad before going to Botswana but she did study abroad soon after her return to the U.S. from Botswana. She travelled to China for three weeks on another nursing-related study abroad program. Prior to her study abroad, the only other time she had left the U.S. was when she and her family travelled to Canada for a week on family vacation.

**Choosing a study abroad location.** Carol’s decision to study abroad in Botswana was based on several factors including the fact that the program had a volunteer component, was faculty led and involved other students.

I think that what influenced the most was probably the fact that the school was running this, whereas in the other-with my mom’s friend you know, I was in charge of everything and I wouldn’t have gotten the experience that I got being hands on. My parents were also kind of wanting me to do it through the university just because it is safer you know, I would have that. So I think there were a f-, a few outside influences, but I think it was a decision that I made based solely on the fact that I would be able to practice more in Botswana. I would have other
students going with me, you know, I would have an instructor there with me to where I could practice and she can make sure I was doing everything right.

**Responding to cultural conflict.** One of Carol’s greatest surprises while in Botswana was the hostile manner in which nurses interacted with their patients. Her knowledge of nursing practice in the U.S. had not prepared her for the kind of environment at the public hospital in Gaborone, Botswana where she worked as a volunteer. In an attempt to understand the observed nurse-patient relationship, she compared her training in nursing practice in the U.S. and nursing practice, noting glaring discrepancies between the two.

> Over here you know we’re taught to be the patient’s advocate and we want to be the patient’s friend and you know, we’re there for the patient and we love the patient. You know, we know the patient’s name, we know the patient’s background, whereas over there, they don’t really know their patient’s name, they don’t really have a conversation with them…. When I would have conversations with the patients, it was kind of frowned upon from the other nurses there in the country, just because it’s just so abnormal for them just to have that kind of relationship. So just very different um, I didn’t expect for them to not explain what procedures were, and I think they would just do things to patients and not explain to them what they were doing right? Whereas in the States you know, we have to say –Okay, this is what’s happening, do you consent to this, is this okay for you?”
Carol found it very difficult to understand this kind of relationship, a situation that she revealed troubled her, particularly in the light of what motivated her to get into nursing which she said was to help others. For that reason she could not make sense of the nurses’ seemingly indifferent attitude towards their patients:

You know, the, the biggest reason I ca-, I went into nursing was to you know, make a difference in somebody else’s life and really be able to you know, be the voice that they can’t be and so it’s, it’s a little bit heartbreaking or is it really just because the whole reason that I went into nursing is not even evident in- not in their nursing culture, but that’s probably the biggest surprise and the biggest rude awakening and it was just very, very difficult for me. That was definitely hard.

Even though the nurses’ conduct deeply upset her, Carol chose not to voice her concerns. In one of her journal entries, she reflected on her dilemma:

Then as we moved the patient to the dressing room, she was left completely exposed. Later, as we dressed her the nurse began making fun of the way she got her burns. She lit a candle when there was a gas leak and it caused an explosion. It completely broke my heart. It took everything in me not to get mad, because it isn’t my home or my culture I have no right to criticize what they do. (Journal entry, 6/11/14)

Another point of cultural conflict that Carol had to contend with was the Batswana perception of personal space. She observed that it was not unusual for male Batswana to stand in uncomfortably close proximity and to be blatant in the manner they
made advances. Describing one of her unpleasant encounters with a male Batswana, Carol said,

There are definitely sometimes when you know, somebody-like a male would come up to me and talk to me, and attempt to hit on me and I definitely felt uncomfortable and was like, ―Okay, you can stand over there and stay. I’m moving.‖ But thankfully I had a lot of great guys that came with us to Botswana and they definitely had my back.

On another occasion, she had a similar experience at a local bar where a male Batswana tried to get physically too close, a behavior she found loathsome. Carol juxtaposed this boy’s behavior with that of the American boys on the trip with her, noting that the American boys were respectful and by implication, that the Tswana males were disrespectful. Carol interpreted the act of getting too physically close as a sign of disrespect.

I had enough to drink to feel tipsy but not too much. It is ridiculous how guys will try to take advantage of you! One guy had his hand on my back while talking to me, but soon started moving his hand down and I had to grab it. It was irritating. However, other than that it was fun! So much dancing! [Name of student] danced this elegant dance with me! I love the Boys on this trip. They really take care of me and respect my morals, which is great! (Journal entry, 6/14/14)

Communication in cross-cultural contexts. Carol identified her most meaningful moments abroad as those times she was able to communicate with her patients. Carol explained that the reason this meant so much to her was because in her
profession, communication goes beyond the ability to understand each other; when patients are in pain, it is therapeutic. This was much more important to her particularly because the local nurses hardly had any form of conversation with their patients.

There is this one patient who had really severe burns and we had to irrigate them which is very painful. And so, you know, the nurses weren’t talking to him and you know, distracting a patient although in pain, is a good way to cope with it. So when we were irrigating the wounds, she was definitely in a lot of pain and so I was talking to her about her and her kids and her husband and it was just such a wonderful experience and so rewarding being able to have this conversation with her.

Sometimes conversations were not possible and at such times Carol relied on nonverbal communication to get through to her patients, a strategy that seemed to work as demonstrated by this encounter with handicapped children:

[There] is also a time when we went to a school with mentally handicapped kids and here in the States I work with kids with muscular dystrophy and mentally um, mental disorders so I’ve always had-there’s always been a special place in my heart so it was just so nice going over there, and yes there is that language barrier, but you know, just like holding them. When you know like-just the smiles they had when you’re just holding them or if you’re just like playing with them. You know like they were just, they were just so happy. They were just so, it was just warming and like wonderful knowing that-you know-I’m making this child so happy just because I’m high fiving them or giving them a hug.
Other times when she encountered communication difficulties, she drew on her knowledge of sign language to facilitate communication. Explaining her efforts to communicate with her hosts in spite of the language barrier, Carol said,

I definitely tried, I think a lot of them speak English, and the people that didn’t, I- I’m getting a minor in sign language, so it was really nice being able to act out what I needed, just because sign language was such a visual language that you know, I was able to really just go back to the basics and you know, if I wanted food, I could just like act out eating. You know they’d know exactly what I’m talking about, so I tried.

Carol encountered several other situations where language served as a barrier to communication. She opined that had she learned more of the language, she would have been prepared to engage with the local culture better. She shared that even though many people in Botswana spoke English, there were times when communication proved difficult while working with patients who did not speak English.

The book had very few words like ‘dumela‘ you know, hello, that type of thing but it definitely did not cover enough. Sometimes we had patients who weren’t fortunate enough to learn English, so they only knew Setswana, so I thought like there was definitely that language barrier. So if there- if I could go back again, I definitely wish I would have, you know, I would have learned more about the language.

Carol also felt that knowing the local language would have helped in her interactions with the nurses because although they spoke English, there were times they
spoke Setswana exclusively and she felt alienated at such times. Knowledge of Setswana, she thought, would have mitigated the feeling of isolation.

Also in working with the nurses. Like a lot of the-some of the nurses would help us, and so they didn’t always speak in English, you know, it was very common for them to speak in Setswana, so I kind of think like I was being sing-, like you know, I was being left out. We’re doing rounds or something then, you know, the doctors are talking, the nurses are talking, I have no idea what’s happening and I’m just standing there. You know, like not even able to attempt to figure out what’s going on.

In such situations, Carol sought help with translation from one of her nurse friends. However, she was conflicted on her actions as she knew she needed help but at the same time felt like she was assigning added responsibility to an already overworked nurse:

So I, I definitely felt bad because I had a wonderful nursing student with me and I just loved her with all my heart, um, but she would translate for me every time she could, so it was so great, but I just felt so bad putting that burden on her. Because you know, it’s not her responsibility to translate for me. She had so much to do and I did not like it that I was expecting her to do this for me. She had so much to do and I did not like it that I was expecting her to do this for me. As I said earlier, the patient to nurse ratio was sometimes 30 to 1.

Rejecting given knowledge. Interacting with Batswana culture revealed to Carol some of the behavior(al) constraints that her U.S. culture imposes on individuals. She
noted that the Batswana freely expressed their true selves as opposed to Americans who are socialized not to reveal too much of themselves to avoid being judged. For the first time, she learned that one could be true to self in spite of personality shortcomings and still be accepted for who they are. She admitted that it was not easy embracing this aspect of Tswana culture but once she embraced it, it granted her freedom of self-expression that she did not think existed in the U.S. culture. As a result, working and interacting with Botswana nurses became much easier as she was not worried about being judged for being ignorant of Botswana nursing practices.

I feel like in the U.S. culture we feel like we have to fit a perfect mold, you know. Like this is—this is the way things are, you have to act this way to people, you have to do this, and you know it's very-you know, we constantly feel like we're being judged all the time, so we have to act a certain way, whereas I feel like in Botswana they were like, this is my personality, this is who I am and if you don't like it, that's just life…. It was nicer [working with other nurses] you know-, knowing that I wasn't being judged. It was nice, you know, being able to make mistakes if necessary, it was nice being able to you know ask questions and that type of stuff, but it was difficult getting used to it at the same time, just because I guess that you know, we're trained- you know, since we're very young to act a certain way, let's say it-whereas I don't think they have the same type of idea over there.

Carol’s knowledge of Botswana was limited to the information she had gathered from a book they had been assigned as part of their orientation to Tswana culture. Being
in Botswana revealed to her its inadequacy in projecting the African image. She noted that the book stuck to the same narrative of Africa being underdeveloped, which was contrary to what she understood to be the reality of Africa.

The book made it sound like it was much less modernized. Like you know, there was no music. I definitely went into it thinking you know, electricity was not a thing. But I definitely-uh, the book made it sound like it was much more traditional and then when I went, I definitely-it’s much more modernized you know, they do have electricity. They do have a lot of stuff that I do not-like the book did not portray. And they uh, they do believe in tradition but they aren’t as set on it as the book puts it, so I think it depends on who you’re talking to. Of course you know, one woman is going to be very traditional whereas others were very you know, let’s go party and have fun.

When Carol started working at the hospital, she expected that the medical nursing practice in Botswana would be similar to American nursing practice. This expectation was shaped by her American training and she made assumptions about Botswana nursing practice based on this training. However, after days of volunteering at a public hospital in Gaborone, she discovered that there was a huge difference between Botswana and America’s approach to medicine. What stood out for her was the loose protocol that the nurses in Botswana followed to ensure hygiene and safety. Faced with this difference, she questioned her assumptions, concluding that it was a sign of vanity to assume that American approach should be the standard for medical practice elsewhere. She engaged
in self-critique, revised her biased assumptions and although admittedly difficult, adjusted to the Botswana nursing protocol.

So far the hardest thing for me to do was to break my usual protocol. It is demanded that I wash my hands between patients and change my gloves. However, I learned today that the nurses in Botswana don’t have the time, the money or resources. It definitely makes me feel spoiled or a little bratty when I assume that the proper protocol to wash my hands between patients is the same in Africa. The nurses looked skeptically at my routine, as they later told me that they don’t have the time to do that and they don’t have the money for more soap (Journal entry, 6/10/14).

**Appreciating cultural difference.** Carol shared how her outlook on life had changed since going to Botswana. Having studies in a school where uniformity was fostered, interacting with another culture had brought her to the realization that people are different and even in the midst of disagreement, one must be willing to acknowledge and respect the fact of difference.

I’ve actually gotten really good at just accepting the fact that we’re different and that’s what makes this country so great. I went to a very small private catholic school, so everybody had the same ideas, same views and beliefs. You know we’re all the same faith, politically we agree to the same thing…. People don’t agree with you, then okay, and it’s actually a good thing most of the time. So I think I’m more willing just to accept the fact that we’re different and appreciate it for what it’s worth.
The realization that even though she considered herself comfortable interacting with different others she had previously made assumptions about people from a different cultures was a positive outcome of her study abroad experience. Carol pointed out that after Botswana, she was cautious not to make assumptions when engaged in conversations with people from different cultures:

I'm a very outgoing person obviously so it's not really hard for me to go up and talk to somebody. But I think my interactions are different now you know. I'm much more apprehensive to assume things you know, which is definitely a good thing. You can always assume everything and we’re taught all the time never to assume. So that’s definitely something positive about it…. I think I'm more culturally humble which is very important. I'm not as willing to assume things as I did before which is really good.

**Demonstrating a global orientation.** Through her visit to Botswana, Carol reported that she had gained greater understanding of the world. Drawing the distinction between knowing and understanding, Carol explained

I think people know how big the world is, but they don’t really understand it. You know, it’s so easy to know something but not really understand it and so I think being able to go to Botswana, I realized you know, how truly massive this world is…. I definitely did not expect it because you know in the States, you’re in your home, you’re in your own little bubble and although you go to different states or different parts of your country, you don’t really truly realize and appreciate how
large the world is and all the cultures it contains, and all the backgrounds it
contains and all of the, you know, geographical sites it contains.

**Dawn**

Dawn was a 20-year old junior studying Information Management Systems. She identified herself as a Caucasian. Last summer, Dawn studied in Botswana for 2 weeks. She had not studied abroad prior to her study abroad in Botswana. She reported that while en route to Botswana, she had a side trip to Switzerland and South Africa for 1 day and 3 days respectively. Dawn chose to study in a location where she would be able to immerse herself fully in the target culture and in choosing Botswana, she felt she was challenging herself to get outside her comfort zone. In her opinion, exposure to the discomfort inherent in unfamiliar situations would help her learn better than if she were in a familiar environment.

My goal was to just immerse as much as I could in the culture, and to not be the stereotypical tourist. I didn't want to go to McDonald's every day and stand out. I wanted to eat the street food every night. Eating with our roommate and stuff. That was my goal. It was to get as much exposure as possible while there. I think in just stepping out of our comfort zone, I feel like you only ever learn when you're outside your comfort zone. If you're comfortable then you're not doing anything.

Dawn went to travelled to Botswana with a broad and open mindset, an attitude that she attributed to her previous exposure to diversity.
I like to think that I went in with a really open mind, and I know my parents, as a big part of how we were raised, I feel like my parents, I was raised in Columbus, so I went to a super diverse high school. I realize Athens isn't quite as diverse, but I like to think that my parents raised me very accepting of other cultures. I went in pretty open minded I like to think.

**Accessing local culture.** Ordinary seemingly mundane activities exposed Dawn to some of the cultural practices of the Batswana. Dawn observed difference in the Botswana shopping experience which she noted she and her peers were totally unprepared for.

I think we should have bartering classes. Prices were super flexible. You just needed to talk about it. We weren't prepared for that, especially the street vendors and stuff. With was souvenirs that we picked up, I don't think anyone bought anything at a store. I think we got everything off the street. There's no price label on that. It's up to you. I don't think we were quite prepared for that different shopping experience.

Dawn also shared her experience riding a taxi cabs. As she tried to make sense of the experience, she questioned the country’s road safety regulations and the driver’s driving habits.

The other thing that was really different was just the driving. I remember the first night. We felt like we were in the Fast and Furious. It was such a different-I remember asking one day, I was like, "Is there a speed limit here? Do they have speed limits?" The taxi driver was just flying, it felt like.
Working on the business project exposed Dawn to Tswana business culture. Reflecting on the difference between the Tswana and American business culture, Dawn appreciated the informality of business environment in Botswana which she considered a “nice break” from their highly formal American business practice.

We worked as consultants and the way it goes is we would go and interview him. Well actually they didn't wear business professional there, so if we went to talk to a client here you'd be in suit and tie. There it was like you can just wear nice clothes and you're good. You don't have to actually dress up. That was nice. It was a break for all of us.

**Learning through human interactions.** Dawn pointed out that the purpose of their study abroad was not just to complete their assigned consulting project but to learn in the process of working on it. Through interactions with the University of Botswana students while working on the project, Dawn learned about the dynamics of student peer-peer and student-faculty interactions. She observed that local students were more forthright with their American peers and did not hesitate to point out their shortcomings when they observed them, something that the American students were not able to do.

They were a little more up front, and I guess more honest in a way. That's one thing we saw. They weren't afraid to stop you and be like, "You're not making sense. What? Say that," or something…. They were better at calling us out on things…We would tell them the first couple of days we would be like, "Man, that's good that you said that. We need to know that, but we would be too afraid to
say something like that." They were comfortable telling peers that kind of stuff, very honest…

However, unlike interactions between American students and their professors, Botswana students' interactions with their professors were more formal. According to Dawn, the students weren't comfortable talking to professors that way, or someone of higher authority. They showed more respect in a way for elders.” Dawn appreciated this exposure arguing that the program helped get… get that experience that you can't get anywhere else. To get just the African time and the differences in the way we speak to each other versus professors, that's something you never would have got in a classroom here. I think the goal wasn't just to do the project. The project wasn't the focus. To get a good solution, that wasn't really the goal. The goal was to learn during it.

While Dawn was happy with the exposure to Tswana culture through every day activities and interactions with the people, she criticized their visit to the Cultural Village for what she thought was a lack of authenticity. She felt that exposure to more current events would have more profitable in imparting cultural knowledge than going to the Cultural Village.

Then there was, I want to say it was Food Fest, some sort of Food Fest, but we really wanted to go and just eat and just listen to music all day and just hang out there and stuff. It would have to be more research for the professors to find and to plan it, but once we got there we're all like, "Why can't we do this on Saturday?" They were like, "No, we already have Cultural Village." I feel like that would
have been more of authentic right now kind of culture. I think to give an
American equivalent of the Cultural Village, it would be like going to the Civil
War reenactments or something. It's real. It's what happened back then. Going to
Washington D.C. and visiting, not the monuments, but George Washington's
farm. That's real. It's where he lived and how he lived. It's not current. The
Cultural Village was a good historical culture about Botswana.

Dawn suggested that although the two weeks provided good cultural immersion,
spending more time immersed in the target culture would create a better understanding of
the culture in question.

I feel like I just got a glimpse of it. Two weeks is a good immersion. I feel like we
made the most of it, but I feel like you don't really know somewhere till you
actually live there. I was still living out of my suitcase. I feel like if you spend a
whole semester there, I would be like I know the culture. I know how it is, but I
feel like we just got a snapshot of it. If we would have stayed another week, I'd
have another experience to tell you.

Dawn considered herself lucky not to have roomed with her American peers because that
gave her an opportunity to learn how to cook Tswana food.

We hung out Rasula, I'm pretty sure was her name. It was something with an R,
but we hung out with her quite a bit. We had meals with her. She taught us how to
cook. I think we benefited from not being down with the girls. They had
American food every night. They had pasta and stuff. She made-it was like boiled
peanuts one night. Never seen that in my life. Me and [name of American student]
were like, "What is this?" She made a couple different things that were really
good. We would just cook with her and just pitch in with groceries and stuff.

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**Experiencing and responding to cultural conflict.** American and the Batswana have differing ideas about the place and value of the local. Dawn noted that while in the U.S. the local is regarded highly, it was not so in Botswana; the Batswana attached greater value to the foreign than they did the local. Dawn considered her group lucky because unlike their peers who did not have someone who could help them navigate these cultural barriers, they had a client who understood Athens culture and Tswana culture so he was able to help explain the cultural nuances.

We didn't have to rely on the students to translate for us like other GCP sites, but we did have to rely on a lot for cultural translation because in Athens, if you overemphasize the local you're popular. That's just how the culture is here, but in Botswana it's different than that. They would rather go to KFC or something and they idolize that culture, and so being local wasn't special. They didn't value that. We needed them for that perspective, and also the restaurant that we were consulting for, it was called The Braai Place, and the owner was really great. We got lucky. He actually went to Hocking College. He understood the cultural barriers, so it was really easy to work with him. Other clients, like the other teams had, were a little more of a cultural barrier, understanding the differences.
**Increased curiosity and openness.** Dawn’s experience in Botswana not only helped her appreciate the ordinary things in her life but it also increased her interest in learning more about other cultures.

I think before even though I was very well prepared and had asked a ton of questions, I felt like I was still naive in a way. I was like, "Oh, I'm going to the other side of the world like no big deal." I feel like coming back, I appreciate things a lot more now. Just my cell phone, I appreciate that. Being close to family. Being able to see my parents whenever. I want to travel again. I got bit by the travel bug, hard core. I just want to see everything now. Experience every culture, but I definitely could see myself going back. I feel like that's something I want to do.

After her study abroad experience, Dawn understood the global nature of her future career the experience had prepared her to work in an international business environment and she wanted to get more cultural exposure.

