

THE MEANING MAKING OF A WOMAN IN HER LIFE
DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE STUDY ABROAD
EXPERIENCE

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The pursuit of education can be an all-consuming process that does not lend well to family and friends. The completion of a PhD program is never a singular process but rather a joint effort between many. One person receives the glory of the degree, but many are responsible for the ability for one to complete. I would to formally thank those who made my degree possible. Thank you to my children Candace, Kyle, and Heather who patiently allowed me to follow this dream. Thank you to my late husband Alan who inspired me to tackle this daunting task through his belief in my ability and his pride in my process. Thank you to my husband Kim who continued the vision. Thank you to my parents who gave me a foundation of learning.

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I dedicate this work to my beautiful grandchildren Amery, Luca, Holden, Paxton and Maisie. I hope this will inspire them to capture their own dreams and follow their own roads.

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Abstract: Study Abroad continues to grow as part of the higher education experience. Women participate more often than men in Study Abroad, yet little research has addressed the narrative of a woman's unique voice in the process as an addition to knowledge. The objective of this study was to address the meaning a singular woman made from her participation in Study Abroad and how that meaning was expressed during her life journey.

This qualitative study used narrative inquiry of a singular individual. Methods used for this research included individual interviews, observation, artifacts and photo elicitation. The member's own photos were used for the photo elicitation and proved a strong resource. Data collection from the methods and applied coding process emerged five themes: *People are good*: this data described an intense need for the participant to acknowledge the goodness of all people. *The need to tell*: this collected data that demonstrated the participant's need to share her acquired epiphany to enlighten others. *Independence*: this gathering evidenced a new degree of freedom in solo travel and general self-confidence. *Places*: location and the need for familiar landscape data grounded the participant. Finally, *Race*: indicated data that described an attention to people because of their cultural differences. The final analysis includes poetry pulled from Labov's coding process, as well as an acrylic painting to visually represent the findings.

The significance of this study was the reflection she shared as a woman because it begins to fill in gaps from the historical narratives that document history through voice. The study was not intended to generalize to others but rather valued as a unique solo note. There were some possible implications from this study. Learning may grow from how a person views self. Therefore, understanding what is important to the learner may allow for the development of higher education initiatives that enhance participant satisfaction and increase positive results. The most profound meaning pulled from the narrative for this participant was associated with how she approached the world, acceptance of people and finally the courage to believe in herself.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The National Association of International Educators (NAFSA) in the 2016 US News and World Report ranked international universities in a category termed “global significance”. American universities garnered the top four spots worldwide with Harvard University listed as number one. Global significance could alter the foundational principles of ivory tower isolationism by breaking boundaries and blending borders, thereby wicking away traditional expectations for stakeholders. Higher education could reflect a new image that emphasizes an international prominence along with the traditional brick and mortar demands previously absorbed by the historical institution.

This pressure of global circumstances drives the need to fully embrace what is termed university “internationalism”. The university can no longer minimize global realities. Globalization continues to shrink our back yard, allowing us to peer over the fence. The encroachment of porous borders between institutions, coupled with the competitive stance required to garner international students, mobility students, and meet the needs of the faculty, positions the institution to remain solvent in a competitive global space (Rhodes, 2014; Rhodes, Loberg, & Hubbard, 2014).

Internationalism reflects how global lines have blurred as the world shares information with speed and content. International study via the sojourn experience is now commonplace as part of the university experience and internationalization process (Jiang & Carpenter, 2014; NAIE, 1983). Student mobility is a way for all members of our education society to understand other cultures. The robust use of the term “internationalism” is evidenced in the development of federal initiatives and programs. Government policies enable the institution to intentionally move forward with Study Abroad programs such as the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship (2005).

Parents and students are knowledgeable of the international experience and they make university choice decisions based on international study opportunities. Family support, for female participation is weighted heavier than for male participation (Shirley & Olsen, 2006). Therefore, gender disparity in participation of Study Abroad may be significant to university recruitment strategies. Moreover, in the female-dominated participation of Study Abroad, the inclusion of gender is a factor of significance, demonstrated in Title IX policies designed for both the female and male student (Rose, 2015). Additionally, if the goals for Study Abroad include the application of meaning for global intercultural awareness developed during the experience, then reflection on meaning making after Study Abroad participation may be valuable to both the university and the student. Meaning making in this specific context considers how the Study Abroad graduate perceives her understanding of the experience in her world.

Currently, there is pressure for participation among higher education institutions, even at the community college level, to meet the global initiative (Boroncio & Boroncio, 2010; Teague, 2007). In 2011, Oklahoma State University enrolled 2,180 foreign students a 3.8 percent increase over the previous year, as documented by the Institute of International Education [IIE], (2013). Female participation remains historically strong (Open Doors, 2016). The state of Oklahoma participated by sending 2,054 students to Study Abroad the same year (IIE, 2013). The emphasis of internationalism by colleges and institutions likely demonstrates a deliberate strategy to direct resources to meet global demands through educational leadership, public policy, organizational environment, legal advice, and financial resources. Much of the intent to create internationalism could be viewed as being met through Study Abroad. The presence of the female in Study Abroad is strong and consistent, with 67 percent female participation in the 2015-2016 academic school year (Open Doors, 2016). Consequently, the women's experience is estimated noteworthy.

Study Abroad programs began in Europe in the twelfth century. Emo of Friesland recorded his educational sojourn from Holland to study at Oxford University (Lee, 2012). The mid-nineteenth century was the gateway for students to begin what was termed summer tramps, voyages to Europe to study history, language and culture (Hoffa, 2007; Lee, 2012). Historically, Study Abroad was part of a political agenda designed to encourage students to participate in the global enterprise as described in the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (Burn, 1980). The Study

Abroad opportunities have evolved in size and scope. Both long-term and short-term Study Abroad programs and national student exchange enable students to connect to their world.

Background of the Study

The increased awareness of the internationalization efforts by all countries and the continued conversations by groups like American Council on Education (ACE)(2014) and other national/international organizations may lead to the high utility of perceiving education as a global public good. The leadership structure, curriculum with learning outcomes, faculty best practices, Study Abroad programming, and the presence of international students and international collaboration are all areas that seem appropriate to the educational campus. However, one may argue student mobility from one campus to another is a particular strength to the university. The value of internationalization may be observed in the increased intercultural competence (IC). The participation of students in Study Abroad programs incubates global understanding and enhances the ability to function with global literacy (Bell, Gibson, Tarrant, Perry, & Stoner, 2016; Martinez, 2011). Although Study Abroad is a significant portion of the effort that attracts students, one should not neglect to mention other benefits, including faculty stimulation and research exchange as well as course and program development all which are appropriate to trending and emergent education (Rhodes, Loberg, & Hubbard, 2014). The increased presence of international students may allow societal community integration of different worldviews. These factors are all contributors to IC. Other countries have long embedded

their educational systems with American cultural awareness. The purposeful inclusion of culture competence in the university environment may decrease the student's ethnocentric attitudes thereby moving toward a cultural competence beneficial for both government and business.

As altruistic and noble as international efforts seem, there is a side that looks to self-advantage. One could argue students have always been mobile since the late 1800's where one can find examples and opportunities to learn abroad even then. The global university is a tag word used to gain appeal and leverage status; this emphasis is used to increase sustainability of the university by the recruitment of tuition-paying international students. Therefore, there is a commercial advantage to the university in having varied cultural learners on campus.

The Lincoln Commission (2005) aspired to have a million students studying abroad by 2016-2017. "The tipping point is very near. When the nation reaches it, studying abroad will be little more unusual than enrolling in college..." (p. VII). However, without careful planning and considerations of limits to student capacity and cost the tipping point could also be a weight that submerges the institution (Leslie, Anderson, & Associates, 1990). Increasingly educational leadership must develop policies that serve all the stakeholders.

The American Council on Education (ACE) (2014) stated global higher education internationalizing as, "the rising tide that lifts all ships" (Introduction section, para. 1). This positive endorsement has both strengths and weakness. One could reason

this educational approach of Study Abroad that encompasses institutional global commitment specifically points toward long-term student engagement. In that transition, skills required to meet the expectations of the Study Abroad environment may also apply in life development post-graduation. The demanding nature of the cultural adaptation experience could impact the future of the students. Moreover, the gender of the participants may present special challenges in cross-cultural experiences that could impact life meaning making experiences.

Gender coupled with Study Abroad denotes a consistent pattern over time that trends toward female participation (Open Doors, 2016). The growth of the Study Abroad programs across university platforms reflects this constant trend. This growth may also highlight the opportunity to study the participation by females from a deep data source. Engaging the data under a gender-specific lens may allow a voice to speak that is specific to the female Study Abroad experience.

Problem Statement

As the world continues to merge into one global marketplace, the pressure to equip U.S. students in higher education with international understanding and experience is also increasing. The Study Abroad program is one established method for providing students this learning opportunity.

Despite the pressure on colleges to use Study Abroad as a vehicle for equipping students, there is little investigation of the meaning making that specifically female Study Abroad students gain from their global experiences. Precisely, we do not know what

meaning female students consider useful as they transition from the world of academia to post graduate life. Nor do we have a clear investigation of other meanings and global experiences that female graduates draw from once in their life beyond graduation. This lack of exploration of the female experience may detract from our ability to understand meaning making in ways that leverage this critical learning opportunity for the participant, allowing the female voice to gain clarity in this process.

Based upon their own experiences, it is likely that former female Study Abroad students who have transitioned from school to life can provide needed insight into what they consider the most valuable and practical meaning making of their lived global experiences. Therefore, more research is needed to recognize the impact of the Study Abroad global experience as it may be linked to the female participants' meaning making into other life experience. This research may address how the experience relates to meaning in their life work and why.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the meaning making from the lived global experiences that a former female Study Abroad student of a Midwestern land-grant university considers insightful in her life.

Professional Significance

We exist in a continuum of increasing global community. This worldwide reality may affect the university experience. While college students expend an increasing amount of time and thought interacting in the global community, they also have opportunities in the university experience to spend educational time abroad. Exploring

how the female student who participated in Study Abroad perceives this experience could add to academic knowledge through the Study Abroad programs' opportunity to hear the voice of the participant, which may prove enlightening. Therefore, this study could create a greater exploration of how a specific Study Abroad opportunity in education created meaning making for a unique female learner and how that international experience impacts her life.

Those who may potentially use and benefit from this study are: the female student as she weighs the meaning making of a Study Abroad experience during her college years. The participant's own reflection of their narrative story may possibly prompt meaning making in her life and finally, it is hoped that the narrative inquiry method may contribute to knowledge through the inclusion of a woman's voice.

Limitations and Delimitations

The assumptions associated with this study involve the belief that Study Abroad program participants acquired meaning during the process that was not a part of their prior experience. An additional expectation is the meaning making could be transferred to the students' life after graduation. In this study the participant pool will live a limited distance from the researcher. Also, the fact that participants may have completed the Study Abroad program over different periods of time as well as the Study Abroad programs not being uniform in destination, could produce varied responses. It is believed that the meaning made from the Study Abroad experience described by the participant in the narrative inquiry is important and unique to the individual.

Different research areas examined include employer value in Study Abroad, the global career inclusion for graduates, gender disparity, gender perceptions, access to Study Abroad and competency skills used. These are all areas of perspectives associated with internationalism and Study Abroad. However, the meaning drawn from the experience and applied by the former Study Abroad student (more specifically, the female Study Abroad student in her life) appears to be the most compelling. What is the significance of the Study Abroad experience to the individual participant? What do we know about how the infused cultural identity impacts the meaning made of the female student who participated? This research may be important in the addition of knowledge because the study allows a woman's voice to be heard and may be insightful to higher education knowledge with the added opportunity to hear the voice of a woman and understand meaningful thoughts about her participation in an internationalism program.

Therefore, I have chosen to research the perspective of the female who participated in the Study Abroad experience and the meaning the participant drew from Study Abroad and how that experience may or may not have been reflected in her life. The lived experience of Study Abroad may impact the female student directly and intimately through meaning making. Some areas of meaning making may or may not include: the type of work former Study Abroad students chose, skill sets required, professional contacts made, empowerment realized through salary, responsibility, and position or leadership, as well as changes realized in life paths. The participant's story will allow the emergence of the meaning making the student drew from the Study Abroad

experience. Some prior studies support the path of research considering the impact of Study Abroad on career advancement by looking at the skills acquired during the process. An area of future research recommended in prior studies is one that would, "... reveal the changing employment contexts within which student[s] apply their Study Abroad experiences" (Dwyer, 2004, p. 161). My research allows a reflection of the participants' perception of their meaning making from the Study Abroad experience while currently engaging in her post-academic life (Franklin, 2012). This will be an inimitable voice.