I guess just my general, like I already have a plan. I want to go volunteer during winter break somewhere abroad, and then I want to take a vacation for my senior trip. Instead of doing a spring break trip or something going down to Florida or something like that, I'd rather go to backpack around Europe and just try to avoid the tourist things to do, and try to get more of the real side of the story. I feel like I'm so much more prepared to work in an international business environment now just having that experience and stuff.
George

George was a 21-year old junior studying Sports Management and Business Economics. He identified himself as Caucasian. Last summer, he participated in a Global Consulting study abroad program in Botswana for three weeks. Prior to his travel to Botswana, George had not studied abroad but had travelled to Canada on family vacation for four days. George also stopped over in South Africa en route to Botswana where he toured with friends for six days.

Choosing a study abroad location. George chose Botswana as his destination for a study abroad experience because he wanted a different cultural experience. He reported that he had travelled all over the U.S. and had visited Canada and so he wanted to go to a place that was different than the two countries. He thought that it was a rare opportunity to travel to Africa.

Well, I've always wanted to go somewhere else. I mean, I've been to Canada for a couple of days but it's pretty much the same as the United States. I've been all around the United States but I, I wanted to travel somewhere outside of the country. And, I thought about doing a GCP, one of the programs but I never really thought about it in too much detail and then Professor [name], she is the head of the Honors Program, she arranged for the honors group to go to Botswana…. This-it's pretty rare for us to get a chance to go to-to travel to Africa. So I saw that and decided it's an opportunity I probably won't get again and I wanted to go.

Experiencing novelty. George encountered difference soon after he and his group started working on their consulting project. During their interview with their client,
George was shocked at the informality of the environment in which the interview took place. He shared that it was nothing like what he knew about business interviews. Prior to travelling to Botswana, he and his teammates had practiced how to conduct business interviews but he was disappointed when he discovered that these skills did not count in the Botswana business context. Describing this most disorienting yet the most meaningful learning experience, George said,

The most meaningful experience throughout my trip abroad would have to be my initial client interview with Chini Holdings. This initial interview, taking place on a chicken farm in a very loud environment, was so unlike any experience I had ever had before on a consulting type project (Or, any school project, for that matter). While I didn’t know fully what to expect upon my initial interview, I was completely shocked after meeting with our client. The room we were in was very loud, crowded, and it made it very hard to interact with our teammates and client. This was also one of my first instances of dealing with cultural differences, as he said some of his answers in Setswana and included the names of many local stores and suppliers that I had never heard of. I left the initial interview thinking that it went horribly, in part because I didn’t understand half of the answers and in also because of my lack of knowledge of how business was transacted in Botswana.

Being exposed to Botswana business culture revealed that George’s defined good business practice from the perspective of American business practice. His assessment of Botswana business culture as “extreme” and “straying” from American business customs
brings to the fore his assumption that American business practice is the norm and any practice that does not reflect that deviates from the norm.

While I had many experiences and learned many life lessons during my time in Botswana, the most important stemmed from my first international business experiences and learning that not all business is done in the same fashion. My consulting project, for Chini Holdings, was a very extreme example of how business is done in Botswana, and how far it can stray from business customs and practices in the United States.

In spite of the disorientation that George experienced stemming from this encounter, it turned out to be the most meaningful in terms of helping him understand international culture and business. He realized that the American business practice was not the only way but another way of approaching business. He explained:

After working with my team and analyzing the interview some more, I realized that it was, in fact, a productive interview. This experience helped me to learn that I need to not draw conclusions so quickly upon trying out new experiences. I initially drew the conclusion that, because it was different from past interviews I had done, our first interview with Chini Holdings was not effective. In the future I will go into new experiences like this realizing that things may not go exactly how I'm used to, or how I plan for them to go and not overreact. This first interview at the chicken farm really helped me to change my outlook for the rest of the project and was an experience that I will remember and draw back on for the rest of my life (Reflective paper)
George attributed some of the challenges that he faced in interpreting and dealing with difference in Botswana business culture to inadequate and ineffective pre-departure orientation. He shared that he was ill prepared for conducting the consulting project in a different cultural environment as he explained:

There were also, however, some expectations of the trip that were not met and some things that came out of the trip that I was not prepared for. While we were told about the differences in the business culture between our two respective countries, I feel like we were not fully prepared to deal with some of the differences. Some important differences were just mentioned briefly and would have been helpful to know more about before starting the projects. For instance, it was mentioned that the business culture was much different in Botswana, but not in great detail. It would have been helpful if more detail had been given to prepare me for the project abroad.

Reflecting on and responding to cultural difference. Working on the consulting project brought into sharp focus the difference in the availability of learning resources. Comparing his research methods with those of the Botswana students, George noted that while he and his peers relied on the internet for all their research needs, information, the Botswana students used different approaches. Realizing that his way of learning did not fit into the Botswana learning context, he relied on his Botswana peers to guide him on how to get the information for the project. Asked what difficulties he encountered while in Botswana, George responded:
One of the things definitely when we were working on the project was, I was used to just researching the way we do here. It was completely different there. Then, I didn't bring my computer. They had much different like research tactics. We would, like we're used to just going on Google and searching for whatever we want and then ....They had a bunch of databases we can use through the library and that's what I'm used to using. And we got there and realized we couldn't like use the databases because they've mainly information on United States businesses. And then we had a lot more trouble finding stuff through Google.

His inability to conduct research in the way that he knew how led to feelings of frustration. He blamed the program organizers for inadequate preparation for this part of the project.

I figured I'm just not finding much like, if I could keep, keep doing this, I'll find it eventually. And then after like a week I realized it's not working and I guess I was a little, a little frustrated because they hadn't told us about that at all going in. I don't know, it was a little frustrating but then I just worked with the, with the local students and it was, it was nice. They were very helpful with that. I liked learning new things and learning how to do things a different way.

This experience helped him learn and appreciate that there are diverse ways of doing the same thing. Instead of dwelling on the problem, he recognized his Botswana peers as a valuable resource if he was to contribute to the achievement of their project goals. He observed that
The students were mainly, they were finding like a lot of case studies done in local universities and stuff like that. And so, I started doing what they were doing and finding more, stuff more successfully. And so, I started doing what they were doing and finding more, stuff more successfully. And they, ah, talked to people they know to try to find out and stuff like that.

George also noted the stark difference between the way that people related with each other in Botswana and in the U.S. He was utterly surprised by how “helpful” and “friendly” the Batswana were in contrast with Americans.

When we first got there, one of the things that surprised me most or that I wasn't used to was how nice everyone was. You'll notice around here, people aren't nearly as nice. And then the whole time we were travelling abroad, everyone in that, like even people in airports or, the cops and everything were much more friendly and helpful….we were staying at a Gabarone and the people were supposed to pick us up but we had trouble just getting a hold of them; they were like half-an-hour late to pick us up. But everyone there was just really helpful. Which was pretty much the experience the whole way through.

This stood out for him particularly because this behavior was alien to his big city. He told me, “I'm from like the Washington DC area and where I grew up people weren't friendly at all.”

Although George perceived friendliness as a positive thing, it was evident that he was conflicted about it. At some point he thought that being too friendly was was a little intrusive as he explained in the following excerpt:
All the students there are much more friendly, and, like the first day meeting us. They, they also had—people here are a lot more, protective of their personal space and the students there were like, talking and getting close. And like, I didn't have any problems with it but they were just, they were much more friendly, and so that as a little different too, just getting used to that the first couple days.

One of the other major challenges that George grappled with was the difference in work ethics. While working on their group project, George noted that the Tswana students were not obligated to work after the scheduled meeting time while the American students felt that they needed to put in more time in order complete the project on time. George and his American peer chose to give the situation time to resolve itself. He narrated:

And then there's definitely a different approach just from the American students and the Botswana students…. me and my friends we've been on teams together in the past. And there was more of like, we would try to just work non-stop and then we would set aside times like to hang out or go do something outside of like working whereas like the Botswana students would just try to mix in. So they'd be talking about like the project and then like for 5 minutes they'd just talk about something that happened to them last night or something. And then it was just back and forth. So there's definitely different getting used to that, too. But I think that worked out. We got used to that and we started working better towards the end of the project.
Communication in cross-cultural contexts. One of the challenges that George grappled with while in Botswana was poor communication resulting from language barrier. Although most people spoke English, there were times that they used Setswana, which George did not have any knowledge of. That this happened on his most important task, the consulting project, was even more challenging. To work around this, the American students relied on their Botswana peers to provide translation and to clarify some of the interviewee’s references.

And then, most of the time we were there, everyone just spoke English to us because, you know, they wouldn't speak Setswana but he, he was one of the few. He would mix in Setswana in the middle of sentences. And he talked about like a lot of local places that we hadn't heard of. So [name of another student] the other United States student, we, we did not understand a lot of what he said. But luckily there was one with, one of the students from Botswana was sitting next to us and he was telling us some of the stuff.

Rejecting given knowledge. Prior to his visit to Botswana, George had relied on the orientation sessions as the only source of knowledge of Tswana culture. He perceived some of the information he received as warnings about certain cultural practices. After having a personal encounter with Tswana culture, he realized that the information he had received did not accurately reflect the reality of Botswana; in some cases it was exaggerated while in other cases it was understated. George highlighted this discrepancy when he said,
… a lot of the things they, they just were being precautionary and warning us about a bunch of things, like they warned us a ton of times about just the local places and what to visit. Just about getting pick-pocketed. Honestly, at no point when we were traveling, I felt like we were in danger, like worried about getting pick-pocketed.

After arriving in Botswana, the same warnings about insecurity were repeated. George questioned these warnings particularly after people went about their business without the anticipated high sense of insecurity.

And like when we first got to the dorms, they warned us too about like, make sure you lock everything and never leave your room without locking it. But they, the people we met there, they would not lock their-they would usually lock their doors but like they would leave for like 10 minutes and they wouldn't be too worried… and that was super nice.

Jeff also reported that during orientation, they had been made aware that the Batswana understood time differently from Americans. He thought that the idea had been understated when he arrived in Botswana and found that the people were more laid back than he had been made to believe. The new idea of time, in spite of being quite different from what he knew, appealed to him because it freed them from worry over future activities and allowed them to live in the present.

And then we were told like the business culture, everything was a lot more laid back in Botswana. That people weren't worried like, as much about deadlines and time. They, they told us it wasn't quite like here. So, I was expecting it to be more,
more laid back than here. But it was a little bit more laid back than I expected actually….It was-it's completely different from what we're used to. I know like when we first got there-the other professor from Botswana-he told us like-he said, "Everyone else let's time control them." He said, "We control time" or something like that along those lines. And I actually liked it a lot. They just, if they were doing something and they needed to finish it or if they wanted to work on it for longer, they would just push back whatever their thing, other thing was for half-an-hour. If it was something important, they would like focus on it and they wouldn't let like a deadline affect them as much.

**Pondering white minority status.** For the time in his life, George had to face the reality of being a minority. He had not anticipated the kind of attention he and his peers received and he found they were often under the spotlight of their hosts. George said,

And that was also the first time I was like the one of the few white people where I was. So, when we first got there and we were walking around, everyone was like pointing at us and I don't remember what the word for white people was, but they were yelling it. It was strange.

The uneasiness that came with this kind of attention served to enlighten George on the feelings and emotions that come with being a minority. He also he realized that although people may single one out as a stranger, their attitudes and behavior could help one overcome the negative feelings of being a minority. He noted that the effect of this attention would have been worse had the people not been as friendly as they were.

Narrating this experience, George said,
That was also the first time I was like the, one of the few white people where I was. So, when we first, when we first got there and we were walking around, everyone was like pointing at us and I don't remember what the word for white people was, but they were yelling it….we'd be walking around in a group and then they would like just point at us. And then people, a bunch of people would just start waving and they'd come over and talk to us. It was uncomfortable. For the first time, I knew how it felt like to be singled out as different because of the way you look. I have never thought about these things when I’m here because there has never been a chance for me to feel different. It could have been worse but like everyone was super friendly about it.

**Accessing local culture.** Although George was generally satisfied with his Botswana experience, he thought there were ways in which he could have learned more than he did. He was confident that his stay in Botswana had given him a good understanding of Botswana’s urban culture. Nevertheless, he felt he was not well informed of Tswana culture outside the capital city and wished they had had cultural exposure beyond the city of Gaborone, particularly exposure to rural life. Discussing the limitations of the program, George said,

Well, we, we didn't really travel much outside of the city, so. Like a lot of the students were telling us where their fun was like there, and it was completely different from where we were. I think, I think I have a pretty good understanding of what the cities are like but outside of that, I think if we, if we traveled to, a local village or something, it would be completely different. We wouldn't really
have correct expectations for it. But it's, the city itself and where we were staying, I think I got a pretty decent understanding of it. We were in most of the parts of the city and we got to meet a lot of different people and see different things.

In addition, he felt that the duration of the program could have limited cultural exposure and suggested that a longer term program would help participants engage with the local culture better. His disappointment at how soon the program came to an end was evident when he said,

The time flew by. It felt like we were there for like a couple days and then we were already coming back. I feel like it would've been helpful to be there for another week or two, definitely. But, I think I got a decent picture of the culture there. But, another week or two definitely would help. So, traveling a little bit more and then being there for longer would help for sure.

He also felt that even though they spent a lot of time with the UB students, they had very little time for social interaction. Outside of the business consulting project, American students spent time together and only went to the only one place they knew. George suggested that greater interaction with the students would have given them greater access to the local culture. Asked what might have helped him engage with the local culture better, George replied,

Experiencing the local culture, it definitely would have helped more if we had started to interact with the, the Botswana students we were working with outside of the work hours. Definitely would have helped more. I mean, we pretty much
just went to the same spot, the same mall that's pretty close the campus. They had a lot of different things there. But, pretty much outside of, outside of work, we went there.

**Jeff**

Jeff was a 20-year old junior studying Management Information Systems and Finance. He self-identified as a Caucasian. Jeff studied abroad in Botswana for 2 weeks. He reported having had pre-departure orientation. Other preparatory activities included a class once a week and 2 full days of orientation at the site. Jeff had not studied abroad before but had been to Mexico on vacation for one week, and had made a five day stop-over in South Africa on his way to Botswana.

**Questioning sources of knowledge.** Jeff shared that he chose Botswana as a study abroad location he likes to travel and to see new things. He said that he “knew absolutely nothing about it going in” although he had read a book about as a part of the study abroad orientation. His first-hand experience with Tswana culture made him start to question his sources of information. He said,

> We had a book—I can’t remember what the title is but was generally about traveling and it broke down a general review of the history like different cultures in different areas but I would say some of the things in the book were more on the extreme end, I’d say exaggerated and I didn’t see much of them.

He also noted that the book did not give an accurate representation of Tswana culture. He noted,
The book talked about Africa time they call it and how everyone is just laid back and just like don’t expect to be meeting on time when you’re there. And I definitely experienced some of that when I was there but it wasn’t as bad as I was expecting. The book kind of over-prepared me for that kind of thing.

Language barrier. Jeff identified language barrier as one of the challenges he faced in Botswana while he was in Botswana. He thought that that was area he should have prepared himself better in. Even though English was the predominant language in Gaborone, the capital city and around the university, there were many instances when Setswana was being used by the local nationals. Jeff felt left out when they spoke Setswana in his presence. He explained,

I think I was under the impression that more English was spoken than it actually was going in. I mean mostly almost everyone does speak English pretty well definitely conversationally but a lot of the time if there are three or four Botswana people in one place there’s gonna be a lot of Setswana being spoken and I’d be kind of confused and I’d have to ask what’s happening.

Jeff observed that facilitated closer interactions with the local people because as he said, “the people of Botswana were very impressed with any Americans that could speak Setswana at all....” Jeff noted, however, that they could rely on translation especially from their student peers.

Experiencing novelty. Jeff made meaning of cultural difference through constant comparison of Tswana and American culture. One of the things that caught his attention
was the cost of living in Botswana compared to the U.S. He shared his experience riding a taxi in Botswana.

The driving culture - like the taxis they were nothing like I’d been in in the U.S. It we would pay like 30 Pula for a like a 10-minute taxi ride which is like 3 or 4 bucks pretty much in the U.S. it would probably be 15-20 dollars for a taxi ride like that so we just taking taxis everywhere.

Encounter with novelty generated emotional responses. Jeff talked about being surprised, he talked of “discomfort” and being “out of his comfort zone.” One of the very unusual differences that caught his attention was the presence of monkeys on campus. He talked about how much this surprised him.

Seeing monkeys around was a little surprising for me because on the campus there were a lot of monkeys running around the building and there would be cows walking out in the middle of the roundabout or something like that so that was like I wasn’t ready for that that was surprising.

He was also surprised at how different campus culture was. He noted that difference in the level of order in the students’ houses compared to their campus dorms. He said,

It was all college kids there and I was really surprised too because I was expecting I’m used to house parties here that are just kind of like typical college house but we walked into this house and it was like spotless-extremely-everything was really nice, perfectly clean. I was really surprised that college students lived there!
Another surprising discovery for Jeff was the difference in what he referred to as “the dowry system”. The concept of dowry in the form of cows was rather strange and difficult to understand. To Jeff it didn't seem normal unlike his Tswana peers who though it did. To make sense of this new concept, he drew on American culture, where money characterizes most transactions.

I was also very surprised to hear about the dowry system there of like giving 30-40 cows in exchange for a marriage but it’s not like-it sounds like just so much different than the U.S. Then I started realizing that cows there are basically like money in the bank more or less-this is how cows were treated. That was such a strange concept to me and then I’m sitting down talking to my friends about that and just seems so normal for them and the more they explained it the more I was like yeah I guess I kind of see.

Experiencing and responding to cultural conflict. Even though there are many new experiences that Jeff appreciated, there are certain cultural differences that he had challenge coming to terms with. One of thing he was concerned about was the between wage and the kind of work some of the local people were doing. He had the opportunity to see how much a company he and his peers were consulting for and he was disturbed by how low the wages it paid their employees were in relation to how much the company was making. Jeff narrated,

After uncovering some financial information from our client, it was discovered that the employees doing the full time cleaning work were being paid essentially what would convert to $40 in US currency per month. The students in my group
didn’t think the wages were that outrageous, and I didn’t want to make a big deal out of it because that did seem to be about the standard wage for that type of labor in Botswana. While the cost of living is obviously different and some adjustments need to be made, this wage still just seems so low to me. Since GCP has ended I’ve still found myself thinking about those wages many times. I can’t imagine doing such unpleasant labor for such low wages. (self-reflection paper).

Jeff continued to reflect on this difference after his return and admitted it was an experience he was still trying to process. He also shared that he had developed new perspectives on related cultural issues. He said,

I prefer to keep this experience in my mind and contemplate it from time to time as a way to continuously flex my worldview over time. I wish that I had some way to neatly wrap up exactly how this experience has changed my perspective, but I’m still figuring it out. I would say that overall it has stimulated thoughts about how much value is placed on unskilled human labor, cultural differences towards entitlement along with the recognition of luxuries versus necessities. I’ve been trying to see life from the perspective of the people that I met in Botswana, which I think is a healthy exercise to recalibrate an extremely American worldview.

Another cultural difference that was challenging to Jeff was the difference in work ethics between the American students and the local students. Working on a collaborative project revealed the challenges attendant with team work that brings people
from different cultural backgrounds together. Jeff explained how that was like when he said,

During the global consulting program, basically all of the work done was some sort of team based work. This certainly made for some unique challenges for every different group due to the diverse range of personalities and work styles. It was such a great experience to see what university students work like on a whole different continent, especially from a country like Botswana. As a member of the CoB Honors Program, the students that I’m usually working with are usually very punctual and generally very determined to get their work done quickly. Students in Botswana were of a different mentality….There were definitely just some cultural differences when it came to pacing of work.

He explained the exact nature of challenge. It was related to the difference in conception of time.

I guess the one challenge had was different paces of work I think like in Botswana students would probably more willing to take a 2-hour lunch break and we were more used to 45-minute lunch break so there were little not really arguments but we had to do some negotiating or compromising a little bit just like let’s do an hour and 20 minutes lunch break

Jeff found a way of getting around the problem without hurting the team. Along the way, he also learned some useful lessons from the experience. He said,

I realized that in order to submit a piece of work that I would be proud of I might have to put a little bit of pressure on the group to work a little longer, more
quickly, or even to just take shorter lunch breaks. Although I felt slightly uncomfortable as if I was challenging their culture, I think that when I explained myself everyone understood the reasoning behind it. Sometimes for the sake of getting quality work done, potentially sensitive issues need to be addressed. In this case the issue was one of culture and pacing. In these situations I learned that as long as you’re not asking something unreasonable and you’re sensitive and clear in what you’re suggesting your team will probably respond positively. (self-reflection paper)

Additionally, research proved a challenge to Jeff due to the lack of internet which as he said is the way he accesses company databases. In Botswana, his methods of research could not work because as he said, “there wasn’t really much data out there. It was really hard to find information.” He explained what it was like to be required to do research in the absence of data, “I feel—I guess that was definitely uncomfortable not uncomfortable but I just a little out of my comfort zone I guess when I can’t do research…."

It was not just the inability to conduct research that was a challenge to Jeff. Being cut off from the internet was a source of discomfort. He expressed what it was like not to have access to the internet. He said,

“…also internet was also not as widely available over there I brought my laptop with me but same time I had to be in a wifi spot it wasn’t always how you set up there’s wifi everywhere. I probably had half as much access I guess. Definitely makes you feel a little uncomfortable at first.”
**Interacting with the locals.** Jeff suggested that the best way to learn when he was in Botswana was by interacting with the local people. He narrated about their visit to a cultural village where they had some cultural encounter but noted that it did not give a representation of current Tswana culture. He said that although this visit gave him some background about Tswana culture, it "really just like talking to people about day to day life [that] really helped me to engage and going to the mall, going to the station like buying stuff at the markets there." He added, "The best way to get the most of any international experience is to just talk to people. It may be hard to understand what they’re saying, but it will be well worth it most of the time."

Jeff revealed reasons why he thought it was important to make local connections. First, through conversations with the host nationals, especially the students, they got a chance for cultural exchange and to share and address stereotypes that they had of each other as a cultural group. Jeff said,

I got a chance to meet people outside of the program and we talked about just day to day life that was a good experience. A lot of times they would ask us about the U.S. but there were definitely stereotypes and stuff that. I remember one time we were walking through the station and there were people saying a lot of things to us in Setswana like some people-I think they were under the impression that all like a lot of people from the U.S. have money because people were like "Oh special Lekgowa" - like calling out white people when we walked by. Another time someone said something bad like, "These Lekgowa‘ have been eating a lot or something like that and then the girl we were with explained to us the kind of
stereotypes from what they see on magazines and TV like everyone from America is skinny which was such a surprise for me to hear that. …. We talked about perceptions from both ends and they were excited to hear about what we all thought about Tswana culture and the food. That was insightful.

**Embracing Tswana culture.** In spite of having experienced some challenges with cultural difference, there were aspects of Tswana culture that Jeff found appealing. One of these was the relaxed lifestyle. He compared Botswana’s understanding of time with America’s noting the difference between the two. He shared,

> It was actually kind of nice because I’m used to the college of business especially in the honors program where everyone there is like-has a completely packed schedule it’s just like go go go on like a hundred per cent for most of the work we do then when we get there and it’s a lot more laid back. Although it had proved a challenge when working on the consulting with their Botswana peers, he liked the fact that they did not have to rush like they do back home. He said,

> I did really search on Botswana time like everyone there warned us about what they call Botswana time and I kind of liked the explanation they gave like we don’t let time control us we just kind of control our time and we don’t let it dictate our lives and stress us out which is I liked that part actually. And then I came back to the U.S. and felt like I have to be punctual again like everything is just wa wa wa.
**Changing perspectives.** Jeff shared how much gain it was to have gone to Botswana for study abroad. He said the experience had helped her appreciate difference in communication styles.

I think I had that while I was there and adopted much different communication styles and what I got used to there was like people being really interested in being so kind basically like sometimes if I interact with someone here they act like that I'd feel like taking it back-almost uncomfortable because I'm not used to it but I think now I feel more comfortable if someone even if they are American they have a different communication style that I'm not used to I can become more comfortable with it.

He also came to realize how limiting it can be to be exposed to just one culture and his knowledge of the difference between the U.S. and developing countries helped him appreciate his life and all the privileges it avails.

Every time I think about it it's like I'm trying to like I'm trying to figure out what that is but I guess it's just like again make me realize how much more is out there and helps you not to get hang up on the little things so much because the section of life that you're living is small compared to the whole spectrum of what kinds of lives are out there. So yeah it makes the day to day life less stressful just to think how different it could be.

Jeff also shared that the Botswana experience had made him more aware of the need to respect people's opinions, difference and their way of interpreting life experiences. He
I’d say just don’t discount what someone else says or is thinking but it’s really important to try figure out where they’re coming from and what it’s based on because I mean I don’t think anyone is willfully ignorant in most situations like it’s usually if you do believe that someone is wrong about something you should try to figure out like why they are thinking that way there is no right or wrong they are just different perceptions of the same situation I guess.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided detailed synopses of the 12 participants who took part in this study. The synopses depict the different ways in which they made meaning of their study abroad experience and how they navigated the various barriers that were erected by cultural difference. The synopses formed the basis for cross-case analysis to determine common themes. The emergent themes are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Findings

In this chapter, I restate the research questions and describe briefly the methodology utilized in this study. After that, I present a detailed analysis of the five themes that emerged from this study: (a) positioning as learner, (b) situating the experience, (c) experiencing dissonance, (d) resolving cultural conflict and (e) making the strange familiar. Finally, I provide a summary of the chapter.

Review of Purpose of the Study

Through this study, I sought to understand how U.S. undergraduates studying in nontraditional study abroad locations made meaning of their intercultural experience and how these experiences mediated the development of intercultural and global competencies. The guiding research questions were: 1) How do U.S. undergraduates in short-term study abroad programs in nontraditional destinations make meaning of their intercultural experience? 2) How do U.S. undergraduates in short-term study abroad programs navigate cultural intersections in nontraditional destinations? 3) In what ways do short-term study abroad program designs impact the development of intercultural and global competencies among U.S. college undergraduates? To answer these research questions, I utilized grounded theory methodology in the study design and a constructivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006) in the analysis and interpretation of data.

The sample for this study was 12 U.S. undergraduate students who had participated in short, institution-sponsored study abroad programs in different nontraditional locations, specifically African countries. The population was drawn from two public, four-year universities in the Midwestern region of the United States. All the
participants were enrolled at the time of study. The average age of the participants was 20.4 years old.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and unsolicited participant journals/self-reflection. Each interview was recorded and stored in a password protected personal computer. After transcribing each interview, I entered the full transcripts into Atlas.ti, a data analysis software. I started coding data on Atlas.ti line by line and incident by incident (Glaser, 1978). Data collection and data analysis progressed simultaneously. As the initial analysis progressed, I took note of emerging patterns, documented and reflected on them in a reflective journal. As I continued with open coding, I attended to segments of data and expressions that participants used in special ways. These In Vivo codes were also subjected to comparative and analytic treatment (Charmaz, 2014). Memos were also subjected to analysis; they too were compared with the emerging codes from the interviews and the journals.

As recommended by Charmaz (2014), I used theoretical sampling. As the two issues of language barrier and students’ inability to break away from their American peers came up, I sought participants whose program had language learning and a homestay component to get a better informed perspective on how the ability to use the local language and isolation from the group impacted cultural engagement. Once open coding was complete, I reviewed the initial codes and through comparison of data to data, I determined the codes that could constitute analytical categories and sub-categories. Finally, I conducted theoretical coding whereby I examined the connections between the
categories and sub-categories to establish the relationships between them (Charmaz, 2006; 2014).

**Theme Identification and Discussion**

Analysis of participant interviews, study abroad journals and self-reflections yielded four main themes. Under each theme, subthemes were identified. Five themes emerged from this study: (a) Positioning as learner, (b) situating the experience, (c) experiencing dissonance, (d) resolving cultural conflict and (e) making the strange familiar. In this next section, I elaborate each of the five themes. Table 2 presents the five themes and corresponding subthemes.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

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<th>Themes</th>
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Positioning as learner. This broad theme refers to the personal characteristics and mental abilities that the study abroad students brought to the study abroad context and which determined how they made meaning of their study abroad experiences. Participants in this study exhibited positive attitudes towards new cultures as characterized by their curiosity and openness. The study also determined that cognitive abilities such as the ability to observe, analyze, reflect, compare and contrast, evaluate and interpret played a significant role in how participants processed novel experiences. Cultural expectations and assumptions set the foundation for students’ experiences. These elements intersected with the contextual factors, that is, the conditions of the study abroad location and programmatic components to frame participants’ study abroad experience in ways that facilitated or hindered transformative learning.

Seeking novelty. Although participants had varied reasons for choosing their study abroad locations such as past travel experience, peer testimonials, programmatic components, heritage seeking and academic relevance, what was common to majority of the participants was that their choice of the particular locations was driven by curiosity, that is, the pursuit for novel experiences. The idea of novelty was articulated using words and phrases such as “different,” “unique,” “inaccessible,” “out of [my] comfort zone” and “authentic.” It is this pursuit of novelty that positioned them in the geographical, historical, environmental, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts (hereafter referred to as contexts) of their study abroad locations.

Natasha expected a unique experience and she felt that Botswana would deliver just that. She believed that going to Europe would not be much different culturally from
her experience in the United States and would not offer the kind of novelty she was seeking.

I chose it [Botswana] because it was a nontraditional study abroad experience so it was one of the many reasons that I did wanna go there…like many people get a chance to travel on vacations but not as many people go to Botswana and so I really wanted a unique experience I didn't think I could get as easily like I know European culture is not much different than here. It varies from country to country but overall there are lots of similarities and I wanted to experience a culture very different than what I’d seen before I was kinda like culture shock-like different.

Josefine said, ―I wanted a place where I could learn a new language, somewhere I'd never been before, and somewhere that I felt was inaccessible to me.” Kirk said he loved new experiences: ―I have travelled a lot in my whole life and I just like new experiences and such so I just wanted to get that experience.” Likewise, Julie, who studied in South Africa, was also interested in experiencing a new culture. She shared, ―I expected new experiences. I expected to feel uncomfortable but I didn't, which was amazing.” Dawn talked about novelty in terms of being outside of her comfort zone. She acknowledged that Tswana culture, being different, would challenge her cultural comfort level.

My goal was to just immerse as much as I could in the culture, and to not be the stereotypical tourist. I didn't want to go to McDonald's every day and stand out. I wanted to eat the street food every night. Eating with our roommate and stuff.
That was—my goal was to get as much exposure as possible while there… I think in just stepping out of our comfort zone, I feel like you only ever learn when you're outside your comfort zone. If you're comfortable then you're not doing anything.

Setting expectations. Setting expectations was a major part of the participants’ study abroad experience. Their expectations had bearing on how they interacted with the new cultures they were immersed in. This study found that when their expectations were incongruent with the realities of the host cultures, they experienced cultural dissonance at varying intensities. It was evident that some of their cultural expectations had been based on knowledge they had received uncritically from various sources. Based on information from these sources, participants had created negative images of Africa as impoverished, insecure and uncivilized. These expectations seem to have mitigated negative effects of cultural difference. Findings of this study suggest that when participants encountered difference that they had expected, they experienced low level dissonance, were more objective in their assessment of cultural difference and were more likely to review received knowledge. On the contrary, totally unexpected cultural difference induced high level dissonance and many participants were unable to process dissonance beyond the level of questioning, which in effect, hindered transformational learning.

Kirk presents an example of participants who were more open in their expectations and who were more open to cultural difference. Kirk reported that his expectation of Botswana was that there would be more uncivilized areas because that is all as he said, "we're told over here.” In spite of this, he was open to the possibility that
Botswana was not much different from the U.S. Expressing his frustration with some of his friends whom he could not convince to travel to Botswana with him, Kirk said,

…I was trying to get a lot of my friends to go with me—that this was a great experience and they would just come up with the most outlandish excuses why they would not go to Africa and I was just like—I don’t know where you’re getting this from.” People were like—I’m going to get kidnapped, I’m gonna get a disease” and I was like both of those things can happen in the States. In the United States, both of those things can happen. So it’s just crazy how people can say things.

Although he observed some anticipated difference, he also realized that the image of Africa he had acquired was not derived from an objective assessment. He provided what he felt was an objective assessment of the Tswana reality saying,

We were in the city and on the outskirts there was that general connotation of Africa where there were just these ten shacks and these barely built fences just to keep livestock and other animals out so there was definitely some confirmation of some things that we’re taught or spoken about about Africa but a lot of that is not correct whatsoever.

Happiness had framed her idea of Africa from the media which, according to her portrayed Africa as impoverished. As a result, she expected to see poverty all around.”

…the only thing I knew about Africa was what the media portrays, that Africa is a place of high need. It’s just the way that America is set up. They only highlight that high need…. so I’m just like, Oh my gosh, am I even going to have pillows,”
so I packed pillows, sheets, I packed like extra coats and different things that I probably, that I found out I didn’t even need when I got there. I was like almost getting ready to pack pots and pans because I wasn't sure what was going to be there, but I didn’t expect a lot of civilization going into the trip.

However, when she went to South Africa, she realized that although there was a level of poverty, there was a good measure of affluence too. She noted that it is not unusual for poverty and affluence to exist side by side.

We went into a township. I believe the first township we went into was called New Brighton. In this township, we got to see the other side of Port Elizabeth as far as families in shacks, whereas on the coast, where I stayed, there were all these tall built-up hotels, and so it brought to the attention the whole idea of tourism that’s there, which you see here in the United States. If you go to New York or even Miami, Florida, you have these hotels that are all built up, but then when you get into the deep center of the neighborhoods, it’s not as nice as what you see in the tourist locations.

During orientation, participants had been given information that shaped their ideas about the places they were going to visit. Participants reported having been warned” about insecurity in their various locations of study. George said that during orientation they [facilitators] just were being precautionary and warning us about a bunch of things, like they warned us a ton of times about just the local places and what to visit. Just about getting pick-pocketed.” Vickie said they had been warned” not to leave rooms at night because it’s dangerous unless you have someone with you that you know.”
and reported that the information they got during orientation gave the impression that Tanzania was a dangerous place. They were warned that due to these dangers they had to be cautious. She said,

…we were given like this-like orientation of like what we should and shouldn't do…. Basically they didn't want us to get like robbed or anything like that. But the way they presented it and made it seem like you have to like be cautious 24/7 or else, like something bad's going to happen to you. Like they made it seem like Tanzanians were dangerous which at-this was like the first day that we arrived in Tanzania.

The participants reported that although they heard stories related to insecurity when they were abroad, they did not at feel insecure and when they did like Rachael reported, it was a false alarm. Jeff attributed heightened security on the University of Botswana campus to the presence of large crowds that were attending African Youth games rather than to insecurity.

**Critical awareness.** Participants' ability to observe, analyze, reflect, question, compare, evaluate and interpret their experiences formed an important element in the meaning making of their intercultural experience. Participants demonstrated these abilities at different levels as they attempted to make sense of cultural differences. Findings of the study showed that students who moved beyond the level of observation, comparison and questioning were more likely to develop new meaning structures that those who did not. Through analysis, evaluation and reflection, students were able to review their perceptions of the new cultures and appreciate cultural difference.
For instance, Rachael observed that the training needed for Americans working with children with autism was quite different than that required of the Batswana. In the U.S., the least academic qualification is a Master's degree. However, in Botswana, people who worked with autistic kids had only a bachelor's degree. Rachael questioned these academic qualifications noting “it was just surprising the level of education that these people were working with these kids with autism.” As such, Rachael considered herself and her peers “teachers” of the local staff and volunteers. She felt that by sharing their American training with them, they were able to help the local staff and volunteers improve service delivery. She said,

And then when we went to a private clinic I didn't feel like the teachers and volunteers who worked in there were necessarily well enough prepared to do what they were supposed to be doing in these clinics like we did some in-services and I think they really learned a lot from us.

From Rachael’s perspective, American training was superior to Botswana’s and because Botswana’s did not measure up to America’s, it was considered inadequate. Failure to critically reflect on the local conditions that determined the adequacy of an undergraduate education for such work prevented Rachael from seeing the difference from a different perspective.

Similarly, Happiness used her ethnocentric African-American frame of reference to respond to race relations in South Africa. She listened to a narration of the story of South Africa and one thing that frustrated her was the insinuation that Black South Africans had not contributed to the economic development of the country.
questioned this view and criticized the creators of the story as being biased against native South Africans.

… we did a double-decker bus tour, and it’s like this automated system of the tour, but they talk about, they don’t really ever touch slavery or touch the aspects of just the fact that people were pushed out of their land. They tip-toe around it and say, –Oh, well, you know, the Dutch came in. They built these great highways that make this -these cities so much better,” and so it frustrates you because I feel you can’t teach people to understand how people are hurting unless they know what really happened in their history, and I feel it just frustrated me to see that a lot of people did neglect the role that Africans did play in building up the economy.

Happiness failed to analyze the situation as it related to the South African context or to reflect on reasons why, in orienting visitors to the country, the South Africans had chosen not to make reference to past political injustices. Instead, she used her understanding of racial relations in the U.S. to question South African behavior, and because she could not understand their actions, she was frustrated.

In contrast, Jeff observed difference in accessibility of data, evaluated the local business contexts and contemplated possible solutions that would fit the local context. The excerpt below reveals a meaning making process that involves the use of higher order abilities.

I learned that in order to successfully research nearly anything you have to really dig in. Coming from the U.S., and especially having access to an array of useful
databases, leaves me feeling like the answer to about any question I could have is right at my fingertips. Although I still had access to most of the same data that I do when I’m in the U.S., it wasn’t of much use this time. Markets in Botswana are obviously very different than in the U.S., so it’s very hard to use market research from very mature markets when analyzing markets that are young and rapidly growing. If I were to return and offer consulting services to any businesses in Botswana I would immediately start thinking about innovative types of research to do, such as personal interviews of customers, employees, and residents of the area that the business operates in. (self-reflection paper)

**Situating the experience.** This theme refers to the contextual factors that facilitated access to cultural knowledge. These include the various conditions of the study abroad location and the programmatic components that enabled or hindered engagement with the local culture. Participants temporarily positioned themselves in the historical, economic, social, cultural, environmental, geographical and political contexts (hereafter referred to as contexts) of their study abroad locations and engaged with these contexts through the various components of the study abroad design including the course curriculum (internships, volunteerism, projects and self-reflection), pre-departure orientation, excursions, duration, time and accommodation. The contexts provided a rich context for learning and, depending on how participants interacted with them, interaction led to or inhibited learning. Two subthemes that illuminate contextual factors that enabled or limited cultural exposure were identified.
Accessing local culture: Enablers. Accessing the local culture served as a foundation for the students’ learning abroad. This study found that through close interaction with rich cultural environments, participants not only became more aware of self and their cultures but also gained both cultural and global knowledge and skills. The study found that the most powerful learning environments were at the intersection of five programmatic components (volunteerism, internship, projects, home-stay and self-reflection) and four aspects of the study abroad location (economic, cultural, social and technological). Volunteerism, internships, and collaborative projects involved participants in real-life activities and provided avenues for interaction with the local people. Self-reflection provided opportunity for participants to reflect on what they had come to know and their own process of coming to know.

Prior to studying abroad, Happiness understood ‘happiness’ to be directly linked to the possession of material things. Since she understood South Africans to be living in abject poverty, she assumed that they were unhappy people. This assumption was put to test during her visits to an impoverished South African township and her interaction with the people there. She began to reconstruct a new meaning of ‘happiness.’ Prior to her study abroad, she had reflected,

…what they had us do is write an initial impression, so we had to write a paper on all the five senses of what we expected to see, taste, smell, so what I had said was I expected to honestly see just poverty. The only thing I knew about Africa was what the media portrays, that Africa is a place of high need.
On the first day in the township, she saw the kind of poverty she had expected and describing her experience, she said,

I was like really emotional and sad and everything, so at first I went in. This is like, you know, “Oh my God, this is so terrible, everything is so bad,” and I was thinking like, “Bad, bad, bad, bad,” but by the time I got a chance to interact with the people in the township and we- I definitely-I understood like, “Okay, this situation is very bad, but these people are actually a lot more happier than people living in mansions,” so it definitely did make me realize that sometimes your situation doesn’t necessarily have to determine your happiness and the joy that exists in your life.