The focus of the inquiry corresponds with my research topic when considering meaning making by a woman from her Study Abroad experience. In the Norris and Gillespie (2009) study, eighty-four percent of the respondents stated that Study Abroad allowed them to, "...acquire a skill set that influenced my career path" (p. 390). This relates to a focus on the development of meaning that the Study Abroad student may draw from as she moves into her post-graduation experience, especially those meanings related in an intercultural forum (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2006). The topic may likely support the need for additional qualitative studies and long-range impact studies which are meaningful. The recent literature suggests that former Study Abroad students respond to the environment with expertise from their sojourn experience (Dwyer, 2004). This research reflects that opportunity for a female participant to reveal their own meaning from the Study Abroad experience.

Overview of Methodology

This research methodology explores the female participant's story. With traditional information, recorded knowledge of the woman's voice is mostly absent. The woman's experience is a source of knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Observation, interviewing, artifacts, conversation, and reflection defined the data collection in my study. Narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) gathered the stories and experiences of the participant. It is hoped that the narrative inquiry allowed a reflection to emerge that was relevant to the unique member. This methodology allowed the focus to remain on the participant story.

The principles of narrative inquiry for the research methodology that I adopt should prove effective under this lens because the woman storied her response using her Study Abroad experience as a familiar context. Looking from the vantage point of the female lived experience, the research question I have chosen is associated toward *other* ways of knowing in consideration of women and how their individual consideration is relevant to this study of a female Study Abroad participant (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). I employed the following research question to view the fieldwork from the unique voice of a single female participant utilizing her description of meaning making. Further discussion is continued in Chapter Three.

Research Question

The research reflects the following question that is the subject of my inquiry:

How do participants make meaning of their Study Abroad experience?

In order to cultivate a strong repository of emerging data the narrative inquiry was used. The participants' intimate reflection toward this process is important for meaningful outcomes.

Data Collection

The data collection procedure developed for this study was a one-on-one interview with the participant. Interviews were conducted with one former female Study Abroad student who was currently engaged in life after graduation. The narrative stories collected consisted of her unique meaning made from the lived experiences generated during Study Abroad. The collection also included photo elicitation, artifacts, document examination as well as observations of the life environment.

Interview and Transcribing

Several interviews were conducted with one member over a four-week period. Each interview was transcribed. The data was listened to numerous times. This process heightened awareness of the members' words and language (Patton, 2002). Portions of data were separated and categorized. The identity of the member and type of data was coded. Care was given to record the description of the site and the collection of any artifacts relevant to the objectives of the interview. Member checking of the narrative was conducted.

The creation of credibility in investigation is the foundation for a study that is valuable and useful to the research community. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) describe credibility as the recognition of all data, not only the data that matches your preference as

the researcher, but also the data that does not. A reflexive digital journal, which is a recommend practice, also establishes credibility and was developed by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation of my research was critical. Ways in which research is triangulated for this study included; the interviewing of a former Study Abroad participant who is active in their life development after graduation, along with the accumulation of artifacts such as document examination, photos, and the observation of the surrounding life environments. The triangulation of data will create research that is trustworthy (Patton, 2002). The use of multiple sources such as observations, interviews and the collection of artifacts were used to record data that is rich and robust necessary to support credible research (Patton, 2002).

Sample

The study population that the singular sample subject was chosen from may be described as a female graduate who participated in a Study Abroad program while in undergraduate school at an institution of higher education and is currently engaged in relevant life activities. A varied group of women in terms of race, socioeconomic backgrounds, career fields and sojourn experience was desired for the single subject to be chosen from.

The type of sampling was purposive sampling. The sample may be described as a former female Study Abroad student who has graduated from a Midwest land-grant university and is engaged in life. This initial grouping is purposive because it is derived

from a known successful Study Abroad program that can accurately address the topic of the study. Additionally, two associates from Study Abroad offices worked as contacts for member referral to help ensure the integrity and clarity of the member pool.

An application to the Institutional Research Board (IRB) was made to target this population of alumni of the Study Abroad program. The sample contact list obtained from the Institutional Research and Information Management (IRIM) department as well as referrals from Study Abroad office associates was contacted via email or other contact efforts to request an opportunity to be interviewed about their Study Abroad experience and the meaning of the program on their life. The research question was sent to the respondent prior to a short phone interview. The list of requested artifacts was given to the member as a reference during the narrative inquiry. Artifacts were collected including document examination and Study Abroad photos. Interview meetings were set up with the willing participant.

The desired purposive sample size for this qualitative study was one. The goal was to record and analyze a rich, detailed discussion of the lived experiences through narrative inquiry interviews about how the alumnus believes this educational experience related meaning making in her life. The pool of one final participant with several separate interviews was chosen to both ensure the depth needed for synthesis and time development needed for engagement in a qualitative study that reflects concerted detail and attention to honor the participant's story.

Data Analysis

In the synthesis of all the collections connected with the study, a picture begins to emerge which is woven together from the threads of layered data, co-constructed by me (the listener), and the participant member. In Luttrell's (2010) *Good Enough*, the researcher learns that the synthesis process is engaged over time. Data is gathered, sorted, stored, and pulled out. The data is then reassembled, gathered, sorted, teased out, refined and focused with many choices and areas to probe for meaning and understanding (Luttrell, 2010).

The process of analytic analysis and final synthesis of carefully collected data is achieved through many methods. One is coding. Saldana (2013) explores this process. Coding is a review of the data document in such a way to highlight themes that surface upon reflection. Structural narrative coding (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967) may allow emergent themes to surface and reflect the lens of the member taken together from several interviews as well as each individual interview.

Definitions

The following terms are listed to aid in the understanding of words used in the study.

- *Study Abroad* – An educational experience for varied length and subject area occurring in a global learning environment under the direction of an institute of higher education (Burn, 1980).
- *Campus internationalism* – International focused activities (Simpson, 2016).

- *Internationalization*- Strategic planned response by the institution (Simpson, 2016).
- *Cultural Intelligence (CI)* – The ability for the university student to appreciate the global other.
- *Unpacking Study Abroad* – The ability of students to take the Study Abroad experience and apply the expertise to life (Gardner, Stieglitz, & Gross, 2009).
- *Performance accomplishment* – The act of becoming better thru the action of participation (Gardner, Stieglitz & Gross, 2009).
- *World mindedness* – The intercultural awareness of others beyond self in the larger global community (Tucker, Gullekson, & McCambridge, 2011).
- *Global career*- The participation in a work experience that is beyond the employee’s native familiarity reaching beyond their own cultural borders for their professional occupation (Norris & Gillespie, 2009).
- *With-it-ness*- An awareness of what is around you specifically in relation to cultural situations (Martinez, 2011).
- *Career advancement*- The process of movement or progression in one’s profession.
- *Gender disparity*- The inequality demonstrated by the repeated ratio of six females to four males who have participated in the Study Abroad experience over the last many years (Open Doors, 2016).

- *Meaning Making*- The perceived understanding of an individual emerging from a social world in a specific context (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

Summary

Global internationalization may create an increased need for the university internationalism that meets the demands of national policy, business requirements, and international partnerships. Study Abroad has become a part of the solution. However, Study Abroad participants may be placed into a new cultural environment that requires the need to develop new meaning making. This development could create influence in the participant associated with the experience (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2010; 2014).

Gender disparity towards female participation may create readily available information (Open Doors, 2016; Shirley & Olsen, 2006), as well as to provide a possible impact on life (Franklin, 2010). This impact may supply an opportunity to reflect on the Study Abroad data of the female experience with a new lens, as well as impacting the development process for female Study Abroad graduates (Gardner, Stieglitz & Gross, 2009). Student competency skills, impact on life development, and employer value of the Study Abroad experience all combine to reflect the emergent meaning making characteristics of female graduates who have participated in Study Abroad. This study will likely speak to the meaning of the Study Abroad program on the female participant's future life that will allow the narrative inquiry process to reveal direction from the participant's story. Furthermore, a recognition of the rich data source acquired through

awareness of gender disparity toward female Study Abroad students creates the opportunity to value the woman's voice in the reflection of the Study Abroad experience. The use of narrative inquiry in this qualitative study will likely allow a story to emerge which may add enrichment to university academic knowledge, by creating an opportunity to hear the voice of a woman and understand the meaning made of her sojourn experience.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Study Abroad opportunities have evolved over time from a short list of mostly European cultural experiences to the worldwide academic opportunities now available for students, thus widening options in destination, and length of study and curricula demonstrated through the breadth of these programs assembled at community colleges, colleges, universities, and for-profit institutions. The international education, outreach departments, and international student exchange programs continue to grow in large part from the internationalization of the university. Currently, there is increased political and institutional pressure for participation not only among large well established higher education institutions, but also at the smaller private and community college level as well (Teague, 2007). The inclusion of Study Abroad pervades the higher educational experience at all levels as part of the learning opportunity.

Yet, research on the benefits of Study Abroad has not established a common thread (Tucker, Gullekson, & McCambridge, 2011). The programs have not had the longitudinal evaluation necessary to provide a guide to define the elements of a program's strengths that relate to the success of students in their lives (Franklin, 2012).

Moreover, gender disparity demonstrated by the weighted inclusion of women in Study Abroad has remained constant, creating a possible trove of untapped data in the participation by women. The female student has much to offer in the gathering of insight into the benefits of the Study Abroad experience that need to be examined (Tucker et al., 2011). One particular unknown about the Study Abroad experience is how the meaning making developed through the adaptation to the Study Abroad environment later influences the graduate's adaptation into life. The woman's voice in this process may prove insightful as well as support female knowledge gathering.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how a former female Study Abroad student describes and respond to their life opportunities from the meaning making gained in Study Abroad. The study examines the emergent meaning the Study Abroad graduate defines as noteworthy as she adapts to life prospects. The literature review will focus on several areas that are evolving in this field, including campus internationalization, Study Abroad, the long-term impact of the Study Abroad programs, Employers' value of Study Abroad, access to Study Abroad, change associated with the Study Abroad student, gender in Study Abroad, Workforce competencies, and Feminism.

Campus Internationalization

Study Abroad opportunities continue to be explored with the intent to create curriculum that supports the development of cultural intelligence. Internationalization is the response of the institution to this development, the strategic plan to support the initiative. This internationalization of education continues to grow in part from the planned response to the catalyst of globalization of the university (Simpson, 2010).

NAFSA (Association of International Educators) in the 2016 *U.S. News and World Report* ranks universities in a category termed global significance. American universities rank in the top four worldwide. Higher education could face a new world that includes an international emphasis along with the brick and mortar demands on the historical institution. This issue may alter the local foundational principles of ivory tower isolationism that previously guided practice by releasing boundaries and blending borders of the educational practice. The university is no longer isolated from worldly concerns. Globalization continues to shrink the map, allowing an encroachment of porous borders between institutions. This globalization initiative positions the institution to remain solvent.

Internationalization reflects how global lines have blurred as the process of sharing information has become more fluid. The structure of the university has shifted. The 2007 Princeton University Report, *Princeton in the World*, establishes the leadership position of Vice Provost for International Initiatives (Tilghman & Eisgruber, 2007), demonstrating the response strategy associated with internationalization. Progress toward multiple designs to advance stature toward international teaching, global research, and governance board avocation for international endeavors indicates the level of concentration universities are beginning to devote to this topic (Aronson, 2011).

One example of universities responding to this trend toward a global educational community is the prevalence of offering Study Abroad as a part of the university experience. Study Abroad is a way for members of our education society to deepen understanding of other cultures. Robust use of the term “internationalism” is evidence of strong foundational response encouraged through various federal initiatives and programs

(The Guardian, June 7, 2011). Altbach, Gumport and Johnstone (2001) in their work *In Defense of American Higher Education* both recognize and give significance to global research associated with higher education. The economy of a nation depends on this inclusive perspective and is evidence of how internationalism is realized (Altbach et al., 2001). These activities, combined with curriculum, research, and international spirit, are all highly valued characteristics of an internationalized university.