From her experience, Happiness learned that poverty did not equate to unhappiness that such a concept must be interpreted in its context.

Julie’s visit to an Afrikaan’s farmer’s house exposed her to the economic disparities existing in South Africa. She identified this visit as her most stressful experience; here she had been able to compare the extravagance in the Dutch farmer’s home and the poverty-stricken township that she and her peers had visited the previous day.

The Afrikaner’s farm-Afrikaners are the White people…. we went from the township to an Afrikaner’s farm which was very high end…. It was so extravagant with their house and their farm. It was literally on the next day….We scarfed down lunch and then we go into her kitchen to put dishes away and there's two women of color in matching uniforms washing the dishes. I think that was the
first "Oh, my gosh! Are you kidding me right now?" I just came from this beautiful place and then now! I haven't seen servants or anything like that in the States as much, I guess. It's not open and in front of my face where I come from. Describing her reaction during this visit in her journal, Julie wrote,

It is Monday, the day after we get back from the Farmers and the experience at the Farmers was just icky. I felt gross the whole time. I didn’t enjoy myself, I kept getting angry, and I was judging and I was fed up as soon as I walked into that kitchen and I saw the women working …. (July 28th, 2014)

In response, she withdrew from engaging with others in any way while at the farmer's. In our interview, she described her response saying,

I couldn't speak because I was sick and so I shut down. There was a conversation that they were having about politics and usually I like to hear people's thoughts, especially with some of much controversial area of politics but I couldn't handle it anymore so I went to play cards. I just pushed myself away and hang out with mainly the girls….

Jeff reported that through working with a team of diverse people in a consulting project, he had learned that the best way to get through a team project successfully was to just not . . .

. . . discount what someone else says or is thinking but it's really important to try figure out where they're coming from and what it's based on because I mean I don’t think anyone is willfully ignorant in most situations like it's usually if you do believe that someone is wrong about something you should try to figure out
like why they are thinking that way there is no right or wrong they are just different perceptions of the same situation I guess, so I guess that's how I try to look at different opinions but it's not always that easy.

Essence identified her host family as a great source of knowledge for clarifying cultural knowledge she had acquired from her professors.

I would have to say like with my host, I always would asked them questions if I was, like, confused about something. I remember I had asked them about the Maasai because you know they're like-you always see pictures of them.

Visiting a local NGO also provided a great opportunity for learning about Tanzania's culture. Essence reported:

But I felt like there were more opportunities when we were in Arusha. Because when we went to Arusha they took us to, this- this NGO-I can't remember the exact, like what it stood for. But like, we met like- we went to like an elementary school where we met some, a lot of like the female Maasai, ladies and things like that….And I just remember, she was just saying how like apparently the Maasai culture is patriarchal. So a lot of the times the women don't get the opportunity to get the official education and like you know, maybe get careers outside of the domestic domain….They asked us questions and we asked them questions. It was interesting.

Dawn shared about their interactions with vendors where they learned,

Prices were super flexible. You just needed to talk about it. We weren't prepared for that, especially the street vendors and stuff…. I think we got everything off the
street. There's no price label on that. It's up to you. I don't think we were quite prepared for that different shopping experience.

Natasha underscored the power of authentic cultural exposure in her reflection of the last night when they spent time with Botswana students engaged in getting ready for the farewell party and playing ‘Catch Phrase.’

The main lesson I learned from this experience was that people from all different cultures are more alike than we are different. We enjoy many of the same habits and pastimes and we do not need to understand each other’s clues or contexts in a game like catch phrase to have a good time together. While we may be more alike than we are different, our differences can be a source of bonding and fun for us. This will affect my behavior towards new experiences in the future because I will appreciate the smaller ways of bonding more. You don't need a fancy time with bells and whistles and great shows of culture to appreciate each other's backgrounds. (self-reflection paper)

**Limiting factors to cultural engagement.** Participants also identified factors that limited access to cultural knowledge. The most commonly highlighted included time, duration of the program, American social bubble, and language. Most of the participants thought that they would have gained better understanding of the host cultures if the programs had been longer in duration. Also, they talked about limitation in terms of time, particularly those who were working on collaborative projects, suggesting that they spent a lot of time working on the projects and did not get much exposure to other cultural environments other than the business environment. Although participants were able to
overcome the language barriers in many cases, they opined that had they been better equipped with local language skills, they would have been able to engage with the culture better. Some participants suggested that their programs were not planned in such a way as to allow interaction with the people and they often found themselves caught up in the ‘American social bubble’, spending a lot of their time with other Americans.

Vickie captured a few of the factors that limited cultural exposure.

I think it would have been better if we had some community service or they took us to an event that was going on at that time- I don’t know how to explain that but so that we’re immersed fully in the culture. Just to see how they did things like when we went to dinner and it was just us we didn’t go to dinner with anyone else. Each night we had dinner at the university a couple of times we went out but it would just be our group of people there vs other people from Botswana.

Josefine reported her disappointment with the program, ‘That's a disappointment because we didn't really get a chance to engage a lot with all the people. We hung out a lot with ourselves and with our TA's and with our professor....’

Essence supported Josefine’s opinion:

… it was hard to break away, I guess. It was really easy to just be with the American students because we were familiar with each other. And there was just like, I guess, I'm a little-have a bit of shyness and nervousness. And just like, "Hi. I'm an American student. I wanna make Tanzanian friends," it's just like that's so hard to do, you know. Yeah, so it was usually... that's one thing that I would criticize the study abroad program in general about. That they, the program
doesn't give us the opportunity to interact with other Tanzanian students. Like it's, it's up to us to do it.

Kirk said he wished they could have also learned "about some of the smaller cities as opposed to just being in the big city" adding, that time did not allow for it.

So I wish we could have seen a little more and may not be a showy village but like to a real village and interact with people and see their mindset and how they think about things. I wish we could have done more of that but I kind of hard with the limited time of the program.

Essence also noted that they did not get a chance to see a balanced picture of Tanzanian life because when they were in Dar es Salaam, which was "very like more urban" with "a mixture of just like urban class" and it was "the expatriate part of Dar es Salaam where there were like a lot of like Western type of people. Similarly, George noted the limitation of being in one part of the country. He said, "Well, we, we didn't really travel much outside of the city, so. Like a lot of the students were telling us how far like from there-that it was completely different from where we were."

Some participants were of the opinion that the duration of the program was a limitation. For instance George said,

I feel like it would've been helpful to be there for another week or two, definitely.

But, I think I got a decent picture of the culture there. But, another week or two definitely would help. So, traveling a little bit more and then being there for longer would help for sure.
Natasha and Vickie shared the same opinion. Natasha said, "Since it was just a 2-week program it was kind of crammed together so I think it would be helpful to make that a longer program." Vickie said that she did not get a good grasp of Tswana culture and attributed this to the time spent abroad.

A longer period of time would have been a fuller grasp because everything was so quick so I think if it was the entire summer you’d have got a full grasp-like a better understanding of the culture. Being there for only three weeks it kind of just hit at once. It was not like a true understanding.

**Experiencing dissonance.** This theme relates to how participants made sense of their experiences with new cultural norms. Participants encountered cultural conflict when their assumptions were incongruent with the norms of the host cultures. Participants interpreted cultural differences through reflectively juxtaposing them with their own cultures, questioning them and, in some cases, reviewing their understanding leading to increased appreciation of cultural difference. Participants experienced new or unusual cultural phenomena in different ways but there were also commonalities; they exhibited resistance through questioning cultural norms. Also, participants experienced negative emotions which they regulated by projecting them on others.

**Questioning cultural norms.** This study found that cultural differences that did not fit neatly into the participants' assumptions generated conflict. When these conflicts emerged, participants found it difficult to come to terms with aspects of culture that deviated from what they knew or imagined. When their attempt to interpret the cultural
norms from a limited American cultural lens failed, they contested them and viewed them as problems, or shortcomings of the societies that practiced them.

Rachael expressed shock at the level of academic qualifications that teachers and volunteers who worked with children with autism had. In the U.S., she pointed out that one had to have at least a Master’s degree to do similar work. Since the teachers did not meet the minimum U.S. requirements for working with the said population, Rachael concluded that they were not fully qualified to teach that particular population.

And then when we went to a private clinic. I didn’t feel like the teachers and volunteers who worked in there were necessarily well enough prepared to do what they were supposed to be doing in these clinics. Like we did some in services and I think they really learned a lot from us and it was just surprising the level of education that these people were working with these kids with autism all these disorders which in the United states you have to have a masters’ degree for but like in Botswana the owner of one of the four clinics was a four year degree…it was a four year degree for them.

Like Rachael, Carol viewed medical practice in Botswana from the limited perspective of American practice. She understood that there should be a clear demarcation of doctors’ and nurses’ duties; however, in Botswana, she found that the boundaries of doctors’ and nurses’ responsibilities were blurred. She interpreted this as a problem,” as it did conform to American medical practice.

…. another problem would probably be their medication distribution system. The nurses although they are very knowledgeable, will change the route of your
medication without notifying the doctor. You know, like if it’s supposed to be an oral pill, and they don’t have the pill, they’ll give it to them as a sub cue injection. Just because that’s the only thing they have, and they wouldn’t notify anyone of that and they’re just so many complications that can arise from that.

Carol had difficulty making sense of the difference in the way nurses and their patients interacted in the U.S and in Botswana. Carol interpreted this difference in the way Tswana nurses interacted with their patients as "crazy." Reflecting on her most stressful experience, Carol wrote:

I worked with multiple nurses there. It was difficult to see them interact with the patients. They do not form a relationship with them. They treat them with little respect and compassion as compared to the states. We had a patient with 3rd degree burns covering her body. We took her to the tub to clean her. We had to scrub somewhat hard, but it was very painful…. The other nurse left and came with a syringe, grabbed the patient’s arm without saying a word and almost injected the medication until the patient noticed and leaned away. The nurse then proceeded to say something in Setswana and administered it. It was crazy to me that the nurse wanted to do that! In America, we talk to the patient, explain the procedure and assist in any way to make the patient more comfortable. (Journal entry: June 11th, 2015)

Carol observed the “ill” treatment of patients with a feeling of helplessness. She felt that since she was a foreigner, she had no right to intervene and, therefore, she chose not to speak out against behavior that she considered to be contradictory to the spirit of
nursing. Carol wrote, “It completely broke my heart. It took everything in me not to get mad because this isn’t my home or my culture. I have no right criticizing what they do. It was a rough but good day.” (Journal entry: June 11th, 2015)

Difference in the conception of personal space challenged the participants as much as they challenged its local meaning. The American students discovered that what they thought constituted intimate distance contradicted the Botswana’s idea of the same. Study abroad participants, particularly females, reported encountering young men whom they thought, by their actions, infringed on their personal space. Sharing her most stressful moment while in Tanzania, Josefine identified the following incident:

There were two older than me guys that were being what would be considered here very, very, very inappropriate. Certain comments, I remember one of them was like, "You should just call me husband." I am like, "Absolutely not." He told me that in Swahili and I didn't know what that word meant, but I looked it up in my dictionary and I was like, no, not cool.

Josefine considered this behavior inappropriate and chose to speak out against it.

… I was able to stand up against that and be like, "This is ridiculous, are you kidding me? No. And I am much younger than you so absolutely not." It's supposed to be a professional setting so that was very stressful for me. I was like wow, this is crazy.

Carol reported a similar encounter while she was in Botswana.

There are definitely sometimes when you know, somebody-like a male would come up to me and talk to me, and attempt to hit on me and I definitely felt
uncomfortable and was like, −Okay, you can stand over there and stay. I'm moving.

Carol expressed irritation over another similar incident in which she considered Tswana boys' behavior disrespectful: −I had a little to drink to feel tipsy, but not too much. It is ridiculous how guys will try to take advantage of you! One guy had his hand on my back while talking to me, but soon started moving his hand down and I had to grab it. It was irritating.” (Journal entry: June 14th, 2014).

The state of poverty was a source of concern for many participants but for Julie, the economic disparities between the White South Africans and their black counterparts was disorienting. She identified her experience at the Dutch farmer's home as the most stressful because in her opinion, it was unethical for the Dutch farmer to be living in the kind of extravagance she witnessed when there was abject poverty all around. She also found it disagreeable that the rich South Africans kept house servants as was the case at the Dutch farmer's home.

The Afrikaner's farm, Afrikaners are the white people…. we went from the township to an Afrikaner's farm which was very high end… It was so extravagant with their house and their farm. It was literally in the next day. People were kind of obnoxious.... We scarfed down lunch and then we go into her kitchen to put dishes away and there's two women of color in matching uniforms washing the dishes. I think that was the first "Oh, my gosh! Are you kidding me right now?" I just came from this beautiful place and then now. I haven't seen servants or
anything like that in the States as much, I guess. It's not open and in front of my face where I come from.

This incident induced anger. Julie was aware that she was being judgmental but she went ahead to criticize the Dutch farmer.

It is Monday, the day after we get back from the Farmer’s and the experience at the Farmer’s was just icky. I felt gross the whole time. I didn’t enjoy myself, I kept getting angry, and I was judging and I was fed up as soon as I walked into that kitchen and I saw the women working …. (July 28th, 2014)

She also decided to withdraw from engaging in any way while at the farmer’s. In our interview, she described her response saying,

I couldn't speak because I was sick and so I shut down. There was a conversation that they were having about politics and usually I like to hear people's thoughts, especially with some of much controversial area of politics but I couldn't handle it anymore so I went to play cards. I just pushed myself away and hang out with mainly the girls….

Regulating negative emotions. Differences in cultural practice and ideas induced negative feelings and emotions among the participants. Participant narratives abound with words denoting negative emotions including but not limited to “surprising,” “shocking,” “annoying,” “frustrating” “anger” and “stressful.” However, contradictions in their responses depicted an unwillingness to admit to themselves that they were experiencing these negative emotions. Instead they played down their negative emotions or projected them on others, directly or indirectly. This was mainly evident through
contradictory statements that participants gave during the interviews or discrepancies between interviews and reflections/personal journal entries.

Jeff was a case in point. He would not directly admit to having been frustrated by any aspect of Tswana culture; during our interview, he talked of his peers getting stressed over the relaxed Botswana time. At the same time, he said it was frustrating for their Botswana counterparts to come late only to give the excuse that they had overslept.

I think I fitted in well with that actually but I can definitely see some people were really getting stressed out about the kind of relaxedness of the project. We would set times and they’d show up 15 or 30 minutes later and say like I overslept or something like that which is possibly frustrating but at the same time didn’t really get in the way too much or anything.

In a different situation, Jeff admitted and denied at the same time to feeling uncomfortable. That he had to adjust to a different way of doing research from what he is used to made him uncomfortable but he would admit it. The contradictions in the following excerpt attest to this.

It was really, really hard to find information so I think may be if I could have prepared myself somehow on trying comparisons between the two even I think …we should have done more in personal research probably like surveys or something like that … I guess that was definitely uncomfortable not uncomfortable but I was just a little out of my comfort zone I guess when I can’t do research and I never had a cellphone while I was there and I was like I’m so
used to always being connected here it was nice but I could use more practice of being disconnected.

Vickie was uncomfortable with the state of hygiene at the hospital where she worked as a volunteer. These feelings were projected on her professor. Even though her professor was not present to articulate his/her response to the situation, Vickie made an assumption that he/she would ―have a stroke” if he/she witnessed these conditions. Describing the lack of hygiene protocol at the local hospital where she interned, Vickie said,

Today was more of a routine day for me. Checking on patients, making sure they are comfortable, taking vitals, passing meds, and charting. One thing’s for sure, my nursing instructor would have a stroke if she saw their way of sterile technique and sanitation between patients. In the states it is routine to glove and wash hands between patients. In [Name of hospital], soap is a hot commodity. They asked us several times why we washed our hands so much. After we explained our reasoning they said we should stop because they do not have enough funds to buy soap and paper towels. Needless to say we packed endless baby wipes and sanitizer bottles after that. (Journal entry: June 12th, 2014)

Evidently, Vickie speculated that the situation would cause her professor discomfort. It appeared that she herself was uncomfortable with the Botswana hygiene protocol thus the reason for packing –endless wipes and sanitizer.” By suggesting that her absent professor would be stressed by the situation, she seemed to be subconsciously articulating her own feelings of discomfort which she was not ready to admit.
Although Rachael did not project negative feelings on others, she was in denial that she was frustrated by the idea of adjusting to "Botswana time.” However, the contradictions in her statements indicate otherwise; she talked about not being "frustrated very much” but then said she didn’t think she never really got frustrated. This indicated her internal conflict in trying to make sense of the high flexibility of Tswana time against the backdrop of her own understanding of time as defined by her American culture.

Honestly I didn’t get frustrated very much when we went to Botswana since our program director emphasized that we needed to be willows not like oak trees. They said we needed to be flexible and things like that so the first time we were at Camphill and lunch took two hours we were like, wow! This is taking a really long time but we were trying to be flexible. I don’t really think I ever really got frustrated about it.

Likewise, George made contradictory statements in an attempt to hide his negative feelings about the difficulty of finding information without access to the internet. Although he talked about this being "a little frustrating,” he changed focus from himself to his peers and in a contradictory version, said it was "fun for me” but a little frustrating for other students. This contradiction and projection of negative emotions indicated his unwillingness to come to terms with his feelings of frustration when he was forced to find alternative ways of getting knowledge.

I figured I'm just not finding much like, if I could keep, keep doing this, I'll find it eventually. And then after like a week I realized it's not working and ... I guess I was a little, little frustrated…. I don't know, it was a little frustrating but then I
just worked with the, with the local students and it was, it was nice…. And it was, it was fun for me but I know a couple of the other students that were getting a little frustrated by it but ... I mean, it was a little frustrating just because we were trying to find like information on like the egg production industry in Botswana, which is, it was very hard to do. So that was a little frustrating but, it, I mean, in the end we got the information we needed to.

While these examples illustrate what I interpreted as skirting negative emotions, there remains the remote possibility that my identity as an African might have influenced participant responses with regards to their emotional responses to dissonance. Not wanting to appear to be undermining the continent or in fear of being offensive, they may have carefully filtered their responses to reflect what they thought I wanted to hear. This calls for extended study on students emotional responses to determine how they deal with negative emotions and how best to support them process such emotions in a healthy manner.

**Resolving cultural conflict.** This theme refers to the reconciliation of conflicting cultural practices and ideas. Participants‘ ability to process difference and change their perspective about the new culture was another meaning making dynamic that characterized participants‘ study abroad experience. Three processes were involved in resolving conflict: Navigating language barrier, dealing with cultural dilemmas and reviewing received knowledge.

**Navigating language barrier.** The lack of a common language between the participants and some of the hosts hindered effective communication and limited
participants’ access to the local culture. Even though students had been reassured that they would be able to get by as people in their respective countries spoke English as well, they discovered that this did not apply in all cases when they started interacting with the local people. Participants associated the ability of or lack of it to use a language that cut across cultures with a variety of meanings.

Vickie identified her inability to communicate with her patients as one of her most stressful moments. She pointed out that “a lot of people did speak English but we had patients that had no clue what we were saying and I had no clue what they were saying because they only spoke their native languages.” Following such difficulty, Vickie suggested that better preparation with language prior to study abroad would have helped her communicate better with her patients. She said, “… if I’d have it would have been helpful to take a Setswana class or something along those lines so that that way I could have had some sort of basic communication with my patients.”

Rachael, who worked with children in Botswana who did not know English, echoed Vickie’s suggestion on alleviating language barriers.

The first couple of days we went to Camphill which was where they had a lot of children who did not know English at all, so there was definitely a language barrier there and I think knowing more would have really, really helped a lot there.

For some participants like Natasha and Carol, lack of a common language inhibited interaction with the locals, particularly outside of the campus environment. Natasha noticed that
it was difficult because when you got away from campus, Setswana was much more predominant. So farther from college there was more of a language barrier so that became an obstacle to having conversations with some locals ….

Carol demonstrated the difficulty of communicating with the local people. She narrated:

… like when I was going shopping and stuff and I wanted to buy something, you know, I could not remember you know, like how much is this, how much is that. Yeah, and if I wa-, if I was looking for something, like one time I was looking for a wall charger and nobody understood what I was saying. And I was like, I just need a charger, I just need a charger!

Speaking a common language was perceived as an effective way of establishing connections and creating rapport with the people. Josefine reported that using the little Swahili she knew as her way of establishing a connection with the local people.

Like I said, learning Swahili in general is awesome, and getting a chance to speak it and connect with local population was great, and to practice it too. They also had a house girl and I was also trying to speak it with her as much as I could…. Whenever I could use Swahili I did because I wanted to be able to relate with the people. I really miss it, I wish I could really connect with it.

Josefine noted that when she and her peers used the local language, people became more receptive and friendly. She offered an example of taxi drivers who would charge them less for their rides just because they had talked to them in Swahili.

We went out a lot, the twelve students. We're 20-21, so we're like, "We have to go out and party!" We went out a lot. Getting home at five in the morning we were
like, how are we going to do that? Using Swahili, people were like, "OK yeah, I won't charge you as much as I would"…. They would give us their number, the drivers and stuff, it was awesome. We would be like, "You're so cool we're going to pay you more anyway."

Natasha agreed with Josefine: "It helped to have a little Setswana—yeah you say "Dumela ma' like address them properly and people would become very friendly." Julie shared that on a day that she spent learning isiXhosa from the children at the Crèche, she felt strongly connected to them.

I wasn’t feeling all that great to begin with either, and because it was Friday, there was no homework. It was a perfect day for them to miss. Since I wasn’t feeling all too great to begin with I just hung out and told the kids that today was their day to teach me. We sat down outside and I would just ask how to say thing in isiXhosa and then I would repeat the sayings to kids that would walk by. The smiles I received were beautiful. I felt so connected.

The local language was more than a tool of communication; speaking in the local language and doing so effectively was viewed as a symbol of respect for the people and their culture. Kirk said that he started learning Setswana on his own before departure because he wanted to be able to at least communicate with them. Even though English is their secondary language I thought it would be more respectful to use their language. Like I’m going to another country I’m not gonna use my language.
Kirk continued to seek opportunities to learn it while working at the hospital so that he could communicate with his patients.

I learned enough to say hi and ask simple questions. I started to be able to ask if they are in pain like how to ask if there is anything I can do to help them. It was tough though. It was kind of very broken but I could get the point across.

Josefine too suggested that speaking the local language — adds respect in saying I am here so I am going to speak your language, I am in your home so I want to fully respect being immersed in your culture.” She identified the greatest constraint in initiating conversation with people in her host country as the language barrier. Although she was learning Swahili, she hesitated to use it for fear of saying something inappropriate and offending people as a result.

I think it was that I didn't know Swahili well enough and that they maybe didn't know English well enough. It was a language barrier but also the sense of if I say something in Swahili and it's wrong I don't want to offend them…. I don't want to disrespect anybody or things like that. I don't want them to say, "Oh my gosh that American!” It was a language barrier, it was also a sense of I don't want to disrespect you.…

On her part, Essence used the local language to boost her sense of belonging. She did not want to be identified as American and she hoped that by using Swahili, Tanzanian's might think of her as one of their own. She explained:

…there were times where I could like because I'm obviously black, I would try to like not, you know, I didn't want it to be obvious that I was like American. Or like
foreign. So I was like, I can speak Swahili for like two sentences. But then after that I would have to like reveal that I'm not Tanzanian. So I, I wanted to, I guess I just wanted to feel like a part of like the environment, like actually feel like I was Tanzanian and not like different.

To overcome the language barrier, participants resorted to seeking help with translation from their counterparts, use of body language or taking personal initiative to pick up more language.

Vickie reported having relied on local nurses at the hospital to translate for her when she could not communicate with her patients. She explained:

I needed to find a nurse or a student that did know English and could translate for me. So at the time I always had someone with me or I'd have to go find someone to understand what they were saying or figure out what they needed.

Vickie observed that although there were communication difficulties, the experience did not take away the value of the interactions stating that “every interaction was fun and exciting and even when it was hard to communicate with people we tried to put our point across if they did not understand us.”

Carol sought help with translation from one of her nurse friends at the local hospital.

So I, I definitely felt bad because I had a wonderful nursing student with me and I just loved her with all my heart, um, but she would translate for me every time she could, so it was so great…. 

Jeff added,
…if there are three or four Botswana people in one place there’s gonna be a lot of Tseswana being spoken (laughs) and I’d be kind of confused and I'd have to ask what’s happening. Yes, that part, I wasn’t as prepared as I should have been probably. I probably should have studied up on Tseswana a lot more. It seemed like older people were less likely to slow down or translate for me but when the students that I was working with were really good about translating for me.

**Dealing with cultural dilemma.** Tension caused by new cultures that were, on the one hand appealing, and on the other hand, disagreeable created dilemmas for the study abroad participants. Participants saw merit in some of the new cultural practices but at the same time found it a challenge to embrace them fully.

Rachael shared that she liked the Tswana understanding of time, yet the long breaks they took sometimes frustrated her. She described the idea of having long lunch breaks as “crazy,” an indication that she was still surprised by the idea. She explained what she thought about “Botswana time”:

In Botswana their sense of time is a little more slowed and here in America we are very rushed, there you’re not rushed at all…. it didn’t matter where we were we had to have tea time and they made sandwiches, they had like cookies and small biscuit things and tea and coffee for us and then lunch time, lunch was always 2 hours. Besides the hospitals, lunch was 2 hours which was crazy (*with a lot of emphasis*) to us because lunch can never last 2 hours. Even when you go out for lunch somewhere it doesn’t last 2 hours. So that was different for us…we loved
tea time though. Like the break and the tea-everyone really liked the tea. Yeah, just the tea and just how relaxed their sense of time was.

Even though Rachael liked the long breaks, Her attempt to adjust was more a response to her program director’s instructions rather than self-initiated and the attempt to adjust to a slowed sense of time was frustrating.

Honestly I didn’t get frustrated very much when we went to Botswana since our program director emphasized that we needed to willows not like oak trees. They said we needed to be flexible and things like that so the first time we were at Camphill and lunch took two hours we were like wow! This is taking a really long time but we were trying to be flexible.

Rachael got very her frustration; she reported that one of the things that she was trying to do after her return to the U.S. was to —əflax more when it comes to a sense of time and stuff like that.”

Essence asserted that she did not have a problem with Tanzanian’s concept of time because it was not new to her. She readily offered that in fact, like the Tanzanian’s, she got late to events too.

In Tanzania like people would show up late to things, like maybe like, I forgot Tanzanian times what they call it. I even have my own personal word for it. I call it CP time, which is, stands for colored people time… that's not new. I think I've experienced it. Like coming-showing up late to things. I show up late to things all the time. You know, so that's nothing new.
Although she seemed to appreciate the flexibility of ‘Tanzanian time’, Essence did not quite appreciate the flexibility with which the Tanzanian public system operated. She expressed annoyance at what she considered a disorderly public system; unlike in the U.S. where public service vehicles operated on rigid time schedule, here they did not. She observed that

the public transportation system isn't like as-I feel like that's the thing with American culture, everything, everything has to be like completely ordered. And they freak out if something's out of place. And Tanzanians are more like laid back. I feel like that's like, manifested in like the public transportation system, how like at one time you see three at a time and another time you see none. I didn't- I mean sometimes it was annoying when like, especially when I was late for class….

In spite of the inconvenience, Essence concluded that it was not as bad since she learned to take other means of transportation and also decided that it would not frustrate her. She said, —Bt I've never-it never like bothered me to the point where I'd be like, oh Tanzania, I can't-it wasn't like too frustrating or anything like that.”

Jeff loved the idea of not being subject to time and considered it a welcome break from the otherwise busy campus schedule. However, when the same idea was applied to the work environment, it became a source of frustration. Jeff explained,

It was actually kind of nice because I'm used to the college of business especially in the honors program where everyone there is like completely packed schedule its just like go go go on like a hundred per cent for most of the work we do then
when we get there and it's a lot more laid back…. We would set times and they'd show up 15 or 30 minutes later and like I overslept something like that which is possibly frustrating but at the same time didn't really get in the way too much or anything.

From his experience, however, he formed a positive perception of ‘Botswana time‘ counter to what was almost a threat to their successful completion of the consulting project. He said, “I kind of liked the explanation they gave like we don't let time control us we just kind of control our time and we don’t let it dictate our lives and stress us out which is-I liked that part actually.”

Like her peers, Natasha found the laid back nature of Tswana lifestyle appealing because it helped relief stress. In her observation, there were no strict procedures on when things should be done. She noted that time was ‘a lot more relaxed like with the time like Botswana time and not just that but procedure everything has more strict set of rules over here this is how this and this and this is done….‘ Yet Natasha expected that their client deliver on his financial report punctually and when he did not, she impatiently wondered why.

… and then even working with our clients we would like ooh let’s see your financials and they were like ‘We didn’t make that one” and then we would be like ‘What do you mean?

All the same, Natasha concluded, “it [relaxed sense of time] was also good because it kind of takes down the stress level and when you walk around it feels more calm.”
Participants were also conflicted on how to interpret the friendly and welcoming nature of the local people. On the one hand, they appreciated it but on the other hand, they questioned the genuineness of their disposition. This conflict was exemplified by Kirk who said,

I loved the people, everyone had a smile on their face, everyone was greeting you, everyone was interested in talking to you it’s different from here sometimes you can even get a hello. If you’re walking down the street you always got _dumela, dumela_ when you made eye contact with someone…. I don’t know if that is taken at face value, I mean because one of my problems was that I wasn’t sure if all the emotions and things I was perceiving from them were genuine so I couldn’t really read people but for face value everyone seemed to be nice to us everyone liked us….

Vickie shared similar sentiments when asked to share her cultural experience in Botswana. She said that the Batswana were friendly and that . . .

. . . they’re very caring people. They want to make that relationship with us. It was not about-I don’t know if it is just because we’re from America that they wanted to make that connection with us. Some of the people wanted us to bring them back with us and stuff like that. It’s understandable, I guess. They wanted to establish that connection so that if they were ever to come to America they’d have one of us can guide them.

George appreciated the Batswana’s friendliness but at the same time he interpreted it as invasion of his personal space when people were “too friendly”.
All the students there are much more friendly, and, like the first day meeting us. They, they also had people here are a lot more, uh, protective of their personal space… like, I didn't have any problems with it but they were just, they were much more friendly. Um, that was a little different, too, just getting used to that the first couple days.

By reflectively juxtaposing American and African cultures, participants came to a point of determination of what they thought about the antagonistic cultural norms. They found opportunity to reflect on American social values that they had not paid much attention to and learned that difference in social values was not a matter of one being the right way and the other being wrong but it was a matter of difference.

**Reviewing received knowledge.** Part of the participants’ meaning making entailed a critical assessment of knowledge they had previously acquired about the cultures of Africa in general (which largely informed their understanding of the cultures specific to their study abroad locations) and the cultures of their respective study abroad locations in particular. Through reflection on their previous understanding, they identified discrepancies between the knowledge they had uncritically acquired from various sources and reconstructed their knowledge as informed by their own experiences. A case in point was Kirk whose perception of Botswana was partly shaped by “what we are taught or spoken about about Africa” and so his image of Botswana was that of an impoverished, uncivilized country. Having a firsthand experience of Botswana made him realize that the African narrative was weaved out of ignorance. Although it reflected some reality of Botswana, it was marked by inaccuracies.
Sad to say there's a level of ignorance that I think that comes with that. I expected to see more uncivilized areas I mean like huts and what not because that is all we're told over here but again we were in the city and on the outskirts there was that general connotation of Africa where there were just these ten shacks and these barely built fences just to keep livestock and other animals out. So there was definitely some confirmation of some things that we're taught or spoken about about Africa but a lot of that is not correct whatsoever.

Prior to going to Tanzania, Josefine’s knowledge of Africa was informed by classroom theories. This knowledge shaped her ideas on what she considered urgent economic needs of the continent and appropriate interventions. After being in Tanzania for six weeks, Josefine realized how naïve it was to base her assumptions of Tanzania's economic situation on classroom theory. Her assumption that financial resources were the sole solution to Tanzania's economic situation was reviewed; having witnessed how hard working Tanzanians were, she concluded that greater potential lay in utilizing human resource to address economic challenges instead of quick monetary aid. She came to the realization that theorizing solutions of countries like Tanzania without contextualizing them can limit understanding of the said country. In her opinion, being immersed in the culture is one way of gaining understanding of the environment of interest.

It [being in Tanzania] opened my eyes a lot more to the theory in classrooms. It's funny because we're in a bubble. We think about all of these problems, issues, theories, and concepts. Prior to going I remember being like, "If I were an MP or the Prime Minister or in charge of any type of political influence in Tanzania what
would I do?" Immediately I would funnel money to infrastructure and things like
that, when I got there I was like, that is actually really difficult, here are all the
challenges. Then it's also the beauty of seeing the human capital potential too,
people are phenomenal, they're so hard working.

The study abroad experience brought students’ awareness to the discrepancies
between the reality and the world created by books they read as part of their cultural
orientation before travelling abroad. They assessed the book information as inaccurate or
distorted because it did not reflect the reality of some of the countries they visited. Carol
thought that the book she read about the HIV/AIDs situation in Botswana was
misleading. She said,

I don’t, I don’t really-I didn’t know much before going into Botswana. I read a
book-I thought-we read a book about HIV and AIDs and how high the prevalence
is, and that it was huge over there, but it wasn’t as big as what I was expecting. So
I guess I was expecting more there’ll be problems with that.

Like Carol, Vickie and Kirk felt that the book they had been asked to read did not
prepare them adequately for the reality of Botswana. They reported that the book
provided a limited view of HIV/AIDs transmission and portrayed the government as
complacent in responding to the HIV/AIDs situation. However, from their experience, the
participants concluded that the content in the book did not give accurate information to
match the reality.

Vickie said,
Because HIV/AIDS is a huge epidemic there and we were learning about it and we read that book and they were telling us about how a lot of the people will have affairs and multiple partners and that's how the disease is spread. I didn't really think there was much going into it. I didn't think there was enough education or things going on about it. I just thought it was there and they were not doing anything about it. But really they're doing a lot about it. They are giving the people— they're giving children free medication and always wanting to check up on them.

Kirk shared that he had limited information about HIV/AIDS and how it is transmitted in spite of having read an assigned book on the same. Kirk indicated that working with HIV/AIDS infected patients clarified his understanding of the brought greater understanding of the disease. He said that one of the gains from his Botswana visit was that he had a better perspective of the HIV/AIDS situation that a lot of his counterparts who had not had firsthand experience.

I think I have a different perspective on HIV/AIDS than a lot of people here in the United States just because I have been to Botswana and I realized that it's not just your decision— it's not like you had unprotected sex or something like that but a lot of people were born with it. Actually there was this case of— this gentleman’s son had surgery and if I'm taking his word for it he said his son acquired HIV through transfusion. And so that's another thing that I didn't even think of as a way of transmission, that you can just get it from unsanitary surgical situations.
Participants shared that the information they received about the state of insecurity in their respective countries of study abroad was inaccurate or exaggerated. They rejected the narrative they had heard about insecurity to formulate their own understanding. Talking about the discrepancy between the information he received during orientation and his real experience, George said,

And then, a lot of the things they, they just were being precautionary and warning us about a bunch of things like, they warned, they warned us a ton of times about just the local places and what to visit. Just about getting pick-pocketed…. Honestly, at no point when we were traveling, I felt like we were in danger, like, worried about getting pick-pocketed.

On her part, Vickie discovered that Africa was not as unsafe as it had been portrayed during orientation. She said, “We were told not leave rooms at night because it’s dangerous….” However, she realized that it was not as dangerous as she had expected. She reported, “So there in Botswana I didn’t get any negative vibes about fighting or anything like so it did make me realize that Africa is not a bad place, it’s welcoming and it shouldn’t be scary.”

Like her peers, Essence rejected the notion that Tanzania was insecure.

…they told us like a lot of things. Basically they didn't want us to get robbed or anything like that. But the way they presented it, it made it seem like you have to be cautious 24/7 or else, like something bad's going to happen to you. Like they made it seem like Tanzanians were dangerous…. And after six weeks, I feel like they definitely over- um, they played that, overplayed that.
Also, participants felt that the information they received about the concept of time in the various African countries was presented to them as something they have to endure. Participants reported that when they were over the initial —shock” they embraced the idea of a relaxed sense of time and actually enjoyed it.

Natasha shared how she came to embrace Tswana concept of time.

We heard about Botswana time like African time before we went over they tried to warn us and then when we got there it was like everything is not like it is at this time, it’s going to end at this time…it’s more like a free flowing.

Later she said,

…afterwards I went and stayed for summer in New York and it was like everyone has somewhere to be, everyone has to walk past there. When we went to the mall it was like people would stop and would like talk to us and like get phone numbers and they were like ooohhh they were friends and we could hang out.

George shared his opinion about the information that he had got from a book he had been assigned as part of the study abroad orientation. He described the content as —extreme” suggesting that it did not give an objective portrayal of the study abroad location. He said,

…and a book I can’t remember what the title is but was generally about traveling and it broke down a general review of the history like different cultures in different areas but I would say some of the things in the book were more on the extreme end, I’d say exaggerated and I didn’t see much of them. Like the book talked about Africa time they call it and how everyone is just laid back and just
like don’t expect to meeting on time when you’re there and I definitely experienced some of that when I was there but it wasn’t as bad as I was expecting. The book kind of over-prepared me for that kind of thing.

**Making the strange familiar.** This major theme refers to the increased appreciation of the cultural norms of the host countries exhibited through cultural flexibility, adaptability and reduced ethnocentrism. Participants demonstrated greater appreciation of cultural difference, readiness to adopt new cultural practices and ideas, openness to new cultures and ideas, the ability to adjust to culturally different situations and expand perspectives in making meaning of other diverse cultures.

**Developing cultural flexibility and adaptability.** In this study, cultural flexibility is defined as the tendency to move through different cultures as implicated through the ability to question and review assumptions about own culture and other cultures appreciation of difference and readiness to adopt new cultural practices and ideas. Adaptability refers to openness to new cultures and ideas as well as the ability to adjust to culturally different situations. Participants exhibited adaptability as a result of working in local environments, through interaction with or collaborative activities with the local people and engagement in everyday activities.

George provides a perfect illustration of the transformational process towards developing. His expectations and assumptions about business culture are challenged through engagement with a real-life business practice. Interaction with a local business client challenges his assumptions about the universality of business practice. Through analysis of and reflection on the situation, George comes to the understanding that
business practice is unique to the context and in future he would be more attentive to the differences between U.S. and other business cultures. His instant of cultural disorientation is captured the first time his group meets to interview their client:

He reported that after days of practicing how to conduct a formal interview, George was surprised that the interview skills he had acquired were not practical in the new cultural context. George said, —And then, so we got there and we went for the first interview and it was, we had done like practice interviews like in the summer over the 6 days….‖ But when they went for the interview, it —was a lot less formal and then it was at a chicken farm and it was, it was like loud there. All the chickens were making noise. And they were in his office and there were a bunch of fans.” In his reflection, his assumption about Botswana business culture viewed from a rather ethnocentric lens is revealed. George thought of the interview as —a very extreme example of how business is done in Botswana, and how far it can stray from business customs and practices in the United States.” Processing this difference through analysis and reflection, George reviews his assumptions, and reflects a changed perspective on business culture not only in Botswana but in other cultural settings. He wrote:

After working with my team and analyzing the interview some more, I realized that it was, in fact, a productive interview. This experience helped me to learn that I need to not draw conclusions so quickly upon trying out new experiences. I initially drew the conclusion that, because it was different from past interviews I had done, our first interview with Chini Holdings was not effective. In the future I will go into new experiences like this realizing that things may not go exactly how
I’m used to, or how I plan for them to go and not overreact. This first interview at the chicken farm really helped me to change my outlook for the rest of the project and was an experience that I will remember and draw back on for the rest of my life. (Reflection paper)

Carol provides another example of how the various factors intersect to impact transformational learning. Through reflection, she is able to place her assumptions into perspective and realize that they are informed by her socialization as an American. Working through dissonance and understanding why Botswana nurses do not follow a hygiene protocol like they do in the U.S. became a “rewarding” experience and reveals a less ethnocentric and adaptable participant:

So far the hardest thing for me to do is to break my usual protocol. It is demanded that I wash my hands between patients and change gloves. However, I learned today that nurses don’t have the time, money or resources. It definitely makes me feel spoiled and a little bratty when I assume that the proper protocol to wash my hands is the same in Africa. The nurses looked skeptically at my routine, as they later told me they don’t have the time to do that and they don’t have the money for more soap. It was rough, yet so rewarding (Journal entry: June 10th, 2014)

Natasha moved from a point of discomfort with the Botswana sense of time to weighing the social benefits of a relaxed lifestyle to accepting that it an alternative and profitable way of understanding time. Natasha expressed her exasperation with a business client who could not deliver on his part of the job in time:
A lot more relaxed like with the time like Botswana time and not just that but procedure everything has more strict set of rules over here-this is how this and this and this is done and then even working with our clients we would like be—Ooh let’s see your financials.” and they were like—We didn’t make that one” and then we would be like—What do you mean?”