Study Abroad

Government policies enable the institution to intentionally move forward with programs addressed from the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Commission (2005) and the subsequent Simon Act (US Congress, 2007). Government policies focus on increased student participation in Study Abroad (Durbin, 2006). Parents and students are sensitive to the international experience and make university choice decisions based on opportunity and international inclusion. Historically, Study Abroad was part of a political agenda to encourage greater development of students toward the global enterprise, as described in the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (Burn, 1980). Government provides financial incentives to the schools as they work to accommodate increased student participation. The institutions attempt to provide Study Abroad programming that is both attractive and educationally responsive to global needs for country and student (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014). The Study Abroad opportunities have evolved over time, enabling students to connect to their world. Internationalization of the campus experience allows the identification of several applications, including student migration. Therefore, the impact of the continued growth

of the internationalization movement coupled with the intent to send more students abroad is a high priority to many universities in order to remain competitive.

In an ever-increasing global world, the institution may remain competitive through the development of ties to sister universities beyond the borders of country of origin, as well as creating ties to standalone, for-profit Study Abroad companies. This emphasis may reveal how higher education increasingly prioritizes student enrollment in a competitive market. One emphasis that demonstrates the approach to the global reach and inclusion is the development of Study Abroad programs (Petzold & Peter, 2015; Rhodes, Loger, & Hubbard, 2014). International competence from Study Abroad is the desired outgrowth of campus internationalization. How to decipher the impact Study Abroad has on the campus culture impact may help determine value (Bell, Gibson, Tarrant, Perry, & Stoner, 2016; Shadowen, Chieffo, & Guerra, 2015).

Internationalism of the university through decoding Study Abroad may help transform our higher education culture. There is an increased emphasis on the internationalization of the campus through Study Abroad (Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus & Skendall, 2012). Immediacy of information, competition of resources for international students, national policy agendas and increased global relationships for faculty research and student mobility all impact the cultural competence of the institution. Though the internationalization plan of the university, the most compelling component of all may be the student sojourn experience. To embed oneself in the language and customs of another culture from a few weeks to a year can have a profound value (Norris & Dwyer, 2005). Shorter sojourn terms create a more intense participatory experience (Jones, et al., 2012). Recognized by government leaders through history, Study Abroad is

an opportunity for citizens to expand their education, thereby broadening their ability to function in the government and private sector enhanced understanding and competence. In fact, the learning associated with Study Abroad may support transformational learning (Bell, Gibson, Tarrant, Perry, & Stoner, 2016; Jones, et al., 2012). The practical implications of student migration are examined in the impact of the Study Abroad experience on life development.

The Long-Term Impact of Study Abroad on Life

University systems aligning with internationalization may find strength in strong Study Abroad programs. A demonstration of success could link Study Abroad success with career advancement. Past participants indicated that ten years after participation, some skills in their Study Abroad experience still applied to their current work (Franklin, 2010; NAFSA, 2005). Therefore, findings from Franklin's study indicated that the impact from the sojourn experience could be long term. The satisfaction of the experience and the appreciation of the application of Study Abroad may support the value and transferability of learning into life experiences (Franklin, 2010). Studies conducted with Australian university students demonstrate that Study Abroad impacted the graduates' early career in a positive way, creating "international career capital" (Potts, 2014). The willingness to develop identity with the new culture as well as the length of time away from the Study Abroad experience, allows the participants to fully appreciate the significance and usefulness of the sojourn event (Bell et al., 2016; Jackson, 2016). Moreover, skills gained were not dependent on geographic destinations of Study Abroad, but more so by level of involvement demonstrated by the student (Franklin, 2010; Potts, 2014). Study Abroad as reflected in multiple student responses evidenced that the sojourn

experience impacted their professional development through the grounding of experiences and the building of communication skills with diverse cultures (Chapman, 2011; Culver & Baez, 2011; Dwyer, 2004). However, the question of gender distinction as it relates to Study Abroad experience has not been fully developed. Franklin (2010) finds that students who live in a home environment during the Study Abroad experience develop more cultural inclusion during their career experience. Additionally, becoming comfortable with a non-native language inclusion in Study Abroad strengthened the willingness of participants to embrace the same experience in work (Curran, 2007; Dwyer, 2004; Franklin, 2010; Norris & Dwyer, 2005). Study Abroad programs that promote language inclusion and immerse the student via language into the culture could be especially beneficial to future life opportunity (Curran, 2007).

The question of value associated with Study Abroad evolved over time to refine the intricacies of the programs rather than evaluating whether the sojourn programs were effective overall (Rexeisen, 2013). The sojourn study is accepted university practice for many institutions which have separate international study departments. The focus for improvement may now be on components of the programs such as variations of length and locations. Possible gaps in the literature may reflect how outcomes from the experience are lifted over time by the participant into their lives (Rexeisen, 2013), especially as they may relate to gender application. One example is the workplace. The return on investment students believe will come from their involvement with Study Abroad are often closely tied to work and their career (Chapman, 2011). Franklin's study (2010) addressed investment in Study Abroad and its relationship with career salary. Students may perceive that Study Abroad bestows financial rewards through

participation. Although the participants did earn more, the cause of the higher earning level may not be from Study Abroad participation (2010). Participation by gender in Study Abroad did not impact the opportunity to obtain an interview for employment, nor did Study Abroad result in higher income. However, females did attach greater value to the sojourn experience than males (Opper, 1991). This study proposes to explore that valuation process through the eyes and experiences of one Study Abroad participant.

Alumni tracking through the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP) demonstrated the degree of Study Abroad influence on career within the field of social justice (Bhandari & Martel, 2016). Seventy-nine percent of those replying in the study had strong leadership roles in organizations that work for change and empowerment. Moreover, the study reflected on how those who experienced social injustice were actively engaged in contributing back to their respective communities. Alumni indicated that overseas service enhanced the opportunity for advancement and increase in salary (Bhandari & Martel, 2016). The interaction between alumni through connections like social media increased their awareness of career goals and support from each other (2016). Students, upon reflection of the experience, felt they were more competitive in hiring opportunities because of their Study Abroad (Franklin, 2010). Furthermore, in Jackson's (2016) work the researcher found students three years from the experience could reflect on the events from Study Abroad and determine lessons learned as very valuable in their life. However, there appears a lack of exploration relative to how Study Abroad impacts one gender over the other.

Developing student global competence and improving student preparedness for a global arena is an outgrowth of student migration, and reflects the long-term impact of

Study Abroad on professional development through the practice of daily decision making (Center of Internationalization and Global Engagement [CIGE], 2015; Chapman, 2011). Students who participated in a Study Abroad experience had the opportunity to become familiar with the culture and appreciate rich cultural differences. Moreover, the familiarity and comfort that was developed was translated in the career experience, allowing students to seek opportunities that included global locations during their life toward a global career. Curran (2007) suggests that the student's own *belief* that Study Abroad as a positive benefit creates a career advantage. Study Abroad could be viewed as a link between those who participated in a Study Abroad experience, and those who chose to participate in global careers (Nichols, 2011; Norris & Gillespie, 2009). The professional contacts made through the student's Study Abroad experience expanded during their life development, giving them benefits of associations beyond their country of origin.

Studies demonstrate students who participate in Study Abroad programs develop more international professional contacts (Dwyer, 2004). This predisposed a continued positive progression in global career paths as influenced by the opportunity of Study Abroad participation (Franklin, 2012). Impacts of Study Abroad for the student over their higher educational experience and deep into their life journey were evident (Dwyer, 2004). However, gender differential in this context has not been fully explored. Ethics in the work place is also a factor of significance to former participants (Franklin, 2010). The mobility immersion creates an opportunity to understand ethical concerns from a cultural stance (2010), regardless of gender.

“Soft skills” are interwoven throughout the Study Abroad experience. The ability to be flexible and open-minded with attention on how people respond in relation to the culture is an outcome that impacts career (Franklin, 2010). Although the participant may be able to personally appreciate the impact of Study Abroad on their life, there may also be a link to how the employer interprets the value of the experience, especially in the case of female Study Abroad participants.

Employer Value of Study Abroad

An increased value of student participation in Study Abroad may in part be demonstrated in various higher education relationships. Universities are finding connections and forming partnerships between career counselors and Study Abroad advisers, thus enhancing the connections between education experience and work experience (Fischer, 2016). Employer value of Study Abroad may be reflected in the manner in which students apply Study Abroad to work. Some studies reflect that students found difficulty verbalizing and appreciating the transference of skills gained in Study Abroad to the workplace environment (Curran, 2007). Some students did not perceive how Study Abroad would provide them positive benefits in terms of career development. Unpacking Study Abroad in the work environment may prove beneficial. However, this process required participation in programs that promoted language building in specific languages as well as cultural immersion. Demonstration of linguistic ability may be attractive in the interview process. Interestingly, the use of the language was not necessary required in the position applied for, but rather, the demonstration of linguistic ability was sometimes attractive to the employer.

It is also suggested that internships may be a means to demonstrate ability gained (Curran, 2007). Curran also suggests that Study Abroad participation is not easy to pronounce on a resume, but rather may be described during the interview process, with examples of graduates taking the initiative to discuss the benefits of Study Abroad. Both applicants and employees were sometimes unaware of the rich unintended benefits associated with the Study Abroad experience, and the strength those benefits might bring into the work environment (Matherly & Nolting, 2007). The researchers conclude these acquired skills were often overlooked (2007). True Study Abroad application to career opportunity is perhaps the responsibility of the student through the reflection on the expertise used and the application into their life (Curran, 2007). This with-it-ness to decipher and infuse the Study Abroad experience may be learned. This ability may be enhanced through partnerships between career counselors, Study Abroad advisors, and students (Fischer, 2016).

The employer who possessed a lack of knowledge of Study Abroad programs also demonstrated a lack of value of Study Abroad for future employees in the hiring process (Gardner, Stieglitz & Gross, 2009; Matherly & Tillman, 2010). In fact, those with the greatest appreciation for the Study Abroad experience such as the CEO or higher administration positions were often also far removed from the hiring process. Therefore, the lack of familiarity of the Study Abroad program by those responsible for human resource development impedes a positive impact during an interview involving a former Study Abroad participant (Trooboff, VandeBerg, & Raymond, 2008). To address this issue the interviewee should magnify this asset during the interview process. When the Study Abroad graduate appreciates the impact of the experience on their skill set and the

value it creates in them as a candidate in the interview process, they can expose and amplify on Study Abroad experiences.

International experience through Study Abroad creates a positive factor in the interview process, if the applicant is savvy enough to weave the proficiency acquired into the discussion (Fischer, 2016; Herren, 2008; Tucker, Gullekson & McCambridge, 2011). Companies may indicate the positive impact of Study Abroad. However, human resource departments will more often than not ignore reference about the Study Abroad experience, even though it was listed on the resume, rather than inquire (Herren, 2008). Students need assistance in the development of conversation skills in the interview process in order to bring the skills developed during the Study Abroad experience into focus (Fischer, 2016; Matherly & Tillman, 2010). This emphasis will help employers appreciate the contribution of past Study Abroad experience as it relates to career. Employers value skills that are interpersonal. The strength of interpersonal skills as researched by Trooboff, Vandenberg and Raymond (2008) were also linked to Study Abroad. Thus, awareness of this schema may allow for an interview process that may enhance opportunity for the former Study Abroad participant to make a positive impression.

Globalization has a dramatic influence on both education and business (Tillman, 2005; 2011; Tucker, Gullekson, & McCambridge, 2011). The development of intercultural competency acquired by the business student during the Study Abroad experience increases the graduate's employment success (Matherly & Nolting, 2007; Tucker, et al., 2011).

Businesses seek applicants that possess a sophisticated global understanding that steeped in experiential learning (Trooboff, Van Berg, & Raymond, 2008). This influence may be associated with the internationalization of the business as well as the experience of the human resources department with Study Abroad (Petzold & Peter, 2015). Study Abroad programs help mirror industry needs, thereby becoming a reflection of what the markets demand (Teague, 2007). Human Resource departments find that Study Abroad on a resume could indicate independence, the ability to work in a diverse setting, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances (Franklin, 2010). In a transactional way, businesses will hire graduates who are able to promote the changes that are needed, and thus demonstrate the advantages of hiring former Study Abroad participant candidates.