Her ability to view Botswana time from a Botswana perspective and to adapt to the new concept of time was revealed in her acceptance that there are benefits to not having a rushed lifestyle.

So just more relaxed—it was also good because it kind of takes down the stress level and when you walk around it feels more calm and where everybody is friendly and not rushing around to get somewhere else so you can stop and talk and take time here it is like everyone has almost always somewhere to be and especially since I told you I was in New York this summer and even here most of my friends in Business school have schedules that are really packed like classes, like meetings.

Also, through exposure to authentic culture and interaction with the local people, participants gained cultural knowledge that led to the questioning of their assumptions about their own culture and the new cultures they had engaged with.

I think I would be more comfortable to study abroad anywhere else again because I already have had an experience I’d know what to expect you know the kind of looks I’d get, how to communicate with someone just try to find general things that you guys can meet in the middle on and help communication out. I feel like I
can go to a lot of places in the world now and have an easier transition. Not necessarily Africa it can be anywhere I feel like I'd just be able to transition better than someone who has not had that experience outside of the United States.

Josefine appreciated the merit of having not having time dictate one's life and that the understanding that time was a servant of people and not vice-versa would have an effect on how she approached her daily activities in future.

In terms of time, slowing down and time being the servant of the person, I liked that because it allowed me to look at life differently in terms of enjoying people and being present instead of always having to worry about what's next or what's the next thing ... The futility of the next thing on my schedule, this is weird. Now when I plan stuff I am like OK when am I going to do whatever and live in the moment and not have to be go go go. Also have to realize how I want to go about my day.

Jeff's summary of his overall experience exemplified readiness to adapt to new cultural environments.

During my 3 week stint in Africa I tackled more challenges than I ever thought I would. It would be impossible for me to have experienced everything that I did without learning a massive amount. I now feel that I would be more apt to handle various cultures besides that of Botswana and America because while all cultures are unique, learning how to handle their differences can be more uniform. I learned what it felt like to be a minority, and how to become comfortable with it.

(Journal entry: July 10th, 2014)
**Reduced ethnocentrism.** This subtheme was defined as the ability to judge other cultures without using the standards of one’s culture as a yardstick to determine the legitimacy of beliefs, values and practices of another culture. Participants exhibited understanding that it was restricting to view other cultures from their own cultural lens and that recognizing people have different ideas, values and practices because of their own cultural orientation was important for improving understanding across different cultures.

From an interview that George thought had gone awry because it did not adhere to American style of business interviewing, he realized that it was important to be aware that wherever you're from, is not the only, the only thing. Just be able to realize differences in other areas and cultures throughout the world.” He continued,

I think it helps a lot just seeing like-experience business through mainly-like-just not like we do in the university Business School. Just a local business, how they operated and it was just good seeing something that was completely different and realizing that you can operate businesses and get the same results with different processes and just seeing how differently everything was over there. So it definitely helped like, helped you see it, see a business from a different angle but, so, it was a good experience seeing that.

After being in South Africa for 6 weeks, Julie concluded that the best way to fit into another culture was not going in with dispositions and if you do, and those are like refuted not to get upset about this, or just to have an open mind….” She learned that even within one culture, there are differences that one needs to pay attention to
I think it was very helpful to get multiple sides [inaudible] and to understand that within the city area that there's different sides to every story and people are living in different conditions. I think I learned a lot and that it was possible for us to experience this and have even more of an open mind about where different people are coming from and what they're doing. I think that helped a lot to—even if we weren't there for a long period of time, just to have more of an open mind. It really helped.

Dawn reported that as an international student academic advisor, she felt better prepared to handle cultural difference when working with the students.

I have at least twenty international students, and I feel like I'm much more understanding now, and especially on like questions and homework and stuff when they come to my help sessions if they don't understand something, I'm like, "Okay. I need another one of you that understands it to help me translate this. We're miscommunicating somehow." I feel much more prepared for those conversations now, and for understanding like if they do something that is odd to me from my upbringing, that it's their culture. It's not they're odd. It's a difference.

Participants also made self-report that suggested that they had become more aware that cultural difference was contextual and that their ideas, values and practices did not have to align with their own ways of thinking or doing. For example, Rachael attributed her ability to see from other people’s perspectives as a result of her study in Botswana.
Just because of my stint in Botswana and now that I am working with international students here I don’t have ideas set in stone. There’s nothing I have in my mind that I think everyone should think. So I don’t think that everyone is going to have same views as me I don’t expect them to and I’m not gonna try to tell them that they can’t think their own way.

Kirk too said that the Botswana experience had trained him not to make assumptions about how people should behave.

I understand more where people are coming from as a result of going to Botswana and not automatically assuming that this person does this, or that person does that. Looking at their past seeing where they’re coming from and understanding that portion of it more. Just keeping in mind that everyone has an opinion and just because it’s different from mine it doesn’t mean it’s wrong. I can respectfully disagree or change my opinion like yeah you actually have a point there…. I think it’s me trying to see where they are coming from than me trying to make them see where I’m coming from.

**Developing a global outlook.** Participants demonstrated a global orientation through increased interest in other cultures and global affairs, recognition of global interconnectedness, consideration of global careers and improved team work skills in intercultural contexts. Participants attributed this to their study abroad experience.

Through interaction with a CEO of a local business company, Josefine became aware of how closely connected countries that are in disparate parts of the world are.
… Another really meaningful experience I would say was when I got a chance to speak to Ashish Thakkar. That was really cool because it opened my mind to the relationships East Africa has with India and Dubai. I am like —Wow this world is so connected, I am fascinated.” He is Indian, a refugee from Rwanda, lives in Uganda and does a lot of business in Dubai. That was amazing!

Carol shared her geographical understanding of the world. She reported that she had gained greater understanding of the world as revealed in this interview response:

I think people know how big the world is, but they don’t really understand it. You know, it’s so easy to know something but not really understand it and so I think being able to go to Botswana, I realized you know, how truly massive this world is…. I definitely did not expect it because you know in the States, you’re in your home, you’re in your own little bubble and although you go to different states or different parts of your country, you don’t really truly realize and appreciate how large the world is and all the cultures it contains, and all the backgrounds it contains and all of the, you know, geographical sites it contains.

Dawn understood the global nature of her future career; she shared that Botswana experience had prepared her to work in an international business environment and she wanted to get more cultural exposure.

I guess just my general, like I already have a plan. I want to go volunteer during winter break somewhere abroad, and then I want to take a vacation for my senior trip. Instead of doing a spring break trip or something going down to Florida or something like that, I'd rather go to backpack around Europe and just try to avoid
the tourist things to do, and try to get more of the real side of the story. I feel like I'm so much more prepared to work in an international business environment now just having that experience and stuff.

Kirk reported having developed keen interest in global affairs and was more attentive to global problems and issues.

After Botswana, I'm more interested in what's going on around the world… looking at the bigger picture of what's going on around the world as opposed to just where I come from, thinking about worldly problems outside of the United States because I've realized that well I don't watch the news much but now I look at news much more elsewhere as opposed to strictly what is going on in the United States. Like I'm trying to follow what's going on and keep up with Botswana.

Josefine's Tanzania experience brought to her attention issues of global significance such as international cooperation and the need for countries to come together to address global challenges that different countries face.

It also made me more aware about the greater issues. For example, there was a lot of conversation about the continent as a community and for me that was really cool. Now I think about almost the community in a sense where it's like nations can help each other out. I am processing this as I speak in terms of development and in terms of international cooperation, what are our goals as a global community?
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a review of the methodology used for this study. Additionally, I have presented synopses for the 12 study abroad participants who participated in this study. Also, I have provided a discussion of the five themes that emerged from this study and which describe the transformational learning process in study abroad in nontraditional destinations. The themes discussed include: (a) positioning as learner, (b) situating the experience, (c) experiencing dissonance (d) resolving conflict and (e) making with other cultures.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, I start by providing a review of the purpose of this study. Then I provide a summary and interpretation of the research findings as they related to the research questions. Thereafter, I provide a discussion on the implications of the research findings for research, practice and theory. Finally, I provide a reflection on what I have learned from the writing process.

Overview of Study

In this study, I sought to extend literature on study abroad by seeking understanding of U.S. undergraduates’ meaning making processes in nontraditional study abroad destinations. Also, in view of emerging research data showing that immersion in a different culture does not necessarily translate into learning, this study endeavored to examine how programmatic components of the study abroad programs facilitate student learning. By paying close attention to the various aspects and elements weaved into the program design, I hoped that the study would illuminate how the design of study abroad programs enhance or hinder the development of intercultural and global competencies.

Study abroad participation in the U.S. has increased rapidly within the last ten years. Goodman (2009) predicted that this increase would continue as student demand for study abroad in the coming decade increases, opening up more destinations and new program development to accommodate the demand. This predicted increase was reflected in the 2014 Open Doors annual report on study abroad which indicated that study abroad participation had grown from 260,327 in the 2008/2009 academic year to 289,408 by the end of the 2012/2013 (IIE, 2010; 2014). The increasing popularity of study abroad
programming in U.S. post-secondary institutions is driven by the conviction that participation has the capacity to impart intercultural and global skills that are indispensable to an increasingly globalized world (Brascamp, et al., 2009; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Patterson, 2006; Pedersen, 2010; Rexeisen, et al., 2008). In light of the low participation and reported benefits of study abroad, the greatest concern has become the programming of study abroad programs to accommodate more and diverse participants. Two significant components that have been introduced in study abroad programming in recent years include shorter durations and expansion to nontraditional destinations.

Changes in programming, unfortunately, have not been a panacea for the challenges of study abroad. On the contrary, they have added a new dimension to existing concerns-that of quality vs. quantity. Some researchers and commentators argue that study abroad as it is designed currently is more concerned with numbers at the expense of meaningful learning (Wanner, 2009). Changes in study abroad programming such as length of program, student accommodation, study abroad courses, classroom setting etc. have raised questions on the capacity for the new components to affect transformative learning (Ogden et al., 2014). Some researchers have cast doubt that there is much cultural learning taking place abroad (Page, et al, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009) or that students are gaining the knowledge and skills that employers look for in prospective employees (Gardner, Gloss & Steglitz, 2008; Van Hoof, 1999). Doubts about the long held view that study abroad has to impact student learning and development have been challenged in recent studies (Paige et al., 2009; Zemach-Bersin, 2008) and Vande Berg
(2009) concluded that it cannot be expected that learning will occur automatically by the mere fact of immersing students in a foreign culture.

If what the students are learning in the more researched destinations is in doubt, it is much more obscure what students are learning in the less researched nontraditional locations (Wells, 2006). In view of the importance being attached to nontraditional destinations manifest in the recommendations of the Lincoln Commission (2005) and Senator Paul Simon’s (2003) Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad proposals to expand study abroad to nontraditional destinations, “much empirical research is needed to understand more about actualities of study abroad programs in less familiar destinations” (Che et al., p. 113).

Study abroad in nontraditional destinations is gaining momentum as evidenced by the gradual increase in students’ choice. In 2001/2002, for instance, nontraditional destinations hosted only 37.4% of all U.S. study abroad participants but ten years later, in the 2011/2012 academic year, 46.7% of participants studied in nontraditional destinations (IIE, 2011). In 2006, NAFSA compiled a list of justifications for studying in nontraditional destinations from several on-line resources. NAFSA suggested that such locations provide unique opportunities for meaningful cultural integration and intercultural learning, offer unparalleled opportunities for students to pursue a variety of personal, academic, linguistic, cultural, and professional goals, help distance students from the average study abroad program participant, and facilitate development of desirable job-market skills such as flexibility and complex problem solving skills (NAFSA, 2006). Advocating for nontraditional destinations, Che et al. (2009) suggest
that although learning can happen anywhere, personal transformation becomes more possible – because of the role of novelty in perturbing our perspectives… when we encounter and experience that which we have not encountered before” (p. 104). However, in the absence of empirical data on the impact of study abroad in these destinations (Wells, 2006), this claim cannot be confirmed or disputed. In this study, I suggest that studying in nontraditional destinations has the capacity to affect transformative learning among U.S. undergraduates.

The success or failure of study abroad in aiding the development of intercultural and global competencies has been debated for a while now. While some researchers found evidence to support claims on intercultural development (e.g. Anderson at al., 2006; Pedersen, 2010)) others found modest development (e.g. Vande Berg, et al., 2009) and yet others found there was development in some but not all of its dimensions (e.g. Salisbury, et al., 2013). Researchers who investigated the development of global skills found that study abroad had a positive impact on its growth (Brascamp, et al., 2009; Douglas & Jones-Rikken, 2001). These studies relied predominantly on assessment tools, which captured the outcomes but not the process of learning. This study sought to examine the process by which participants develop intercultural and global skills in the context of less familiar cultures.

Transformative Learning theory (Mezirow 1991, 2000) and the Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardoff, 2006) provided a theoretical base for this study. Transformative learning theory was particularly useful as it has its focus on how individuals make meaning of life experiences leading to significant learning. It also
emphasizes the central role of dissonance as a catalyst for change as well as the important elements of critical reflection and self-reflection (Cranton, 2006). Additionally, it focuses on transformative learning as a process by which individuals emancipate themselves from culturally constrained frames of reference to form frames that are more accommodating. This is relevant in study abroad situations which may involve reflection on cultural differences, particularly in the context of disparate cultures, where participants might attempt to interpret new cultural experiences from a limited American perspective. The Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardoff, 2006) suggests that intercultural competence is predicated upon individuals’ knowledge, attitudes and skills and external outcomes that are expressed in individuals’ interactions with culturally different others. At the individual level, one needs to have an attitude of respect towards, openness to and curiosity about other cultures. By conducting this study, I hope the findings would contribute to the theoretical understanding of the learning processes in intercultural contexts.

**Summary of Findings**

To explore students’ study abroad experiences in the said locations, this study utilized Charmaz’ (2006, 2014) constructivist grounded theory methodology. 12 U.S. undergraduates who had studied abroad in nontraditional destinations recently were selected using both criterion and theoretical sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, study abroad participant journals and self-reflection papers. Follow up interviews to clarify and confirm participants’ thoughts were conducted for no more than 15 minutes.
Data were analyzed using Charmaz’ (2014) constructivist grounded theory methods. Consistent with grounded theory methods, analysis of data and data collection progressed simultaneously (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Creswell, 2012). The study utilized the constant comparative method of analyzing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Glaser, 1998). I used Atlas.ti to code, analyzed and find connections between data. I started open coding with the first interview, diary and reflective paper and assigned codes to segments of data. On each subsequent set of interview transcripts, diaries and self-reflective papers, I identified new codes and compared them with previously identified codes. I used theoretical coding to establish relationships between codes. Through comparison of cases and reassessment of codes, I identified themes and subthemes that describe the transformational learning process in study abroad.

This study was guided by three research questions. Research Question 1 explored how participants made meaning of their intercultural experience. Findings suggest that positioning as learner. Three subthemes that captured how the student positioned her/himself in the study abroad context included (a) seeking novelty, (b) critical awareness and, (c) setting expectations. Search for novelty opened up access to disparate cultures; the interplay between personal characteristics and the various contexts of the study abroad location framed the students’ experience. Depending on the cognitive skills that students employed to process new experiences learning was achieved or hindered. Another emergent theme was experiencing dissonance and the theme was classified into two subthemes: (a) questioning cultural norms and (b) regulating these undesirable emotions. When expectations and assumptions were incongruous with the reality of the
study abroad contexts, students experienced cultural dissonance. Cultural dissonance attracted resistance which was manifested in the questioning of norms of the host culture. In addition, cultural dissonance induced negative emotions and regulating these undesirable emotions by projecting them on others was the mechanism that students adopted to mitigate the effects of stressful experiences.

Research Q2 examined how participants navigated the intercultural intersection in the context of less familiar cultures. The emergent theme was resolving cultural conflict. This broad theme was classified into three subthemes including: (a) navigating language barriers, (b) dealing with cultural dilemma, and (c) reviewing received knowledge. Findings of this study show that students experienced language difficulties and they used the local nationals as a resource to manage the language barrier. Also, the study provided evidence that students faced dilemma when they encountered novel experiences which were on the one hand appealing, and on the other hand, questionable. By analyzing and reflecting on cultural differences that caused dilemma, students demonstrated appreciation for cultural difference.

Finally, Research Question 3 explored how study abroad program design impacted the development of intercultural and global competencies. The first main theme that emerged was situating the study abroad experience. This theme as classified into two subthemes: (a) accessing local cultures: enablers and (b) factors limiting cultural engagement. The second emergent theme was making the strange familiar. Under this theme, there were three subthemes: (a) demonstrating flexibility and adaptability, (b) reduced ethnocentrism and, (c) developing a global outlook. The first theme described the
contextual factors that facilitated or hindered cultural engagement. These included both the contexts of the study abroad location and the programmatic components. The second theme, *making the strange familiar* referred to the various ways that students demonstrated learning, with particular attention to intercultural and global competencies.

**Conceptualizing a Learning Model for Study Abroad**

Findings of this study suggest that there are five important dimensions in transformational learning in study abroad. These include (a) positioning as learner, (b) situating the experience, (c) experiencing dissonance (d) resolving conflict and (e) making with other cultures. In the next section, I discuss these five dimensions and provide the implications of these findings to practice and research.

**Positioning as learner.** Learners positioned themselves on the study abroad environments with different personal characteristics, varying levels of critical awareness and different expectations. This positioning contributed to the meaning making of their study abroad experience. These elements intersected with the contextual factors--that is, the conditions of the study abroad location and programmatic components to frame participants’ study abroad experience in ways that facilitated or hindered transformational learning.

The majority of the participants in this study indicated that their choice of a study abroad location was based on the desire to experience novelty. Curiosity emerged as the single most important factor in students’ selection of their study abroad location, having been mentioned by 10 out of the 12 participants. Regardless of previous travel, participants agreed that they wanted to experience something new, unique and/or
different. Perhaps their high level of curiosity had to do with their lack of or limited knowledge of the respective host cultures; all the participants acknowledged this limitation. Kashdan (2013) related curiosity to the pursuit for novel experiences and added that curiosity should be understood to encompass the idea of relishing the unknown. For students who choose to study abroad in nontraditional destinations, where cultures are generally unfamiliar to majority of American undergraduates, curiosity and openness are closely linked. Participants attributed their openness to African cultures to the lack of knowledge of such distant cultures and therefore were open to learning whatever the experience presented them with. Curiosity, it seems, serves as a foundation for learning within the nontraditional contexts while openness provides room for exploration of difference leading to possibilities of interpreting life experiences from multiple perspectives. Indeed, Deardoff (2006) identified curiosity and openness to other cultures as positive attributes on which the development of intercultural competence is predicated.

Critical awareness refers to the process of making sense of life's experiences through critical analysis, evaluation and reflection. Findings of this study show that recognizing cultural difference is an important step towards appreciation of diverse cultures. Observation and comparison played an important role in bringing cultural differences to students' attention and formed the basis for questioning such differences. While some participants were able to move from the observation-comparison-questioning level, some did not. This can be partly explained by difference in cognitive abilities to process new cultural information. The challenge for faculty and study abroad program
administrators is to support learners to move to higher order cognition. Kiely (2005) suggested that the kind of processing of cultural difference that leads to transformational learning involves —“problematic, questioning and analyzing” (p. 8).

Findings also indicate that processing is stymied in intensely dissonant situations. When participants encountered highly dissonant cultures, they were unable to move beyond the questioning —phase.” This would indicate a relationship between intense
dissonance and the ability to process cultural difference. It could be argued that when participants encounter cultural difference that generates high levels of dissonance, they are unable to engage in critical analysis that might help them understand the underlying values, assumptions, beliefs and practices of their host countries in order to understand why their economic, social, political and cultural systems operate differently.