Workforce Competency

Workforce competency skills allow for program participants to interact in a manner appropriate to the conditions required for the workplace. Competency involves the worker, workplace and work. The university experience along with the programs they provide may be considered one of the resources where these competencies are developed (Deardorff, 2009). Study Abroad as a program of the university may be considered in this context. The intercultural competence development may relate to the Study Abroad experience by providing the participants the opportunity to interact with people of different cultures thus practicing skills that could be associated with future career or life experiences (Williams, 2009). Williams used qualitative data collection in both a “prior to” and “after” experience to assess gains or changes in competency. Confidence gained in a new culture along with the release of trepidation allows the changes to evolve in the participant (Williams, 2009). Foreign language exposure is determined as an opportunity

for competency for those who participated in Study Abroad programs. Participants in Reynolds-Case's (2013) study may have developed a competency level in this area even during a short term education experience, and may use this experience in future prospects (Reynolds-Case, 2013). Several models address the concept of competency (Deardorff, 2009; Ennis, 2008). The Ting-Toomey (1999) model as described by Deardorff (2009) considers work place readiness skills that are key to adjusting to the culture and required in the work. Tiers are associated with the various models, and they may address the issues of workforce preparedness (Ennis, 2008). Placement in a career and satisfaction of both employer and employee may be a guide in monitoring the interim progress of foundational competencies. The Study Abroad experience as a resource for competency building in cross cultural development may not meet the expectations of students or programs. In Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke and Ardichvili (2016) participation in a Study Abroad program was not a guarantee for intercultural awareness that would result in global competency. The Study Abroad program examined, though well-developed, may not have the desired effect necessary to take full advantage of the diversity experience. Student satisfaction with an overseas program did not necessarily create strong competency skills (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016). Workforce competency is connected to the Study Abroad experience through several studies (Deardorff, 2009; Izatul, Abdul, Shahrul, & Ishak, 2012; Lokkesmoe et al., 2016; & Williams, 2009) Students who participate in Study Abroad may expect to secure some competency skills. The acquisition of skills may represent personal growth in the participant.

Change Associated with Study Abroad

Increasing employer value of Study Abroad will include several factors, including gains in competency skills and the ability to identify change (Franklin, 2010).

Furthermore, the identity and self-awareness of the experience, the influence of the experience, as well as the impact on the participant's life development are outgrowths of the Study Abroad experience (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014). The global educational experience, specifically for students in this period of life development, will have emotional impact on them (Parris, Nyaupane, & Teye, 2014). The individual attitudes of the student before the sojourn may impact the positive or the negative association of the experience to life after Study Abroad (Parris, et al., 2014). Although the length of sojourn is important, especially in learning and use of the language (Norris & Dwyer, 2005), the thought processes of students were impacted even during short term Study Abroad experiences (Parris, et al., 2014).

The intercultural competence (IC) is the change in self-behavior made by the student to fit the host culture because of knowledge and skill gained from the new culture (Stemler, Imada, & Sorkin, 2014). IC is a goal for the student experience, and enhances their ability to see problems and conditions from a broad view as a skill acquired from the sojourn experience (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014; Stemler, Imada, & Sorkin 2014). This may be termed as with-it-ness. Additionally, the cultural differences that the student experiences may be extraordinary and quite surprising when compared to their own normative foundational national experience (Jackson, 2016). The skill to advance toward the unknown with a tolerant and inquisitive nature is identified as a possible gain in Study Abroad. Thus, the dexterity of courage was an outgrowth of Study Abroad, giving

former participants' confidence to engage in risk for future endeavors (Herren, 2008; Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014). Confidence and independent thinking, coupled with persistence, form the changes that were recognized as valuable to career (Franklin, 2010). The ability to work under the awareness that one's own view was not universal, was also considered a developed positive advantage from the Study Abroad experience by some employers (Herren, 2008). The attitude the student imbibes while participating in the Study Abroad educational experience is most important to the lasting changes associated with the study. A predetermination of how one should respond to the new cultural norms may advance the experience and increase the relevancy of the experience to final outcomes (Jackson, 2016). Changes associated with Study Abroad may be carried into future life experiences.

The Wesleyan Intercultural Competence Scale (WICS) scale demonstrated the awareness to the unique consequences associated with Study Abroad, such as foreign language use and frequent contact with unknown cultural norms (Curran, 2007; Stemler, Imada, & Sorkin, 2014). Accordingly, viewed from a broad perspective the academic endeavor associated with the experience is in fact less important than the long-term outcomes associated by the actual experience (Lumkes, Hallett, & Vallade, 2012; Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014). In other words, more is gained from the experiential Study Abroad learning than the subject matter under study. Together these skill awakenings and subsequent changes demonstrate outcomes of Study Abroad, giving life direction and meaning (Lumkes, Hallett, & Vallade, 2012). The pattern associated with the experience may possibly give the participant a guide to go through stages supporting change later in life.

Students who participate in a Study Abroad experience are faced with the need to adapt to a new environment. They are immersed into an unfamiliar experience. Individual student engagement and reflection of each person is pertinent to the individual determination of success of the Study Abroad practice (Jackson, 2016). Students learn to refine and acclimate skills to survive and thrive in the new learning surroundings (Franklin, 2010). Student participation in Study Abroad may be associated with both educational and personal desires (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2010, 2014). Study Abroad continues to be part of the internationalizing program and may be used as a tool to create globalization from the experience with skills gained by the student in cultural immersion incongruent from one's native culture (Norris & Dwyer, 2005). The research by Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2014) recognizes two outcomes of the experience; first, the connection to a new culture through language and understanding, and second, the internal change of self-awareness.

The success of the globalization factor may allow the Study Abroad participant to recognize and respect differences (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2010, 2014). Former students perceive that the Study Abroad experience changed the inclusion of their social activities. Students describe high impact activity participation in Study Abroad as a factor in skills acquired and internal change and increasing student knowledge of self. Increased levels of tolerance to others who are different than self, critical thinking, and the encouragement for students to reflect on life purpose, as well as a desire for students to serve, are some of the changes students experienced that were noted in the study by Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2010, 2014). Changes experienced by participants may also be related to the leaving of home, experience of difference in culture, the return to home,

and the assimilation back into everyday life (2014). These modifications of self after the Study Abroad experience may be a pattern of change and discovery. The cerebral rub created by a discord between one's foundational beliefs and one's new experience also may encourage growth and consequent change, possibly creating a transformational experience (2014).

Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2014) encourage further research in how these changes occur. Researchers reflect that college life may be a perfect opportunity to participate in a sojourn experience and enhance cultural intelligence along with the many other cerebral changes could become a normal outgrowth of development during the college years. Institutions could continue to develop programs that offer the sojourn as an educational experience to students with an awareness of how the event may change a student and work to support students as they leave their normative national beliefs and reach into distant and different cultures (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2010, 2014; Norris & Dwyer, 2005). This educational event could create a lifelong impact and change in a student's life.

The desire to maintain and respect these gains in global awareness may be reflected in choices the graduate makes in social groups past the experience. Skills that involve risk taking, problem solving and flexibility are recognized as useful during the Study Abroad experience post reflection. Confidence gained bolsters the willingness to try new and diverse social experiences (Jackson, 2016). The ability for former Study Abroad students to express how their Study Abroad experience can apply to the work environment is reflected as a transferable skill in business (Gardner, Stieglitz, & Gross, 2009). The student's aptitude to exchange this expertise for future endeavors is valuable

to the business sector. Graduates who are active in their career field demonstrate strength when they encounter ethnic differences. Study Abroad students may be able to exhibit a competence in relation to cultural awareness. Furthermore, they may be able to create initiatives important to the global business community (Martinez, 2011; Wilkie, 2014). This may allow the Study Abroad graduate to stand apart from others of similar age and life experience in their work, and excel.

The importance of the student's leadership skills and critical thinking are reflected in their opportunities for advancement (Heimler, Rosenberg, & Morote, 2012). The sojourn experience allows the student to be immersed in language and culture transitioning from home culture to host culture (Wilkie, 2014). The intercultural competence in a global world is demonstrated in language use, and a skill gained by global knowledge as the ability to understand and communicate among cultures other than one's own is a valued skill (CIGE, 2015). Further, each generation of students may continue on a path to increase the boundaries of what is considered readiness in response to the rapid changes of world advantage (Herren, 2008).

Change in each person and the views each person adopts with acceptance of the differences in culture may become increasingly useful as one experiences life beyond Study Abroad (Jackson, 2016). Jackson's (2016) use of narrative inquiry allowed the lived experience of each participant to create a storied recollection that created focus on what they determined to be most important and lasting in the details of the event post experience. Change that students experienced from Study Abroad could be linked to hands-on, academic and organizational views and given more attention in program success. In fact, pre-conceptions may govern and postulate student fulfillment (Parris,

Nyaupane, & Teye, 2014). While acquisitions from Study Abroad may create long term change in a person, access to Study Abroad is not the same for every student.

Access to Study Abroad

While over half of high school students are interested in Study Abroad when they attend college, only 2 percent choose to do so as college scholars (Rhodes, Loberg, & Hubbard, 2014). Barriers to the sojourn experience may be encountered that explain the low participation rate compared to the desire ratio. Study Abroad opportunities may be linked with gender, race, socioeconomic status, or first generational college student status. Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay (2015) find perception is a strong determination for participation and may be divided into three categories: personal development, professional development and intellectual growth. Length of time of the sojourn experience, as well as the cost of the experience may navigate students away (2015). Boroncio and Boroncio (2010) agree that sensitivity to the costs associated with the Study Abroad experience by the university may allow greater access through financial solutions. Thoughtful inclusion of how students are supported in the process toward participation is important. Marketing and positive faculty feedback are a few of the areas Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay (2015) find that institutions may use to encourage student participation in the underrepresented groups. Financially, Study Abroad has appeared out of reach for many students (Boroncio & Boroncio, 2010). Historically, the predominate participating group consisted of white females who were social science or humanities majors (IIE, 2013). The purposeful addition of Study Abroad opportunities, college major selection, and trending topics of student interest may also allow for increased inclusion (Boroncio & Boroncio, 2010). Notions of what one believes Study

Abroad entails may shape students' willingness to consider a sojourn (Parris, Nyaupane, & Teye, 2014). One may also contemplate how gender impacts the choice to Study Abroad.

Gender Disparity

More women participate in Study Abroad programs than men (Fischer, 2012; Nichols, 2011; IIE, 2015). Research has examined this trend in an effort to develop a path toward a more even gender participation rate, yet women continue to contribute at a rate over 60 percent (IIE, 2015; Shirley, 2006). The most recent 2016 Open Doors data supports Study Abroad participation of 65 percent of women compared to 35 percent of men, even amidst an overall increased general participation by students. Gender disparity has remained consistent over many years (Shirley, 2006). Therefore, women have studied abroad at a steadily higher rate than males, and in general, Study Abroad has a reputation associated with female involvement (Fischer, 2012; Nichols, 2011). Reasons postulated include historical/cultural views on women, feminization of Study Abroad programs, parental impact and gendered university engagement (Fischer, 2012; Shirley & Olsen, 2006). There is also data that may support Study Abroad as a romantic notion rather than serious study, and because students respond to the opportunity to Study Abroad from varied perspectives, female and male students may prefer one type of opportunity over another (Fischer, 2012; Steven, 2006). Marketing of the programs may be stronger suited to the female student (Fischer, 2012). The message given to females may be different than males, thereby encouraging a Study Abroad experience in a more appealing way towards one gender over another (2008). Studies show the imaginary completion time allowed for education is less for males than females, and a perception of the Study

Abroad experience as increasing the duration of the educational process may effect participation, thereby excluding some students (Shirley & Olsen, 2006). Shirley and Olson (2006) consider how parental impact may effect participation by gender, as well as concerns for internship opportunities, with research supporting a higher support level for females' parents over male.

Regardless of why this gender disparity trend persists, one discovery may emerge, for a rich trove of data is available with a focus on female membership. This discovery may reveal a gap in the research; namely, the lack of consideration of voice from the lens of gender. Hearing a woman's unique voice from the Study Abroad experience may have been largely ignored. Therefore, the opportunity to hear a woman's unique voice to the impact of Study Abroad from her perspective has been essentially untapped.

Study Abroad had long been recognized as an agent for global engagement (Murphy, Sahakyan, Yong-Yi, & Magnan, 2014). However, what is the woman's view in the engagement? Research may look at the unique ways males and females consider education and how this difference is influenced by values and attitudes (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pescarella, 2010). The way in which views are affected by gender before college is also critical (Salisbury et al., 2010). The parental model to give greater freedom of decision making to sons may engage the less likely opportunity for sons than daughters to participate in Study Abroad (Salisbury et al., 2010). Additionally, some studies indicate that active marketing reflective to the male gender could work to advance opportunity for men (Salisbury et al., 2010). Men also appear to be influenced more by

peers rather than parents with the respect to the intent to Study Abroad (Salisbury et al., 2010).