These findings suggest the need for a strategic blend of challenge and support if the objective of cultural learning, which is articulated by many study abroad programs as a learning outcome, is to be achieved. Vande Berg’s (2000) that immersion in a foreign culture by itself does not guarantee learning. It also supports Cranton’s (2006) assertion that individuals, even adults, lack skills for self-directed learning, thus the need for intervention. Identifying participants who need support in developing and/or using higher cognitive abilities and to understand the circumstances under which participants are unable to process cultural difference would require daily reflection. As such, faculty should encourage self-reflection, supported by group discussions and dialogue in order to encourage students to think critically about their assumptions and beliefs. In a study by Kiely (2005), students identified daily reflection and group reflections as activities that provided space for processing.

Setting expectations was a major part of the participants’ study abroad experience. Participant expectations were based on knowledge they had acquired through reading, from faculty and cultural advisors, the media and other online resources and, assumptions they had uncritically received from these sources. Expectations had bearing on how they interacted with the new cultures they were immersed in. This study found that
incongruence between participant expectations and the realities of the host cultures generated dissonance, which participants experienced at varying intensities. Findings of this study suggest that when participants encountered difference that they had expected, they experienced low level dissonance, were more objective in their assessment of cultural difference and were more likely to review received knowledge. On the contrary, totally unexpected cultural difference induced high levels of dissonance. This phenomenon resulted in participants exhibiting difficulty processing cultural difference beyond the level of questioning, which, in effect, hindered transformational learning. Based on these findings, I suggest that expectations play a crucial role in transformational learning; expected cultural difference mitigated the negative effects of dissonance while unanticipated cultural difference aggravated the negative effects of dissonance and in some cases, inhibited perspective change. For instance, the most common anticipated difference was the level of poverty, civilization and insecurity. Majority of the participants were able to review their understanding of these issues as they related to their countries of study abroad and showed a change in perspective. In contrast, unanticipated difference in business culture, race relations and medical practice induced high intensity dissonance which participants had difficulty processing.

From these findings, there is reason to believe that pre-departure orientation focused more on general cultural, social and economic issues and neglected cultural difference related to the particular professional environments that students were going to be immersed in. This lack of preparation led to greater cultural disorientation. Although in a study comparing international and American study abroad students' expectation and
experiences Domville-Roach (2007) found that regardless of expectations of the students, the experience changed the students, it would be important to investigate further the nature of expectations that led to change.

**Situating the experience.** Researchers in the area of study abroad have concentrated mainly on the outcomes of study abroad and neglected the contextual and the process systems that promote transformational learning (Kiely, 2005). Yet, as Brofenbrenner (1992) posited in his ecological theories, environmental factors play a critical role in developmental processes. He postulated that the developing individuals bring their personal experiences and characteristics which determine how induce or hinder dynamic dispositions toward the environment. He pointed out growth is instigated when developing individuals engage in activities, play out roles and get involved in interpersonal interactions in informal settings. On their part, Che et al. (2009) hypothesize that nontraditional study abroad holds great potential for affecting perspective change owing to the great cultural distance. This study found that nontraditional destinations, particularly African countries, offer unique opportunities for learning particularly when student activities and experiences encourage engagement with authentic culture and facilitate interaction with local nationals. However, not every engagement of this kind resulted in transformational learning. When cultural difference gave rise to intense dissonance, participants were unable to process cultural difference thus perspective change was not affected. Participants seemed to cope better with cultural difference that they were aware of prior to their study abroad experience; therefore, it would be important that faculty leading programs to nontraditional destinations have a
wide range of knowledge about the various contexts of their target study abroad locations so as to provide guidance and shape participants expectations.

Evidence from this study indicated that programmatic components that encourage community participation through volunteer work, internships, homestay and collaborative projects have the potential to foster transformational learning. Participants get to gain cultural knowledge and skills from interacting with the nationals and use these interactive opportunities to practice newly learned skills. It is no doubt that to successfully navigate today’s increasingly heterogeneous work environments, students need to acquire intercultural knowledge and skills. Participants in this study gained knowledge and skills related to professional practice and created new meanings regarding professional practice, working in teams, academic research and social interactions.

Debate on the impact of short-term study abroad programs has been ongoing and research has provided conflicting evidence with some showing that they are effective in fostering cultural learning (Anderson et al., 2009; Niam, 2012) and others indicating that short-term programs do not achieve the goals for which they are intended (Engle & Engle, 2003; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). Students participating in the two week program demonstrated that programs as short as two weeks have the potential to affect perspective change. Participants in this program exhibited change of perspective in their understanding of business culture, sources of knowledge, the role of technology in academic research and teamwork in an intercultural environment. This might suggest that the intensity of the program, which included not only consulting with local businesses but also elements of research, collaboration with local students and interaction with the
country nationals, may be the reason for the positive outcomes. This echoes Niam’s (2011) findings that a 3-week trip abroad enhanced cultural sensitivity and brought about changes in participants’ worldview and perspective although he noted that these gains were short-lived. Even though positive outcomes were identified in this study, most participants thought that study abroad programs should have been longer. Participants, particularly those in the 2 week program shared that the intensity of the course curriculum did not leave much room for them to engage with culture or interact with the local nationals beyond the campus environment. Longer program duration would have provided opportunities for students to get a more holistic cultural exposure. King and Magolda (2005) suggest that more interaction with host culture enables students gain awareness of multiple perspectives and begin to gain comfort with uncertainty.

**Experiencing dissonance.** Experiencing dissonance was central to participants’ transformational learning. Transformative theory (Mezirow, 1990) attributes the phenomenon of dissonance to inconsistencies between culturally constrained frames of reference and new experiences. According to Mezirow (1990), dissonance results when current frames of reference constrain interpretation of new experiences, which in turn initiates “a personality struggle with the new demands of a specific environment” (Levykh, 2008, p.86). Participants encountered cultural conflict when their assumptions were incongruent with the norms of the host cultures. They made statements that suggested contestation of the new cultures along with expression of negative emotions. This study found that the degree to which participants experienced dissonance was affected by whether or not they expected the particular cultural differences that generated
dissonance. Expected cultural difference generated low intensity dissonance while unanticipated difference produced high intensity dissonance. Findings show that high intensity dissonance induced negative emotions and participants had greater difficulty processing it. Working through dissonance started with participants questioning the validity of new cultures, which they often interpreted as a problem.” Their ability to work through dissonance resulted in new meaning structures while inability to fully process it led to negative perceptions not only of their experiences but also of the cultural difference.

These findings raise a pertinent question. With McNally and Martin’s (1998) proposition that challenge is a key ingredient for growth in mind, how can study abroad present challenging learning contexts without overwhelming the students and/or avoid underexposing them in ways that do not challenge them enough to learn? Gipe and Richard (1992) raised three salient points with regard to challenge: that (1) inappropriate amounts of challenge are not conducive to learning; (2) a context that is not challenging may provide few opportunities for critical reflection and, (3) an overly threatening context may promote negativism and inhibit learning (p.55). This suggests appropriate levels of challenge must be matched with appropriate levels of support. Houser (1996) suggested that the discomfort and disequilibrium inherent to the creation of new meanings must be supported within a safe, affirming emotional environment. The implication of this to study abroad is that since it is anticipated that participants would inevitably encounter situations that can induce intense dissonance, program design should
incorporate appropriate interventions that support student learning as well as developmental processes.

The consequences of exposing students to too much challenge without an equal measure of support are explained by Perry’s (1968) theory of intellectual and ethical development. Perry theorized that when students have too much challenge with too little support, they may respond by temporizing, escaping or retreating. These approaches may inhibit intellectual development such as transformative learning. Learning in nontraditional study abroad locations poses a challenge to American students owing to the great cultural distance. A study abroad experience in a nontraditional location should be designed with this in mind and appropriate levels of support should be included in the design of the study abroad curriculum.

This study adds another important element to the transformational learning process: how participants respond to negative emotions associated with dissonance. While it is acknowledged that individuals in new cultural settings experience negative feelings and emotions (Berry, 2005), there is little to explain how individuals manage such emotions. Research into the role of emotions in transformational learning is limited. It was evident from this study that participants experienced various levels of emotions resulting from their inability to reconcile their current ways of thinking with new experiences. Participants in this study reported experiencing a range of emotions including stress, annoyance/anger, frustration, shock, emotional isolation and confusion. Their hesitation to acknowledge the existence of such emotions was exhibited through their attempt to regulate them by projecting them on others. Baumeister, Dale, and
Sommer (1998) postulated that all adults have positive views of themselves (which include the kind of emotions they would like to be associated with them) and sustaining these positive perceptions is a constant concern. One way of warding off negative emotions is what Freud (1946) identified as projection of emotions. Freud (1946) described this as an attempt to disassociate oneself from undesirable emotions or traits by attributing them to others. Participants’ statements were characterized by contradictions about their responses to cultural difference, which I interpreted as an attempt to deny experiencing negative emotions.

Although this study did not determine the impact of negative emotion on learning, it certainly opens up debate on how emotions relate to transformational learning in the context of disparate cultures. Regulation of emotion in study abroad is a concern considering Bower’s (1992) assertion that negative emotions are associated with rigid and less effective learning strategies such as rehearsal and rote memorization (p.32). He opined that with tasks that require flexible transfer-oriented strategies, negative emotions negatively influence performance. In his study on fostering transformative learning, Neuman (1996) found that processing of feelings and emotions provided impetus for critical reflection. Additionally, he suggested that affective learning resulted in greater appreciation for differences and tolerance for ambiguity (p. 463). These arguments and suggestions point to the need for greater attention on how regulating negative emotions might hinder transformational learning in nontraditional study abroad destinations.

**Resolving cultural conflict.** This dimension suggests the idea of reconciliation of conflicting cultural practices and ideas. Participants’ ability to process difference and
change their perspective about the new culture was another meaning making dynamic that characterized participants’ study abroad experience. Two processes were involved in resolving conflict: dealing with cultural dilemmas and reviewing received knowledge.

One of the challenges participants identified was language barrier. Language is considered a barrier in study abroad when it hinders or limits interaction between the study abroad students and the host nationals. Majority of the participants in this study identified language barrier as one of the challenges they faced while studying abroad. It is worth noting that even though language was considered a barrier, it did not hinder intercultural communication. Participants adopted various strategies to manage the language barrier problem. Many participants attributed their limited interaction with the local nationals to the lack of a common language. This claim is supported by Mancini-Cross (2009), who suggested that language barriers set limitations for students studying abroad in non-English speaking countries. Even though Moghaddam, Peyvandi, and Wang (2011) suggest that students are more open to diversity when they are able to comprehend the language of the host country, there was no indication of a lack of openness to diversity for many of the participants in this study, all of whom had little or no knowledge of the local language. Perhaps the greater concern for participants and which should be a concern for study abroad program organizers is the negative feelings of isolation and insecurity that students experience when they believe that nationals use the local language in their presence to secretly talk about them. Considering the argument made earlier that negative emotions may interfere with perspective change, important to
consider is how to encourage positive feelings and emotions in contexts of cultural discomfort.

Reviewing given knowledge is an important meaning making dynamic that marks the turning point for individuals as they begin to reflect critically on their own assumptions about their own and other cultures. For the study abroad participants in this study, review of current knowledge started with the recognition that the knowledge they had acquired about other cultures was incomplete, inaccurate or distorted and was based on subjective evaluations. They also began to reflect on what they knew about their own cultures. Cultural values, beliefs and practices that they had hitherto taken for granted became apparent and they started questioning those too. This is precisely the objective of study abroad-to expose students to other cultures and provide them with an opportunity to reflect and become aware of their own deeply held assumptions about themselves and the world (Che et al., 2009). For students who had the ability not only to recognize and question cultural difference, but also to interpret and analyze it, new meaning structures emerged. Unlike earlier meaning structures that rely on external sources of knowledge, these new structures are generated from within. This marks an important phase in the context of study abroad as it forms the basis for transformation (Che et al., 2009).

Mezirow (1981) opined that transformational learning involves a “reconstitution of limiting frames of reference to permit a more inclusive and discriminative integration of experience” (p.6).

Learning constitutes questioning what we know and how we know it. The role of a college education is to help students develop cognitively in ways that they can generate
their own meanings to life experiences. Students may take knowledge from authorities but along the way, they critically examine ideas and possibly reject them. This marks an important step in cognitive development (Evans, Forney, Patton & Renn, 2010). For the participants in this study, the process of transformation began with the questioning of knowledge they had acquired over time from their professors, the media, books and their socialization. They sought alternative sources of knowledge. Peers and the local nationals were considered important sources of knowledge. They sought clarification, alternative meanings, and validation of old knowledge from these new sources. Rejection of knowledge they considered subjective and reframing of their experiences based on internal meaning making marked an important point in the transformational learning process. Baxter Magolda (1999) considers this ability to internally formulate meanings an important milestone in the epistemological development of college students. She identifies this internal way of making meaning of self and the world as “self-authorship” (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p.6) which is characterized by awareness of the multiplicity of points of view and is more tolerant of contradictions in the context of conflicting value-systems.

The goal of any study abroad program should be to provide students with opportunities that lead to internal meaning making. This study suggests that nontraditional destinations hold potential for helping students meet this objective. Mezirow (1997) states that transformation of the way we make meaning of new experiences does not occur unless the new material challenges our current frames of
reference. The unfamiliarity of African cultures makes them suitable contexts for transformational learning.

**Making the strange familiar.** The concept of making the strange familiar (Geertz, 1973) is a relevant one in the context of study abroad in nontraditional destinations. In fact, the core objective of study abroad is to render “strange” cultures familiar. In the context of study abroad, particularly in nontraditional destinations, familiarity with new cultures is demonstrated through the ability to (a) appreciate cultural difference, (b) adopt new cultural practices (c) openness and (d) judge other cultures, not by the standards of own culture but from a broader perspective. Although these abilities can be fostered at home and in traditional study abroad locations, nontraditional destinations provide a rich context for the nurturing of these abilities. These locations present divergent cultures which form the basis of comparison, which in turn leads to an expanded point of view. These opportunities also avail opportunities for one to look at their own culture from a fresh view leading to greater appreciation of one’s culture and where it fits in among other cultures.

The study abroad experience brings into focus other cultures that help the participant see their cultural perspective is just one of many. The study abroad participants in this study demonstrated an expanded world view; they started by judging new cultures by American standards and when the new cultures did not fit those standards, they dismissed them as wrong or problematic. Continued interaction with authentic cultures and the local people, reflection on difference and their ability to process cultural difference led to greater appreciation of the target cultures (Deardoff,
2006) and many participants showed willingness to exercise their new roles as members of an intercultural community. They reported having enjoyed greeting “everyone” in the streets, relaxing over a cup of tea, dancing to local music late into the night and haggling over the cost of souvenirs on the streets. They expressed admiration for nurses who worked successfully in spite of limited resources and thought that their ingenuity was something to be emulated. They talked of learning new medical skills which as one participant said, could be applied in their country. They reported coming to know that business culture is context specific. Participants indicated that the kind of cultural knowledge they had gained was going to serve as a reference point when they found themselves immersed in other cultures noting that transition into a completely different culture would be much easier. In all this, they were expressing a change in perspective—a new way of making meaning of experiences. It is this kind of openness to other cultures that Deardoff (2006) pointed out demonstrates intercultural competence.

This study supports Deardoff’s (2009) concept of intercultural competence as a developmental life-long process without a definite moment in time when an individual becomes completely interculturally competent. Although many participants considered themselves interculturally competent, this was mainly in comparison with Americans who had not had a chance to travel abroad or those who had travelled to other Western countries. They acknowledged that their experiences abroad had initiated a quest for cultural knowledge. The importance of developing intercultural skills among U.S. undergraduates cannot be overemphasized. The American society is more heterogeneous than ever; employers are requiring that employees demonstrate intercultural knowledge
and skills, schools have bigger numbers of immigrants and teachers need the skills to help support diverse populations, social interactions bring people from different cultural backgrounds together and many business are no longer local and business operations across the globe require that employees communicate effectively across national borders. This underscores the importance of graduating students who have intercultural skills to navigate the increasingly intercultural social, business and professional environments. This study demonstrates that even short-term programs serve as a catalyst for intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence serves as one dimension of global competence. A globally competent individual should be able to demonstrate all the above mentioned abilities as a threshold. Beyond this, individuals should demonstrate increased geographical and historical knowledge of different countries, have an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world and have the ability to function within such an environment, having a sense of social justice and being proficient in a second language (National Education Association, 2010; NASULGC, 2004; Zeichner, 2010). Other skills that have been identified include the ability to work effectively and cooperatively as a team player and ability to identify problems and draw on available resources to come up with solutions for them (Willard, n.d.). This study found that some participants demonstrated a global outlook as a result of studying abroad in nontraditional destinations. Some participants reported having a greater awareness of interconnectivity of global systems, considering global careers and working effectively as team members.
in intercultural settings. Others reported having greater interest in what is going on around the world and yet others expressed a desire to travel more.

One of the key elements of global competence is gaining a sense of social justice (Brascamp et al., 2009). The participants interviewed for this study did not demonstrate that they had become more sensitive to social justice. Jenkins (2002) suggests that awareness of the interconnectedness of global problems, which can be raised through study abroad in nontraditional destinations, may enable graduates to seek solutions to global challenges. Although participants gained a heightened awareness of the challenges facing African countries, they did not see how they would affect a country like the U.S. On the contrary they thought that problems facing the U.S. could negatively impact developing countries. Many of the participants thought that problems could be addressed through short-term donations as some talked about sending books and equipment, sharing professional expertise. In essence, they were not able to think globally about problems facing African countries and solutions that were global in nature.

The challenge is for study abroad organizers is to create a curriculum that specifies learning objectives to include social justice and create activities that are focused on the achievement of that objective. Social justice is a complex concept that would require that American students first reflect on their own privilege and what it means to be privileged in a global context. Undergraduates may find it challenging to develop a sense of social justice in the absence of directed learning as the concept itself is not easy to understand at their level. Thus, even with activities that aim at sensitizing students to
issues of social justice, critical reflection and discussion of their understandings should be incorporated in the course curriculum.

**Implications for Practice**

The purpose of research is to advance understanding and in turn inform practice. This study has generated a number of implications that may be useful for faculty who lead or intend to lead study abroad programs to nontraditional destinations, study abroad administrators, and international educators. The ideas that I present in this section are in no way exhaustive; rather, they are meant to stimulate thought on how the insights from this study might impact student learning in nontraditional study abroad locations.

- Setting expectations is a crucial part of study abroad engagement. This study found that the learning process was impacted by students’ expectations. It is suggested that pre-departure orientation should aim at helping students to set realistic expectations. Additionally, pre-departure orientation to nontraditional locations should be used to set a positive tone to the study abroad experience. This can be done by choosing language that students understand to be casting target locations in positive light.

- Many of the contexts of nontraditional destinations such as the political, economic, technological and social can pose a challenge to study abroad participants. Programs should be designed in ways that they provide a good balance of challenge and support to the study abroad participant.

- This study suggests that not all students are able to engage with cultural difference in ways that lead to transformational learning. Participants'
cognitive abilities play an important role in enabling or disabling processing of cultural difference. If they are unable to process difference beyond the level of questioning, learning is impeded. With this in mind, program coordinators and support staff should monitor student learning to establish the kind of support they need to help them engage with higher order cognitive skills.

- This study also underscores the usefulness of critical self-reflection. Providing students with opportunities for reflection helps them monitor their own learning and identify specifically what they are learning. Additionally on site self-reflection is crucial for the processing of new information. It is recommended that study abroad students be encouraged to keep a journal for daily reflection. This should be followed by constant discussions and dialogues on salient issues that emerge from their experiences.

- Activities that encourage engagement with authentic culture and interaction with the local nationals should be encouraged. Students learn best when they engage in real life situations, thinking about and seeking solutions to real problems. Volunteerism, collaboration between U.S. and local university students, real life projects and internships offer great potential for transformational learning.

- Programs that target nontraditional destinations should be longer in duration. Even though there are positive outcomes associated with short-term study abroad to these locations, the intensity of the short-term programs do not leave a lot of room for extended cultural engagement. With programs of longer...
duration, daily schedules would be less rigid, thus creating opportunities to explore culture beyond would it create more opportunities for transformational learning. King and Magolda (2005) suggest that more interaction with host culture enables students gain awareness of multiple perspectives and begin to gain comfort with uncertainty.

- In the light of the positive outcomes that this study has associated with study abroad, it is recommended that higher education institutions, international educators and the federal government continue support for study abroad to nontraditional destinations. The study has established that studying in nontraditional destinations has the potential to transform perspectives and, to a certain extent, change students’ global outlook.

**Implications for Research**

The other purpose for research is to provide new and/or different direction for research. As with other studies, this research does opens up areas that require research attention. The suggestions provided below provide leads into future research that would bring deeper understanding of transformational learning in study abroad. A few suggestions are provided.

- This study investigated transformational learning with a sample of twelve participants from two different higher education institutions. Findings limit our understanding to this specific population; therefore, there is need to conduct a study that draws on a larger sample from different institutions.
• The number of programs was also limited. Considering the diversity of program designs, it would be recommended that studies that target students participating in programs with a wider range of programmatic components be considered.

• This study does not provide insights into the long-term impact of study in nontraditional destinations. As such, a longitudinal study with a similar population might help provide deeper insights into the permanency of the identified positive outcomes.

• Just like the contexts of the different study abroad programs varied and provided different levels of challenge, so it should be for different nontraditional destinations. This study focused on countries in Africa alone, which is one of the many identified nontraditional locations of study abroad. Findings of this study therefore cannot be said to be representative of all nontraditional destinations and students‘ experiences in this region cannot help explain or bring understanding of how students who study in other nontraditional locations learn. Research on transformational learning in other nontraditional destinations can offer insight into the similarities and differences in the learning processes. It can also offer a basis for comparison with various other nontraditional locations.

• Findings on the effect of contextual factors on transformational learning are neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. Therefore, studies that focus specifically on the impact of contextual factors on learning would provide
greater understanding on the complex interactions between programmatic components and location contexts.

- Positioning in study abroad has been introduced in this study. There is a whole range of student characteristics beside the ones mentioned in this study that could shape how students make meaning of their study abroad experience in nontraditional destinations. Research that focuses on student characteristics and how they affect transformational learning are encouraged. Characteristics that could be considered might include: identity, self-efficacy, past travel abroad experience, academic major, career aspirations etc.

- Additionally, considering the limited research on emotional response in learning environments, research that delineates students’ emotional responses in study abroad, particularly in nontraditional destinations, the intensity of such emotions and how they affect how study abroad participants make meaning of their experiences would shed more light on the learning process.

**Personal Reflections**

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes." (Marcel Proust, n.d.)

Writing this dissertation has been a journey wrought with countless challenges but also marked by powerful learning moments that would never have been without my experiencing those challenges. It is the learning moments that will be the focus of this final section. As many dissertation writers say, the writing process begins with a few false starts before settling on the one topic: the dissertation topic. Mine was not any
different. In retrospect, I believe that none of the topics that I had considered as dissertation topics would have yielded as much learning and satisfaction as this one has.

As an educator who was educated and taught in an education system that does not encourage critical thinking and discovery, and who is now learning and teaching within a system that encourages just that, my real struggle has been and continues to be conceptualizing teaching and learning in new ways without falling back on old habits. At every level of my Kenyan education, one thing was consistent—my teachers and professors were the sole custodians of knowledge. Students trooped to their classrooms and like empty slates, waited to be filled. I was a keen learner and so when my turn to teach came, I did not disappoint my trainers. Yet now, in a different education setting, I am supposed to forget my training and distance myself from the all-knowing teacher under whose feet I learned. Every day, I am reminded of the need to see myself, not as a teacher, for that word suggests passivity on the student, but as a facilitator. I am constantly reminded that my students are collaborators in the creation of knowledge. Nothing has helped concretize these exhortations as writing this dissertation has.

Interviewing students for this research revealed the empowering nature of an education that provides opportunities for exploration, creativity, critical thinking and reflection. Apart from two study participants who had formal classes every day, the rest of the participants were involved in activities with the host communities. Much of their learning was the result of interactions with other people, not their professors. As one of the participants put it, he had learned more in three weeks than he had learned in any single activity in his lifetime. Yet, the lessons he identified as invaluable did not come
from his professor—they came from engaging with others, and through that engagement, was presented with new knowledge which he decided, on his own, to either accept or reject. This was a thread that ran through the interviews and it was a sober reminder of how I, as an educator, may constrain student learning when learning opportunities are limited to safe and familiar environments.

The idea of limiting possibilities for learning brings me to my next point. It has been argued that many U.S. undergraduates think of study abroad as time off for vacation. Those who choose to study in nontraditional locations particularly have been labeled education tourists pursuing not knowledge but the exotic, their desire being to see the face of poverty. The study abroad students in this study, against all my expectation, came back with stories neither of magical one-time transformation nor of frustration from having to adjust to a temporary life of average deprivation. They talked about a discovery journey of self and others that had just begun and of a desire to keep pondering what they had gained from studying abroad in Africa. This was evident throughout the interviews. Student participants acknowledged how helpful it was to participate in this study because the interviews provided the much needed space for reflection on those experiences that they had not yet made meaning of.

A number of students attributed their willingness to participate in the study to the realization that the more they talked about their experiences, the more discoveries they made about what they had learned. One particular participant, who shared that she had made two presentations on her experience to groups on campus and one at her place of work, said that while the presentations had helped her process her study abroad
experiences, there were some insights she only gained from participating in the interview. She thought that the focused nature of the interview questions provided opportunity to think about events and situations she had hitherto not given much attention to.

This was echoed by a number of participants who agreed that responding to specific questions helped them process experiences they had not paid much attention to. One student pointed out an incident that would be considered mundane under ordinary circumstances and not worth attention. She had attended a wedding with her host family; the woman was getting married as a second wife. In a fleeting moment, she thought how unfortunate it was for her to be in a polygamous marriage and wondered why anyone would want to make such a decision. Although that particular incident disturbed her, she said she had quickly dismissed it as a poor decision on the part of the woman. During the interview, she realized that this event had much more meaning than she initially thought. She noted how closely individual decisions are intertwined with societal expectations. She explained that such a decision may not be an individual decision but the decision of any society that encourages polygamy. She was able to put this in a cultural context and had greater appreciation of how culture shapes human decisions and behavior.

It is incidents like these that became powerful learning moments for me too. They bespoke of the need for educators to provide space for critical reflection on what students are learning and how they are learning it. They reveal that learning, whether in the classroom or out of the classroom, may not necessarily happen at the moment when we want it to happen and points to the need for encouraging constant self-reflection beyond the walls of the classroom or any other learning environment.
One of the interesting observations and perhaps one that I expected was the difference in the interpretations made by students attached to the same experiences. However, this difference in interpretation appeared to mark more profound difference in outlook, identity, experience, motivation and abilities. All the twelve participants were U.S. undergraduates but that is as far as the similarity went. This was evident throughout the study and the evidence of how different they were from each other was all so clear from their meaning making processes. This was another significant realization that points to then need to take into account student diversity regardless of the circumstances under which they learn. It was a reminder that learning experiences may not yield similar or near similar meaning for all students and to assume so as an educator would be detrimental to students‘ development. I started this dissertation with the intention of examining students‘ meaning making of study abroad experiences; but the greater implications are what I, as an educator, have gained from the process. I can say that the simple act of providing students space for reflection on their experiences abroad has been my ―real voyage of discovery‖ and just as they learned to see cultural difference ―with new eyes‖ from traversing African countries, I too have learned to see college teaching and learning ―with new eyes.‖

Conclusions

There is little doubt that in modern day societies that have become increasingly intercultural, there is need for appreciation of cultural differences and diverse perspectives. This recognition has been translated into goals for U. S. colleges and universities to produce graduates with the knowledge and skills that will help them navigate such environments more effectively. This explains the internationalization efforts that have become the new agenda for many, if not all, higher education institutions
in the U.S. One of the main dimensions of internationalization is study abroad. The general belief is that studying in a different culture from one’s own sensitizes individuals to different ways of interpreting life experiences. It is important, therefore, that these expectations be put under scrutiny to determine whether or not they are being met.

It is important to determine the outcomes of exposure to other cultures. It is equally important to know about the processes that lead to such outcomes. Such knowledge is invaluable to higher education educators and administrators as it may help determine the kind of environments, activities and processes that maximize learning. Understanding the processes can provide direction on how to best guide students towards the achievement of the set goals. This study was designed for that purpose. Previous studies have largely focused on the outcomes of study abroad and provided little insight into how students learn. Additionally, previous studies focused on outcomes of study abroad without taking difference in the context of study abroad into account. As such, what and how students learn when they study in less traditional study abroad locations remains obscure for the most part and any conclusions on the processes are primarily conjecture and tentative.

This study examined how U.S. undergraduates made meaning of their intercultural experiences in the context of disparate cultures. The study provides useful insights that have implications for both research and practice. The study points to the need for building support mechanisms in the study abroad curriculum, particularly in the context of highly dissonant cultures which are characteristic of nontraditional study abroad locations. The study also suggests the importance of planned self-reflection in
helping students to process cultural difference. Such reflection should be encouraged not just at the study abroad site but also after students’ return. Research in student experiences in nontraditional destinations is very limited and I cannot claim to have pursued all of the questions that relate to students’ experiences in the locations that were studied. Indeed, this study has left more unanswered questions than it has answered. There is need for consistent research in this area to gain better understanding of the contexts and processes of learning in nontraditional destinations and how to impart the much needed knowledge and skills for intercultural interactions.

In sum, the findings of this study contribute, in a general sense, to the empirical research on internationalization of U.S. higher education and more specifically to the outcomes of study abroad and the processes involved in the achievement of those outcomes. The study has demonstrated that in spite of the short duration of study abroad programs to nontraditional destinations, they hold potential for transformational learning. The study shows that when students are exposed to authentic culture and have an opportunity to interact with the host nationals, they gain greater appreciation of cultural difference, expand perspectives, become more open to learning about other cultures and, for some, gain a global outlook. Results of this study support the theoretical perspective that nontraditional destinations, because of the great cultural dissonance, provide the kind of disequilibrium that prompts perspective change. However, it also raises a concern in the capacity for such programs to sensitize students to issues of social justice. The challenge is to ensure that each student enrolled in such programs gains what they can from the experience by receiving the support that they need.
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U.S. Department of State (n.d). 100,000 strong educational exchange initiatives. [http://www.state.gov/100k/](http://www.state.gov/100k/)


Appendix A. Informed Consent Document

Ohio University Consent Form

**Title:** Development of Intercultural and Global Competencies through Short-term Study Abroad in Nontraditional Destinations: Rhetorical Ideology or Educational Reality?

**Researcher:** Mary K. Gathogo, Candidate, PhD Higher Education Administration and Student Affairs

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Explanation of Study**

This study is being conducted for the purpose of understanding the transformational effect of study abroad on American undergraduates who have studied abroad in developing countries. You are being invited to take part in this study because you are an undergraduate who plans to or has participated in a study abroad program in a nontraditional study abroad destination in a recent semester/summer.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to: A) Write a short reflective journal (a maximum of one typed page) on your goals for participating in study abroad in a developing country, your expectations and perceptions of your host country, prior to your departure. You will also be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute individual interview where you will share your study abroad experience with the researcher. You may later be asked to clarify certain things from this conversation after the initial interview. Should that be deemed necessary, no more than 30 minutes of your time will be required for this follow-up. During the interview, you will be requested to come with a few chosen photographs that you think capture interesting and/or powerful moments of your experience abroad. You will also be asked to bring any artefacts that you bring back from study abroad that might help the researcher understand your unique experience abroad. Questions related to the photos and artefacts will be asked during the interview. During the interview(s), you may refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer or one that makes you feel uncomfortable.
The interview(s) will be conducted at a location that is most convenient to you and will be audio-recorded. The researcher will create files under your pseudonym (that is, a name that you will create so that the interviews cannot be traced back to you). This information will be treated confidentially and will only be accessible to me as the researcher. All files will be securely saved in my personal computer and the password used to access the files will be known only to me.

**Risks and Discomforts**

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts from participating in this study.

**Benefits**

Your participation will provide an opportunity to reflect on your learning experience of and gains from your study abroad, which would otherwise lie dormant without such reflection. You will also receive compensation for participating in the study. Also, this study could be important to study abroad administrators and faculty in that it might inform the design of and/or improvement of programs to and the students' overall experience in developing countries.

**Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will not be made known to anyone but the researcher. To keep your information confidential, you will create or the researcher will assign a pseudonym, that is, you will use a false name that cannot be traced back to you. Any recorded materials which result from this study will be stored in the researcher’s personal computer and laptop, both of which are protected by a password that is known only to the researcher. The researcher will hold the results until the analysis and conclusion are completed or as prescribed by the Ohio University Institutional Research Board. If the results are published, your identity will not be revealed neither will any content contained in the document be traceable to you.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

**Compensation**

For participating in this study, you will receive $20 after the interview. You will also have a chance to enter to win a $50 Amazon gift card. The odds of winning the lottery are 1 to 12. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point during the research period. However, no compensation will be provided if you choose to discontinue participation prior
to completion. Your name and address will be collected and provided to the Finance Office at Ohio University.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:

Mary Gathogo at mg162708@ohio.edu, Telephone No: (740)590-6852

or

Dr. Pete Mather (Dissertation Chair) at matherp@ohio.edu, Telephone No: (740)593-4454

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered

- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.

- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study

- you are 18 years of age or older

- your participation in this research is completely voluntary

- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_____________________________ Date

Printed Name______________________________

Version Date: [05/21/14]
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter 1

Dear Faculty/Study Abroad Administrator,

I am starting my doctoral research as required by Ohio University. I am conducting a qualitative study entitled “Development of Intercultural and Global Competencies though Short-term Study Abroad in Nontraditional Destinations: Rhetorical Ideology or Educational Reality?”. To be able to conduct research, I need to recruit undergraduates at your institution who are participating in short-term faculty-led study abroad in developing countries. This email is being sent to you to request for your help in identifying potential participants.

In brief, I will need participants to provide a reflection of their goals, expectations and perceptions of their study abroad destination prior to the commencement of their study abroad. On their return, I plan to conduct one-on-one 60-90 minute interviews to discuss their experiences, how they understand and interpret them, and ways in which they have learned as a result of their study abroad experience. We will also discuss program features that they consider to have been instrumental enhancing learning. Also, I will ask them to share their study abroad journals if they are self-initiated. If they are part of the course, I will be seeking permission from the concerned faculty and staff to allow me to access such journals.

Anonymity of the participants will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms that cannot be traced back to them. I will seek their consent after explaining to them what informed consent means and what would be expected of them as study participants. They will be provided with the requirements that they need to meet to be eligible for participation. Only after signing the consent forms will they be officially be considered participants. A compensation of $20 will be given to participants on the completion of the interviews and they will be entered to win a $50 Amazon gift card.

Kindly send out the attached invitation letter to study abroad participants in developing countries and ask them to contact me on 740-590-6852 or at mg162708@ohio.edu. Please find attached study authorization for the Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Thank you,

Mary K. Gathogo
Appendix C: Recruitment Letter 2

Dear Study Abroad Student,

My name is Mary Gathogo, a doctoral candidate in the Patton College of Education at Ohio University. As part of my graduate studies, I am conducting research on the experiences of undergraduates who will be studying abroad this summer in a variety of programs in developing countries. To explore student experiences in these countries, your help is requested. Since you are participating in a study abroad program in [name of study abroad location] I would like to invite you to share with me your study abroad experiences.

To participate, you must be an undergraduate between 18-25 years of age, you are currently enrolled in college or you were last semester (including seniors who are enrolled in summer of 2014), will study abroad for between 2-8 weeks in a developing country countries in a faculty-led program sponsored by your university.

The participants will be asked to provide a maximum of one-page reflection on their goals, expectations and perceptions of the people and culture of their selected country of study. You will also be requested to allow the use of your study abroad journal if you have one. After your return, you will be invited for a 60-90 minute interview with this researcher where you get a chance to reflect on and share your study abroad experiences. Each participant will get a compensation of $20 for participating in the study and will be eligible to enter a draw for a $50 Amazon gift card.

If you are participating in or have already completed a study abroad program, you meet the outlined criteria and you would like to share your study abroad experience, you are welcome to participate in the study.

You may contact me via email @mg162708@ohio.edu or call me on 740-590-6852.

Your help in this endeavor is highly appreciated.

Regards,

Mary
Appendix D: Interview Request

Dear [Name of Student]

Thank you for participating in the proposed study on the experiences of U.S. undergraduate students on study abroad in nontraditional destinations. Now that you have completed your study abroad program, I would like to invite you to an informal interview to share with me your study abroad experience. The interview session is expected to be between 60-90 minutes long. You may propose dates and times that you would be available for a face-to-face interview.

During the interview, we will also talk about photos you took while abroad and artifacts that you brought back from your study abroad. Therefore, select 4-5 photos from your study abroad collection that you think best capture unique/powerful experiences that had the greatest meaning to you. Also, bring any portable artifacts that you brought back with you.

You will get a $20 compensation for participating in this study, which will be given to you at the interview session. You will also be entered to win a $50 Amazon gift card.

Once again, thank you for participating in this study. Should you have any questions and/or concerns regarding your participation, feel free to get in touch with me any time at mg162708@ohio.edu or call me on 740-590-6852.

Sincerely,

Mary K. Gathogo
Appendix E: Demographics Questionnaire

Pseudonym ______________

1. What is your age? Circle one.
   A. 18  D. 21  G. 24
   B. 19  E. 22  H. 25
   C. 20  F. 23  J. Other: ______________

2. What is your current rank in school?
   A. Freshman         C. Junior
   B. Sophomore                    D. Senior

3. What is your major/graduate degree?
   ___________________________________

4a. What is your ethnic identity? List all that apply.
   A. Caucasian
   B. Hispanic/Latina
   C. Black/African American
   D. Asian/Pacific/
   E. Other: ________________________

5a. Where do you plan to study abroad this year?
   ___________________________________

5b. What is the duration of the program. Circle one.
   A. Two weeks E. Six weeks
   B. Three weeks F. Seven weeks
   C. Four weeks G. Eight weeks
   D. Five weeks H. Other: ____________________.

6a. Did you have a pre-departure orientation?
   A. Yes
   B. No

6b. What other preparatory activities did your program offer before departure? List them here
   ___________________________________
   ___________________________________
7a. Have you studied abroad before?
   A. Yes
   B. No

7b. If yes, list the countries where you studied before.
   ____________________________________________

7c. What was the duration of your earlier study abroad program(s)?
   Specify: ___________________________________

8. How many countries have you visited outside of United States for other reason other than study abroad? List them here:

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Appendix F: Study Abroad Interview Protocol

Part I

Tell me about your study abroad experience in ________________

How did you prepare for your experience in ________________?

What were your perceptions of __________ before your study abroad experience?

How have those perceptions changed since the end of your study abroad experience?

How would you describe the culture of _________________.

In your opinion, how does __________ culture compare to U.S. culture?

Are there things you felt you had to know about ________________ before leaving to study abroad? What are they?

Part II

What parts of your program did you like most and why?

What were the most stressful moments in your interaction with people from your host country?

What were the most stressful moments in your entire stay abroad?

How did you respond to these moments? Would you respond to them differently now?

How similar or different would you say the culture of your host country is compared your culture?

Describe the experiences that were most meaningful to you during your study abroad.

How would you describe yourself before and after study abroad?

Part III

How comfortable would you say you were with people who are different from you before your study abroad experience?

How has that changed if at all?

How would you describe your interactions with people from your host country?
How do you plan to remain engaged with the country/community where you had your study abroad experience?

**Part IV**

What did you know about your host country before your departure? How well would your say you know your host country after your study abroad?

To what extent would you say your study abroad experience has changed the way you understand problems/challenges faced by ________________?

How do you think that those challenges affect the U.S. or other countries?

How do you think your study abroad experience affected your entire outlook on life as an American?

To what extent would you say that the program goals and those that you set for yourself have been achieved?

Is there anything else about your experience else that we have not discussed that you would like to share with me?
Appendix G: IRB Approval

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies): 7.

Project Title: Development of Intercultural and Global Competencies in Short-Term Study Abroad in Nontraditional Destinations: Rhetorical Ideology or Educational Reality?

Primary Investigator: Mary K. Gathogo

Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor: Peter C. Mather

Department: Counseling and Higher Education

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

Approval Date 5/29/14
Expiration Date 5/28/15

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.