The Ford Foundation International Fellowship Program (IFP) tracks the impact of alumni outreach in organized frameworks. Post experiences in the IFP indicate forty eight percent of woman created programs in their communities and careers (Bhandari & Martel, 2016). Under the auspices of powerful female sojourn participation, it seems possible that the women's view could be identified and systematically studied further (Cartwright et al., 2015). This is a unique voice because women experience Study Abroad on their own terms, and then interpret these lessons into their life work (Cartwright et al., 2015; Inaba & Moore, 2000).

Gender and Study Abroad

Change in attitudes and insights about belief systems that the Study Abroad student acquires while embedded in a new culture includes ideas about gender and meaning development (Squire, Williams, Cartwright, Jourian, Monter, & Weatherford, 2015). The beliefs we engage about gender are closely linked to our cultural identities and experiences that we develop as we grow (Jessup-Anger, 2008). The challenges students absorb through Study Abroad may be in tandem to their identity. Jessup-Anger (2008) concludes that the students bring with them all that they are into the educational experience and gender is one part of this composite (Jessup-Anger, 2008). Masculinity and femininity are tied to the cultural norms of the environment (Cartwright et al., 2015; McGivern, 2013; Wilkie, 2014). The demanding nature of the cultural adaptation experience during a Study Abroad event could impact the coping skills of both the female and male student. Students' reflection on the change they experienced from Study

Abroad is insightful. Moreover, the gender of the participants may present special challenges in cross-cultural experiences that could impact future choices. For example, focus groups after the Study Abroad experience reflected on how dress and safety precautions toward females were greater than the male participants (Cartwright et al., 2015). This demonstrates how the cultural norms may be defined by gender. One gender may need to respond in a different way than the other dependent on cultural norms (Cartwright et al., 2015).

Gender may affect how the student responds. Interestingly women gained clearer insights in reference to cultural awareness and insight at a higher level than males in the same experience (Cartwright et al., 2015; Nichols, 2011). Study Abroad experiences include a growth element for one's understanding of gender and may effect long term impact on the student (Cartwright et al., 2015).

Women's lived experience while in Study Abroad programs reflect a view of the world via gender both inside and outside the educational environment (Cartwright et al., 2015). This preponderance of participation by women creates a rich resource of lived experience to hear and consider. This may be an important reflection. The difference between these two lenses as defined by the gendered experience is relevant to why a study about Study Abroad with gender as an element of consideration may be important.

When thinking about gender, several factors are present; the historical heavy participation of females in Study Abroad, change associated with the Study Abroad experience, the impact that research shows to impact the career, and the increased inclusion of the Study Abroad experience across college disciplines. All dynamics

contribute in the programs for university internationalism and together support the need to hear the woman's voice from the experience.

This study's primary objective is to consider in what way a woman perceived meaning making from the Study Abroad experience. Meaning making is described as the perceived understanding of an individual emerging from a social world in a specific context (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Women may be influenced by the culture in which they developed. The way a woman considers drive and motivation in the work environment could reflect in empowerment feelings, independence, or lack thereof during the life development (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2006). Consequently, gender could impact how the views of individuals are woven into the reaction of the transitional experiences (2006). Study Abroad is a lived experience, embedded with transitions. The consideration of gender may influence these experiences. The awareness that gender, as well as person's race, culture, or age could influence the response is clarifying (2006). Thus, a women's lived experience during Study Abroad is a resource.

By allowing women to reflect on their Study Abroad experience, they may identify the memories the most closely associated to their current meaning making. Thinking about how gender relates to life experience may help understand gender in a greater context (Cartwright et al., 2015). Experiential learning is a valued awareness of the strength gained from Study Abroad. Keynote topics for groups such as the Boston Area Study Abroad (BASA) include those that surround alignment between increasing collaboration of career support and international experience academic advisement. This awareness may empower women to use them in their life.

Feminism

Feminism is the female lived experience. It is the breadth of the world through the eyes of women, the, "... re-visioning of the man-made world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 160). Crotty (1998) described how in the feminist lens one would need to be a woman to understand feminism. In the same way, to know racism one would need to be of the oppressed race. Obliquely, the American culture prides itself on individuality and the multifaceted nature of the people. Therefore, it may appear incongruent to need the feminist movement, yet like many other invisible segments of our culture based on color, religion, social status, geographic demographics, age, or sexual orientation, we may need to look through the lens of those who experience their world to begin to understand that world. If we continue to look at all knowledge through only one theory lens, we could end up with a myopic distortion of a lived life. Anfara and Mertz (2015) say, "To understand a theory is to travel into someone else's mind" (p. 2). The feminist theories look at what is omitted from knowledge because a woman's perspective was unseen (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Landman, 2006). If our knowledge is framed by both gender and the color of skin, then perhaps we should say, move over white male, it is time to embrace the many other facets of knowledge from lived experience in this very large world of multiple lenses. When conducting research and utilizing the theory that is enriched by the feminist view we may support the, "contributions of feminist methodology to the enterprise of building quality in generating evidence about the lived experience of women" (Landman, 2006, p. 429).

Feminism may seem to further elude even the sage researcher. Work on feminism explores knowledge, power and the relationship between them (Harding, 1987,1991: Hartsock, 1983); each researcher is grounded in women's experiences and recognizes the role of emotions and gendered embodiment. However, the divisions in feminism are many. Rosemarie Tong's (2007) seven different feminisms: liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist or postmodern (as cited in Crotty, 1998) demonstrate the variations. Therefore, feminism is multifaceted, replete with diversity in application and understanding. However, there is common agreement that traditionally, knowledge is based on experience in a male dominated world. This exclusion of a woman's experience also allows an opportunity for her knowledge to be different (Harding, 1987, 1991: Hartsock, 1983; Tong). Knowledge or awareness of the other is important to give context to understanding.

Feminism may be debated in two ways. Are we speaking of *equality* among gender or *sameness* between gender? Do we say males and females are different yet may be equally valued, or do we say there is no difference? Evans (2013) in her work *Feminist Theory Today* takes care in the description and exploration of feminism. Evans draws attention to how the general principles of civilization are equipped toward men. Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004) state, "Feminists from all traditions have always been concerned with including women in their research in order to rectify the historic reliance on men as research subjects" (p. 18). It is possible that when considering feminism, the 'equality-difference' or 'sameness-difference' debate may not be as important as perhaps the realization of the lack of attention in the inclusion of the female voice. However, even

in the inclusion of the women's voice there may also be a narrowed focus of inclusion defined by geographic environments.

Contextualized Perspective

The experience of a woman of Western thought is vastly different from those women who are from other global environments. The woman's experiences should be recognized under appropriate sameness. This may be applied to the female Study Abroad research with a methodological choice that connects with American women of Western culture reflective of the global Study Abroad experience. The females' view allows ways for the unique woman's voice to be heard (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). However, this thought should not imply that all Western women are the same. It would be faulty to do so because the experience of women is unique to everyone (2002). Commonality may be related based on global significance; however, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) acknowledge it is logical to realize the limits to the idea of a common experience. The process in this study is an inductive approach to consider the women's voice that, "...lies in the metaphor of intersection, as well as offering a way of thinking about how not only race and gender but also nation, sexuality, and wealth all interconnect, configure, and reshape each other" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 15). There is no one-size-fits-all framing approach in subjugation inquiry which acknowledges that the, "awareness of the global community may enable researchers to better understand certain forms of women's oppression..." (p. 20). Although the focus of their work is on women of different cultures, they may leave open a space to consider more. There may be value in an increasing global community to explore the subjugation of western woman in the Study

Abroad global context because it describes a lived experience. In other words, using a global perspective allows a deeper, more inclusive womens' dialogue.

In the past, some in academia may have cautioned the researcher in the engagement of a gendered focused study. However, it may be possible that one could observe gender studies as palpable and appropriate to our place in time involving everyday life and experiences. Gender, it may be argued, is indeed at the forefront of activity and discussion. Knowledge may be based on one's gendered experience and therefore, an important consideration in the voice of other.

In addition, addressing the woman's experience allows the *other* or a contributing voice beyond white male to be heard. Therefore, in the context of my research, the lived experience of the female Study Abroad student would not only be expressed in her views, but may also reflect her experience in society. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) describe the complexity of gender as sexuality, masculinity, femininity, and associations between them with boundaries, injustices or power. The female perspective has a stronghold in social research because gendered life allows for a social reality to be known (2002). The application of narrative inquiry methodology in my research is sensitive to the unique experience of women for it allows *other* knowing.

Perspective

Theoretical perspective applied to data may be understood as a strong link from theory to methodology, or a complete footing of the study (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). However, in general, Anfara and Mertz (2015) describe theory in the following manner: "...theory is a simplification of the world...clarifying and explaining some aspect of how the world works" (p. 2). Through theory the researcher organizes her view of the world.

Theory is her expectation as to how the world works and how the data is viewed under that umbrella of truth to self and truth to beliefs about how things should be. The researcher may also consider what the purpose is in the making sense of the data, if the view set by the theory is not in focus with their guise of the world.

The adoption of a theory to view my study allows the perspective to change much like climbing a circular stairwell allows the view of the same space to be altered by height and direction. In the same way, different theories allow the view of the same data to be appreciated in a new light. Claude Monet (1840-1926), an impressionistic artist, painted the same bridge in his garden many times. He painted the Rouen Cathedral many times over. However, each time he painted the bridge or cathedral it was at a different time of day and a different time of year. Therefore, it was viewed from a different lens, and consequently painted with different colors. The only thing that changed was the light. Thus, in the process of my data analyses, considering several different theories is useful to me as a light to view my study, and to discover what expresses reality from my view of the participant data.

The role of theory in qualitative research may come at different points in the process. The exact place has been a topic of rich discussion. Theory may come after the data has emerged (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Creswell, 2009) or as Creswell would later write, the researcher will bring assumptions that could influence the theory through the development of the study. Anfara and Mertz (2015) reflected on Patton (2002) and the relationship between theory and method. Skillfully, Maxwell's (2013) work viewed that the theory is not separated from the researcher, and therefore it may influence the work. In this study the researcher agrees with Anfara and Mertz (2015) who suggest, "... that it

is *all* that the researcher brings, implicitly and explicitly, that affects all aspects of the study” (2015, p. 14).

Conclusion

Internationalization strategy of the university may include the Study Abroad experience to develop intercultural competence. Study Abroad continues to increase in importance at universities. Appropriate counterweights of resources and wise judgment vetted in valid research, is needed to support these programs for both the institution and the student. Understanding what female students believe about Study Abroad pre-experience is important to participation fulfillment. Participation numbers in Study Abroad continue to increase. However, to determine success, student involvement in the program is only a part of the process. Global competence and global interdependence may also be measured as a source of success (Pedersen, 2010). Students may become students of the world through this experience. How this change occurs could be associated with several factors and could be transformational (Schlossberg, 2011). The entrance into life, post Study Abroad and graduation, is a part of the measure of value. The changes that students experience as they move beyond Study Abroad may relate into their life. The awareness of the long-term impact of the experience could encourage the student to develop a strong response to meanings that serve to enhance the development of life. Additionally, Study Abroad has long been heavily weighted with female participation. The female student has a unique voice to respond to the way in which Study Abroad creates meaning in her life. Women experience Study Abroad on their own

terms. The woman's voice, as an addition to understanding the experience, may provide opportunities to gain insight into her view.

The campus internationalization, the long-term impact of the Study Abroad program, employer's value of Study Abroad, change associated with the Study Abroad student, Study Abroad gender disparity, gendered differences in the study experience, workforce competence, student access and the view of Study Abroad from women's lived experience are all perspectives associated with Study Abroad. However, the meaning making acquired and then used by the former Study Abroad student, more specifically, the female Study Abroad student in her life development, may be the most compelling. There is a gap in the research of how the female Study Abroad participant reflects and uses the meaning making from the experience into her life. Research may ask what is the significance of the Study Abroad experience, and what do we know about how the infused cultural identity impacts the future of a female student who participated in Study Abroad?

This research may be important to the addition of knowledge. The continued proliferation of female participation over the history of the Study Abroad programs supports a possible inclusion of research that allows a woman's voice to be heard through the storied reflection of her experiences and how the sojourn relates to meaning in life.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Internationalization, an important strategic response planned by higher education institutions, is the new reality often considered as the institution designs its programs (Scott, 2011). The inclusion of this concept directly into a university's strategic plan demonstrates how globalization impacts the campus. The blurring of the borders between institutions in the United States and in other parts of the world directs attention to this issue, resulting in the close examination of related topics under the universities' internationalism wing. International student recruitment, Study Abroad programs, course curriculum, faculty research, policy and related funding are all areas of significance as this new reality is developed.

Study Abroad opportunities continue to be established with the intent to create programs that support university curriculum and create cultural intelligence. Therefore, the impact of continued growth of the internationalism movement, and the intent to send more students abroad, is a critical concern to universities striving to stay on the razor's edge of teaching.

The length of sojourn experience, destination of Study Abroad, faculty member participation, gender disparity, the influence of language barriers and curriculum are all research relevant factors (Curran, 2007; Dwyer, 2004; Fischer, 2012; Gay et al., 2012). In previous studies, researchers have examined different Study Abroad programs. This study began with an emergent design (Patton, 2002) framework established to explore how a particular subset of students made meaning from their Study Abroad experience. After completing the project, the methodology of narrative inquiry was chosen because this design was most consistent with the research purpose, questions and guiding theories. Listening to the participant leads the researcher through possible directions revealed through the narrative inquiry from the female participation in Study Abroad experiences and subsequent life development. The demanding nature of the cultural adaptation experience inherent in Study Abroad may impact the meaning making of the students. Moreover, the gender of the participants may present special challenges in cross-cultural experiences that may or may not impact early post graduate life development. All of these may be revealed from the participant's story.

The primary objective of this study is to hear the voice of a woman through the consideration of Study Abroad expectations, and to explore those expectations through Study Abroad into post-Study Abroad experiences for a woman, and how meaning making from the experience could be expressed through the use of narrative inquiry. The researcher looked at how the meaning made from Study Abroad impacted a woman as she progressed in her life development.

This following chapter will describe: the methods and research questions used and why this particular design was chosen, what the collection consists of, and how the

collection was executed, the description of the participant, the sample process, and finally, the analysis of this data and how it sheds light on the research question.

Statement of the Problem

As the world continues to merge globally, the pressure to equip American students in higher education with an international understanding and experience continues to increase. The Study Abroad program may be a proven and established method for providing female students meaning making opportunities in this regard.

Despite the pressure on colleges to use Study Abroad as a vehicle for equipping students, our knowledge remains limited as to the long-term meaning that specifically female Study Abroad students could gain from their global experiences. Precisely, our knowledge remains restricted in the female student's expectation of Study Abroad, or the meaning making a female student found useful as they transitioned from academia to life demands. This lack of exploration of the female experience may hamper the understanding of the depth and meaning of the Study Abroad experiences in ways that gives voice and provides leverage allowing women to experience this critical meaning making opportunity on their own terms.

It is possible, based upon her own experiences, that a former female Study Abroad student who has transitioned from Study Abroad and post-Study Abroad status into her life development can provide insight about components of the lived global experiences, thus deepening our understanding of how the impact of this learning experience created meaning in her life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the meanings a female Study Abroad participant, from a Midwestern land-grant university, made from her Study Abroad experience. Furthermore, this study explores the participant's perception about how her Study Abroad experience may have played a role in her adjustment to life after graduation.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Research guided by the theoretical perspective of interpretivism aims to understand and interpret participants' meanings made about their lived experiences. This research project is a qualitative study framed by narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008). The researcher was open to opportunities to adjust the possibilities as cognition and clarity move focus. As Patton describes, in a "non-manipulative and non-controlling; openness to whatever emerges" (p.40). The design was allowed to disclose itself as meaning surfaced (Patton, 2002).

This approach is based on the idea that humans understand our world through group contexts rather than solitary experience. Meaning is derived from the social engagement of ideas and beliefs (Crotty, 1998). Understanding the constructionism epistemology allows the researcher to discern a direction of how research is to be conducted. The participant's individual meaningful life story of the Study Abroad experience frames the experience by the constructed shared abroad interaction with those the participant spent time with, allowing insight to develop from the experience.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

This qualitative study uses narrative inquiry methodology. Evidence supports that narrative inquiry informs work that honors the voice of the participant (Giovannoli, 2012; Riessman, 2008). The unique and whole voice of the individual is valuable, allowing an inductive creative response by the researcher wholly guided by the participant (Patton, 2002). Narrative inquiry is a sequence of storied events constructed by the participant in response to exploratory questions in the form of interviews conducted to capture the participant's individual view (Giovannoli, 2012; Riessman, 2008). The narrative storyline is dependent on the participant and may be interpreted by them from the perspective of tragedy or joy. The verbal imagery embedded within symbols or metaphors may add an important part of the members' distinctiveness in the deep information rich experience (Giovannoli, 2012; Patton, 2002).

The narrative inquiry methodology is the primary approach of investigation for this study, employing methods of observation, interviewing, conversation, artifact examination, reflection, and photo elicitation (Harper, 2002). Telling, transcribing and analyzing are the three components that I propose to use (Riessman, 2008). The use of narrative inquiry allows the participant to construct a storied response in context with the Study Abroad experience that is important to her and may relate to her life experience. This methodology may allow the participant to process memories and allow remembrances to resurface that are the most important to her (Giovannoli, 2012). Photo elicitation method (Collier, 1957) is a tool that may be used in the interview process. The member will use her photos from the Study Abroad experience to stimulate dialog and perhaps nudge memories submerged over time that are meaningful to her. Coding with

Labov's (1972) structural narrative analysis will shed light on specific signals brought about during the story that orient the listener, the substance, and the meaning, and identifies the summary or closure.

These methods relate to narrative inquiry through the series of storied events reliant on the participant from the interviews as well as explore the premise that meaning flows from our engagement; thus, commitment by the researcher to collect deep conversational data through the narrative inquiry fits the interpretivism theoretical perspective. The interview process allows the woman's voice to be heard, and the use of the narrative inquiry is utilized to emerge themes. Therefore, a series of potential accounts may surface that describe the participant's meaning making from the Study Abroad experience.

The narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008) is a known process that has shown promise for many researchers. Narrative inquiry offers a way to capture thoughts. In the work of Chan, Jones, and Wong (2013) they describe thoughts as shedding light on hidden data and allowing in their research an open mind into the practice of nursing. An appreciation of the nursing profession revealed an enhanced understanding of the nursing experience. Riessman's narrative inquiry was used in the work of Wenji, Turale, Stone and Petrini (2015). Their in-depth interviews allowed themes to emerge from individual stories of the medical experience. The most recent work of Lannario, Scott, and Shaunfield (2017) and their use of the narrative process examined the social relationships of young adults who go through the cancer experience. The narrative method allowed the members to explain how they experienced effective communication with individuals moving in this health transition.

Chan's (2012) findings demonstrated the use of narrative inquiry methodology that allowed student teachers to make sense of their learning environment through thinking and self-reflection. This is a natural component of the methodology. Chan's study could facilitate improvement in individual participant learning and facilitating change. This connects to my research purpose. It is possible that the former Study Abroad student may reflect on her storied narrative which may consider how meaning she made from the experience might lead in her current life development.

A similar approach is the work of Mims, Mims and Newland (2009). They applied theory to development that reflected on a narrative case study that considered the life of an African immigrant. They described the storied life of a student and the experience of transitions that were employed to understand the student's process as he navigated toward success in a new country. Additionally the work of McGowan, Palmer, Wood and Hibbler (2016) used theory through the narrative approach in looking at the voice of the black man as he progresses through higher education. The goal of the study was to examine the experience of a black man who enrolled in a doctoral program and to discuss the factors that led to his successful participation in the program. The use of narrative inquiry from both of these prior studies match in that the objective was to hear the participant's stories, a similar application toward the research question for my study

When considering the interrelationship between the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods, the iceberg (Bailey, 2015) is an appropriate analogy. The iceberg is the visible representation of what lies beneath the unseen mass of theory and literature, including evidentiary warrants, disconfirming evidence, empirical assertions, and open coding (2015).

Research Questions

Looking through the lens of the lived global experience of Study Abroad, I adopted the principles of narrative inquiry for the research methodology. I used the following overarching research question to view the fieldwork from the individual voice of the female participant's experience, and honor her meaning making from Study Abroad.

The research questions framing the study were twofold: 1: How do participants make meaning of their Study Abroad experience? And more precisely, 2: Does (and, if so, how does) the Study Abroad experience influence the life of a singular participant after the experience?

This question may allow the emergence of memories made as the student participated in the Study Abroad experience. The participant's remembrance of the opportunity to study in a new culture, away from the norms of campus life, may be enlightening and bring enrichment to their story. As the student considers activities and events of their Study Abroad and describes them through storied conversation, the inclusion of the second question may allow the individual to consider the event in the context of their storied life today: Does (and, if so how does) the Study Abroad experience influence her life after the experience? As the woman considers what she remembers, the narrative inquiry may allow a reflection that contemplates meaning as she moved through and moved out of the Study Abroad experience. The storied examples she may choose to discuss from her life development after graduation may reflect back to the Study Abroad experience. The use of narrative inquiry will hopefully allow the member

to describe their engagement with Study Abroad and highlight her individual meaning in her life story from Study Abroad education to life today.

Significance

A student's Study Abroad hopes, as well as the meaning making created from the Study Abroad experience, may impact life development. Women experience Study Abroad at a six to four ratio to male participation. This may allow rich data to be developed relative to female participation. Evidence supports that the woman's voice is important to understand the life story. Therefore, significance lies in the collection of the meaning making of a single female participant for the addition of her unique story to the way in which Study Abroad creates importance. This study incorporates an individual woman's voice as an addition to understanding and may provide opportunities to gain insight into how the Study Abroad program was meaningful to the participant in her life development.

Participants

Sample

The study population that the sample pulled from may be described as a female graduate who participated in a Study Abroad program while in undergraduate school at a Midwestern land grant institution of higher education that has graduated and is now engaged in life. The type of sampling was purposive sampling. This initial sample was derived from a known successful Study Abroad program that may accurately address the topic of the study, thus focusing on a Study Abroad participant who can illuminate the research question. The sample criteria was a female who participated in Study Abroad while at a higher education institution in the past 10 years and is now graduated and

engaged in her life. The researcher contacted university professionals associated with the Study Abroad and National Student Exchange office for references of participants, as well as requested permission to access the university Study Abroad alumni email database.

From these contacts, I chose a single participant who best met the purposive criteria and who was willing to share the meaning of the Study Abroad experience over several interviews. To avoid sample bias, an initial random sample group is utilized. I randomly chose possible participants from the Study Abroad alumni list. The sample was expected to be predominantly female participants who have been raised in a United States western culture. The goal of interviewing the sample size of one was to observe data synthesis through correctly representing the depth, and by following emergent meaning shared by the participant under the study.

It is hoped that studying only one participant allowed for the necessary complexity required to study her meaning making and connections from the life story as represented by the interviewee. Interviewing only one participant allowed information that was rich in description and allowed the participant to fully describe her unique meaning she made and perhaps will continue to make from her reflection of the Study Abroad experience. The quality of the experience developed from the memories of the individual Study Abroad participant hopefully created a proper reflection of a complete narrative. The researcher recorded and provided a rich detailed description, followed by the discussion of member storied experiences, through several interviews to reveal how the alumnus believes this educational experience creates meaning in her life.

Data Collection and Procedures

The data collection procedure developed for this study was three-fold, and consisted of no less than three one-on-one interviews with a former female Study Abroad student who is now engaged in her life post-graduation. The collection included interviews, photo elicitation, artifacts as well as observation of the chosen environment. The following progression was followed to order to begin the research.

First, the researcher requested permission to begin the research through gaining approval from the dissertation committee in a proposal defense. Then the researcher submitted an appropriate description of the data collection and participant population to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) associated with Oklahoma State University. Following IRB approval, the researcher contacted the Study Abroad office, colleagues, and the alumni office associated with the university in order to access the possible former Study Abroad candidates. The potential candidates were contacted through email and asked to respond if they were willing to be interviewed (Appendix B). If they agree, they were sent IRB information and the research question to contemplate as well as a request to collect artifacts of document examination and Study Abroad photos. An interview protocol was used to level the approach for the member in order to insure the inclusiveness of the content and process.

The interview questions outlined in Appendix A divide the narrative inquiry into two groups which are reflective of moving through and moving out of the Study Abroad experience. The purpose of the division of the experience into groups was to effectively organize the interview questions. The first group of questions reflected on the member's meaning making as a college student as she participated in the program. The member was

asked in the second set of questions to consider Study Abroad with photo elicitation. This series of questions focused on the member's meaning of the Study Abroad experience. The questions strove to engage the member in her own selective memories of her experience during Study Abroad. The last question focused on the member's meaning making today. All questions allowed honor of the participant's individual voice from her Study Abroad into life.

I actively engaged two participants at the beginning of the collection process. After a series of four interviews, two with each subject, I chose a singular participant, and suspended interviews with the alternate participant. Several considerations were made to determine which subject was the better fit. I considered their Study Abroad experiences, relationships and rapport formed in the two interviews with the participants, and the overall participant approach to the interviews. First, although both participated in Study Abroad, the participant who had a more varied experience base with Study Abroad was preferred, this could allow her to have a stronger response to the research questions. More importantly, the relationship built between the researcher and participant may seem more compatible on a personal and communication level. Additionally, one participant may seem to have personal barriers associated with her Study Abroad experiences that the other did not have. Finally, the participant who seemed to respond better to the opportunity to collect the data. I reasoned this positive approach would result in data collection that was genuine and not constricted.

A third and final interview was conducted with the chosen member, as well as an observation. The observation was conducted at a place of her choosing. An impromptu fourth interview was requested based from the observation.

The interview protocol continues with the following: The respondent chosen brought the collected Study Abroad photos to the interview, as well as relevant document artifacts such as her vita. The participant set up a specific interview time at a mutually convenient location that allowed the participant and researcher at least thirty minutes to address the research questions. A future two-week window was established that allowed the participant to submit artifacts, and the date and time of the next interview was also established.

The research contemplated that no less than three interviews of one participant shall take place over a four-week period. The preferred location was at a site chosen by the participant and in an area that provides comfortable surroundings relative to temperature, light, sound, and privacy, allowing the participant to converse without undue distraction. A reminder email was sent the day before the interview date to remind the participant of the interview. I used a script developed from the interview protocol to inform the interviewee about the nature of my research. I explained the informed consent form, and confidentiality was stressed. The interviewee signed the appropriate IRB consent form (Appendix C).

I hoped to build rapport and establish trust with the interviewee by sharing brief information about myself, as well as by asking general background information about the participant. The interviews were conducted with the researcher as the instrument using

open-ended questions as prompts (Appendix A). Photos were used to prompt the narrative inquiry through photo elicitation (Harper, 2002). The use of photos hopefully allowed meaning and information to emerge from the participant's memory (Figures 1-8). The direction of the interview was guided by the interviewee as the conversation moved forward in order to support the member and prompt their emerging narrative.

On completion of the interview, I thanked the member for their time, provide my contact information, as well as clarified any information collected from the narrative inquiry and subsequent member checking. The interview was recorded and stored electronically on a separate computer drive that was kept in a locked private office space maintained by the researcher. Additionally, a thirty-minute observation of the environment was conducted and stored, along with the three actual interviews. I documented the detailed descriptive data of the environment through written notes by observing, among other items, the outside, front entry, and general space of the interviewee's choice, as well as relevant Study Abroad photos, and other artifacts from the space of the member. I transcribed the interviews and returned them to the participant for verification. A telephone interview and email addressed any follow-up questions. I composed the findings and submitted them in chapters Four and Five for approval. As the researcher, I reworked chapters One, Two and Three to adapt the narrative inquiry methodology (Riessman, 2008). Finally, I submitted all five chapters to the committee, and requested permission for the dissertation defense.

Selection Process

The selection of a research participant was initiated in two ways. The first method was through the solicitation of email contacts derived from the university alumni database. The second method was the recommendation of a possible participant from two university educators both involved in separate higher education Study Abroad programs. Response from the two professors of the university programs came before the alumni database was delivered. The two educators responded back with several contact emails of a possible member based on the criteria solicited. Interestingly, both colleagues used a social media site that was a platform for former Study Abroad participants from their university. This process allowed an immediate response back to the researcher. Each possible participant was contacted via email. Detailed correspondence is described in Appendix B. The research subject matter was briefly described. A response was requested if the respondent would consider participating. Of the thirteen possible subjects that were contacted, four responded to the research request email with a desire to receive more information about the study. Of these four, two returned a signed letter of informed consent. Both subjects were contacted, and arrangements were made with both participants to begin the interview process. Although only one participant was needed for the study, the researcher decided to begin with both. Thus, each underwent preliminary interviews to determine who better met the study criteria, and to choose a member that was able to fully participate as the study progressed.

Data Analysis

In the synthesis of all the collection of data, an image, will likely begin to emerge that is woven together from the threads of layered data, co-constructed by me, the listener, and the participant member. In Luttrell's (2010) *Good Enough*, the researcher learns that the synthesis process is developed over time. Data is gathered, sorted, stored, and pulled out and the information is reassembled, gathered, sorted, and further teased out, and finally refined and focused with many choices and areas designed to probe for meaning and understanding.

This process of analytic analysis and final synthesis of carefully collected data is created through many methods. One method is coding. Saldana (2013) explores this process. Coding is a review of the data source in such a way to highlight themes that surface upon reflection. The first cycle is intended to split data; the second cycle will reorganize the data toward the development of the emerging theory. The length may be a singular work, an image or a passage. This deliberate process will allow for the possible merging of data and meaning. Coding allows categories to emerge; concepts or themes then emerge from the data (Saldana, 2013), allowing a vigorous exploration of the researcher's thoughts based on the intimate relationship built between researcher and the data.

Labov's narrative structure coding will allow a storied experience to surface through the data. Where the member begins the story and what is chosen to remember are important factors for focus (Labov, 1972). The structural narrative was used as a coding frame for understanding the data. As researcher, I looked for comparisons across the participant's experiences by adapting Labov's model of transcription identification:

abstract (AB) how does it begin? orientation (OR) when and who was involved?; complicating action (CA) what happened next?; resolution (RE) what finally happens?; evaluation (EV) what was the result?; and finally the coda (C) what does it mean?

The three interviews I conducted of the participant, as well as the observation and subsequent fourth follow-up interview in the form of an impromptu conversation, were all transcribed and returned to the participant for a member check. After the data collections were approved by the member, the rich data was coded. Initial coding, descriptive coding and Labov's structural narrative were applied to the data.

Structural narrative coding used with the participant stories allowed a process to dissect and further identify the meaning the participant was conveying to me. Labov's method (as Riessman (2008) described) allowed me as the researcher to see the story through the division of the participant's thoughts by identifying Labov's five areas; *Abstraction, Orientation, Complicated Action, Evaluation, and Resolution*. This process gave substance to her words and allowed each thought to speak for a purpose. Key words were highlighted to identify each area. Specifically, this process was used in four separate storied responses. The participant's words were then culled in order to identify the five areas. I then used each collection of the participant's words to create the three poems in chapter four. Additionally, a visual analysis with the use of images chosen by the member was utilized with photo elicitation (Collier, 1957; Harper, 2002). Radley describes this process as being aware that "pictures not only restore feeling but also the capacity to feel..." (as cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 142).

Photo Elicitation

Visual imagery to capture or collect data for research is a longstanding method (Riessman, 2008). Images like photographs or film can capture the human experience as reflected by what was seen (2008). In the use of photographs for this research the participant explained the images she presented. The participant may also examine the photo and add verbally why or how the image related to the storied narrative. Likewise, the use of photo elicitation (Collier, 1957; Harper, 2002) from the Study Abroad experience allowed the subject to speak beyond the visual representation and story her response with the photo image as a catalyst for recollection. The participant had digital access to many photos from her Study Abroad experiences. She filtered through them until an image provoked her to speak about it. Often her story correlated with the image and the chosen lived experiences the participant spoke about while using narrative inquiry. Eleven total images with substantive narration during the interview portion were used. Additionally, she also storied a few of the photo images that she had displayed in her home during the observation portion of the narrative collection. A list of photographs used in the solicitation process during the three formal interviews may be found in Appendix E.

Coding methodology utilized

Initial coding was used to become familiar with the participant's use of language and perceptions of the world (Saldana, 2013). This beginning approach allowed some areas to emerge in order to determine the type of coding necessary to further penetrate the participant's story. Thus, the coding approach was chosen as the appropriate method to organize the data. Effort was made to remain open and sensitive to the participant's

voice, thereby creating a harmonious approach congruent with the participant, a process which was necessary to legitimize any possible conclusion or finding (Saldana 2013). descriptive or topic coding (Wolcott, 1994) allowed for an inventory of the data using a short group of words. This is evident in the findings through the stated themes. Finally, Labov's structural narrative coding allowed the storied responses to fall into elements that were evident in the poetry section. The compatibility of the coding was apparent when laid adjacent to the research question. For example, the coded narrative that created the poem for meaning three speaks to the meaning the participant created that *people are good*.

In addition to the photo elicitation and three interviews, observation of the participant's living space was an additional storied response she provided concerning the numerous visual images collected during her Study Abroad experiences. This collection of rich data was not originally anticipated. The visual images were displayed in her home. The participant contextualized the visual images of wall art, maps, sculpture, and fiber art in a meaningful way. Riessman (2009) supports the interpretive control of the participant in that the seeable and sayable operated in conjunction. Reading a visual object carries three criteria: 1) the how and when of the object 2) the story, and 3) the response created from the participant (Riessman, 2009). Riessman states, "Stories can be found in the moments of the research process" (p.145). This process was exemplified in the three maps. The participant spoke about them during the interview and then described them again while viewing at them during the observation.

Interview and Transcribing

In the role of researcher, I conducted separate interviews with the chosen member over approximately four weeks, using the narrative inquiry method. The narrative inquiry method allows knowledge to be co-constructed with storytelling methods that evolve through the interaction between participant and researcher (Giovannoli, 2012; Riessman, 2008). The member's account was expressed in conversation taken from interviews, which may reveal how the participant wants to be known, as well as meaning she derived from the Study Abroad experience (2008). It is preferable to conduct numerous interviews that fully engage the participant. I hope that by allowing the participant to be in their chosen setting, and using myself as the interviewer utilizing relevant and appropriate photo elicitation, that rich and storied information was developed over the three sessions.

In the role of researcher, I transcribed each interview as I listened to the data numerous times to process a clear understanding of the interviewee's intent (Riessman, 2008). The transcription process included added pauses in conversation, notes on laughter, as well as indicators of stress, fear, confidence or any other inflexion perceived from the interviewee's voice. This process will likely heighten awareness of the member's emphasis (Patton, 2002). I used the close reading technique in considering tone (Riessman, 2008). I read the transcription several times, and separated portions of data and placed segments in categories.

The identity of the member was protected by using a pseudonym. The type of data was color coded. The data included visual analysis assimilated from non-verbal resources. I was meticulous in my description of the site as well as the collection of all

artifacts referenced above, as well as any other documentary evidence and impressions that might be relevant to the objectives of the interview in a fashion that captures the participant's meaning making and honors her unique voice.

Triangulation

The triangulation of data from the analysis will also create research that is trustworthy (Patton, 2002). As mentioned, the use of multiple sources such as observations, interviews and the collection of artifacts to record data that are rich and robust supports credible research (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Patton, 2002). Ways in which research was triangulated for this study included; the interviewing of a former Study Abroad participant who was active in her life development, the accumulation of artifacts such as vita and photos, as well as the observation of the surrounding environments. Detail from the participant's voice, along with quotes, analytic memos and field notes reflected the themes.

Additionally, several narrative stories were pulled from the participant's storied reflection of her Study Abroad experience to further describe and give depth and richness to the research findings (Hesse-Biber, 2012). A poem was created by me reflecting the storied narratives to enhance as well as support the participant's meaning. Finally, art in the form of an acrylic painting that I created offers a visual response to the data collection. The painting represents a visual key to all the collection. Hues, shapes, and foreign languages all work together to stimulate a response inclusive of all the data groups, themes and modes of collecting. See Appendix F for the painting analysis and figure 9 for the painting.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the reflection and recording of what the researcher brings with her into the construct of the research in order to identify possible areas of bias, unintended emphasis, awareness and interpretation created innately and governed by the experiences of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Although I have not participated in Study Abroad, my children have. Two of my children of different genders participated in an eight-week Study Abroad experience in the humanities. In addition, one of my children participated in a Study Abroad clinical nursing experience for a three-week period. Under the shadow of that involvement I interpreted each Study Abroad experience as successful to my children. Each experience allowed them to develop meaningful skills they may have applied in their subsequent life development, and I attempted to be aware of any possible biases that may have been created in my perceptions as a result of those past experiences.

Reviewing the Study Abroad experiences and reading literature in the area made me aware of my own ethnocentrism. I am biased toward the advantages of educational opportunities in the United States, and believe them to be superior to other countries. Additionally, my career has been embedded in K-12 education. I grew up in the northeast part of the United States. My own college-age transition to another region of the country has made me acutely aware of the ethnocentric values that exist both regionally and nationally. Not participating in the Study Abroad experience has fostered my personal romanticism of the experience. I may look for components of the Study Abroad experience with an undeserved positive bias in these regards.

The experience of my children in Study Abroad, my career in the field of education, along with my personal ethnocentrism and romanticism of the experience,

may influence my interest in this study, and consequently, may impact my interpretation of the data from this research. These are all important factors to identify in my reflexivity as I attempt to strengthen the quality of the findings.

Establishing credibility in investigation is critical for a study to be valuable to the research community. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) describe credibility as the recognition of all data, not only the data that matches one's preference as the researcher, but also the data that does support those preferences. A reflexive journal establishes credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As researcher, I maintained a digital voice journal of the interview conversations which recorded my impressions and may be used as a reference when considering the transcribed data.

Limitations

The limitations and assumptions for this study included the belief that a Study Abroad participant may acquire meaning from the experience that could provide an addition to general understanding. Additionally, it was hoped that the participant would create an understanding of this meaning into her life post-graduation.

The purposive sampling criteria I utilized required the participant to live and work a limited distance from the researcher. Also, the fact that participants may participate in Study Abroad in a variety of formats and time within their undergraduate experience may affect the meaning created. Finally, the meaning made from the Study Abroad experience described by the participant is understood as important and unique to the individual.

Summary

This research explores the meaning making of a female Study Abroad student and how she believes that experience influenced her life development. I began with Patton's (2002) emergent design in my qualitative study to distinguish the female's experience in Study Abroad and early life experiences after graduation. Patton's (2002) emergent design allowed the methodology possibilities to surface as evidence was gathered and sorted and allowed the researcher to prioritize the participant's meaning. My chosen methodology is the basis upon which to support the methods. The methodology is narrative inquiry (Reismann, 2009) which gave a storied conversational approach to the data from the co-construction between myself and the female member, while honoring the unique voice of the participant (Hesse-Biber, 2011). This approach is consistent with prior qualitative studies which were considered successful methods of inquiry by a variety of researchers.

Qualitative data analysis contains rich layers of compounded sources. Patton's (2002) quest in his work that "...the complete analysis isn't" (p. 431) is an appropriate approach to the practice. In qualitative research one must engage the process as ongoing and emergent over time. This involves a gathering and nonlinear expression of thought that requires contemplation and courage, allowing time for growth that cannot take place in a step-by-step process, but often slowly with occasional leaps and bounds, as member meanings emerge from the data that has demonstrates depth and breadth of scope (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Patton, 2002; Wolcott, 2009). The ability to describe, compare and relate (Bazeley, 2009) the data back to an original purpose creates weight and substance in

research. Labov's coding (1972) is part of this process to uncover the member's meaning making.

The reflection on the storied lived experience of a woman defines the narrative inquiry and perhaps makes a difference in the honoring of a woman's voice. The female's Study Abroad experience is weighted in the enriching social interaction between people of different cultures and geographic place. The meaning which female Study Abroad students define as important from the woman's lived global experience is valuable, especially as the female makes meaning under new social norms and conditions. My research explored how a former female Study Abroad student described meaning making from the experience as she navigates her life development beyond graduation in the broad life span.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The participation in Study Abroad by higher education students continues to increase. Women choose to take advantage of this opportunity more often than men. This disparity is documented over the last several decades. The voice of the woman in the Study Abroad experience makes a unique contribution to knowledge that is mostly untapped by research. This chapter will document the process of one female college student from unusual circumstances participating in the Study Abroad experience in the face of adversity and enlightenment, and how she discovered a unique personal voice as a result of the adventure creating meaning in her life journey.

Rationale

The rationale for how findings were presented first requires that I provide an understanding of who the participant is so that the collected data may best reflect her unique meanings. Second, the sifting of the variety of data emerged commonalities to unveil categories. The categories are based on repeated evidence from the participant's interviews and observations, as well as artifacts from the photo elicitation and document analysis gathered. Detail from the participant's voice, with quotes, analytic memos and field notes will reflect the findings. Additionally, several narrative stories were extracted

from the participant's storied reflection of the Study Abroad experience to further describe and give depth and richness to the research findings. Poems reflecting the storied narratives will strive to enhance as well as support the participant's meaning. Finally, a painting reflecting the collection of data will visually document the participant's meaning.

Heather

The subject chosen was Heather (pseudonym). Heather was a graduate of a midwestern land grant university. After graduation, she began working with a local banking firm, and then decided to pursue a graduate degree. When we met she was in her first year of graduate study, working as a graduate assistant for the Agricultural Economics department. Her Study Abroad experience took place over several years at various locations around the world. She participated in a summer semester experience to Europe earning college credit, as well as a year-long experience in China working as a student liaison to encourage Chinese students to participate in Study Abroad in the United States. The positive experience of the educational sojourn encouraged her to participate in an additional Study Abroad experience to several countries in Europe, as well as trips to Iceland, China, Turkey, Malaysia, and Thailand (Appendix D). Some of these countries were chosen simply because of the opportunity presented. Others were chosen because of participant preference and curiosity. During the interview process she acknowledged she was considering new rewarding career opportunities. The interviews were conducted in a separate space convenient for the participant. In Heather's case, the location was her office on the third floor of the agriculture building of a university where she worked. The location was within eight miles of the researcher.

Heather was attending the same university that granted her undergrad degree. Originally, she transferred from a neighboring two-year college that possessed an academic relationship with the land grant university. The land grant university of 25,900 students was in a rural community of about 48,000 residents and was the largest employer in the town. The residents were predominantly white and middle class, with a median income of \$32,000 (US Census, 2016).

Heather's hometown was about two hundred miles away in the southeastern part of the state in a poor, rural environment with a small population. The ethnic makeup of the community was mostly white. Heather's parents were not regular participants in her life, rather her grandparents were the strong surrogate parental influences. She did not spend her entire childhood with them. However, this is where she calls home. Therefore, her extended family is an important part of her total life experience. Described as hard working, her grandparents owned and operated a small cattle ranch and hauled equipment for hire. They are described by the participant as conservative Christians, with conservative political views and traditional roles of gender in society and the home. Her grandfather is white, and her grandmother is part Native American.

Heather is described as a white female in her early twenties, with dark blond shoulder length wavy hair, green eyes, medium height and built. She has a bachelor degree in field of Agricultural Economics.

Heather is currently pursuing an advanced degree in agricultural business. She lives in a home shared by two other individuals. She is in a committed relationship with a male partner. During her undergraduate experience she held down several part-time jobs in order to meet her basic living and education expenses. After receiving her

undergraduate degree, she worked with a local bank in the loan department for a brief period before deciding to begin her Masters studies. During this time, she participated in several internships, including one at the bank.

Heather participated in three separate Study Abroad experiences selected through the encouragement, recommendation and support of university faculty and friends of the university with in those involvements she also traveled to other parts of the world. Her longest Study Abroad experience was for one year to China. Her shortest Study Abroad was a summer experience in Europe. A list of the countries experienced by Heather is found in Appendix D.

Emergent Categories

The data I gathered from my interviews with the participant created a strong backdrop for the categories that emerged from my coding strategies. These twelve data clusters were: enlightenment, landscapes, ethnocentrism, faith, strangers, freedom, frustration, future children, maps, travel, gender and upbringing. The following describes each data cluster in further detail.

Enlightenment

The participant experienced several conflicts in her understanding of life during her varied Study Abroad experiences. Often these alternative ways to conduct life conflicted with her preferred cultural norms and the hierarchy of value she associated to those norms, "...when I moved to China, everything was different just absolutely everything, everything we eat, everything we say, there were no English letters. So it was really cool to be put in that position, to be a little kid again, you have to figure it out." Often when these views were challenged through her new cultural experiences that

Study Abroad revealed to her, she found her established views wanting. These events created moments of *enlightenment*, aha moments that initiated higher levels of insight, awareness and comprehension about her surrounding circumstances, "...so it's a really big deal for me to go out of my way to talk to people from all different background and...not judge them by the way they look...it didn't really register...to me until I was in an area where everyone was so different from like what people I was raised with." For example, she received kind and compassionate treatment from groups of people she had been taught to fear during her developmental years and even in her current college environment, "...with study abroad I learned that...I learned to make the most out of anything and talking to people is the best way to do it and just because they don't look like you does not mean anything...they have their traditional appearance that I may have been raised with a negative connotation to and so I directly translate that into my life now because I talk to everybody." From this Study Abroad she experienced a profound level of awareness and understanding about connecting with peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds. She experienced this conflict between the warnings of the past and the realities of the present contextually in several of her narratives.

Landscapes

Two thoughts were linked closely together in the telling of her story. The participant often described specific people in close context to visual imagery of places she explored during her multiple Study Abroad experiences. Understanding how the participant felt close association to places was important in describing her connectedness to those around her, "I got it (landscape photo) in one of the markets...I was really sad, and I really missed home and it reminded me of home because the mountains...I hung it

right above my bed in China and reminded me of home.” The photographs of places triggered memories and reminded her of significant and meaningful people she had met. For the participant, places were strongly linked to people. In developing connectedness with people, the participant also felt an association and affinity with the land and culture she was experiencing, “ I guess I really seek out peace...although you can’t tell I’m in that picture. The water was very deep...you can’t really tell... you could see all the way to the bottom. It was so pretty.” This helps explain the deepened sense of affection the participant felt about not only the people she met but also the cultures she experienced. The participant spoke with great detail in describing the people she engaged. Looking at a remote landscape photo she described an old woman serving tea in her home with pictures of her sons on the wall, aromas of spices, and warm floors. Later the participant would scour her photos to validate some of the storied narrative she described (Figure 8). “This is the picture I told you about...it’s a bad picture of me but...this is the lady...that is Muslim, that came, and rescued me...”

Heather often brought photos of landscapes taken during her Study Abroad experiences. Very few photos featured people, and even fewer had individuals as the focus of the photo. I began to understand how the immediate landscape was to Heather an internal emotional and experiential anchor. The land upon which she stood was her center, her place to regain focus and gain a place of security and familiarity, “...so I lived in Beijing so there like 20 million people like it’s... so there’s a lot of people it was hard for me coming from the middle of nowhere.” When she spoke of the land, she tied those images to deep personal meanings that echoed feelings of discovery as well of loss. Every step she took into her new world represented a half a step away from her

upbringing and from the people she loved during her formative years. "...I never even thought about leaving the country before...I was raised in the country so a very rural setting with cattle...horses...and dogs." This was both exhilarating and heart-breaking, "...and not be in the city so I love looking at that picture because it just reminds me of peace." Therefore, a landscape photo of the gardens in China was a place for her to describe becoming centered and feeling connected to her home.

Ethnocentrism

The participant tied her identity to the cultural beliefs of her surrounding community. The beliefs about one's culture as a standard against which all other cultures would be valued demonstrates Heather's ethnocentrism. The goodness of people, places that are visually beautiful, safety and gender formed the basis of her ethnocentric thought which was evidenced in the data. When these ancient views were challenged through her Study Abroad experiences, Heather began to identify value in other cultural identities in an emotive and profound way. She realized that people are good, places are beautiful and safe in other parts of the world as well as her own country. Responding to her own home-grown ethnocentrism became a catalyst for Heather to identify opportunities for greater identification and understanding. Heather described how she tried to, "...show her [grandmother] the pictures and tell her about all of my positive encounters with people of a different faith make her realize even if she believes her beliefs are the only right way it doesn't make everyone else a bad person..." She used the active term "shocking" when describing how some of these long-established standards of America being a superior country to all others in all ways were crumbling internally.

Faith

The member described herself as a follower of the Christian faith. She described her conservative family, "...and we're super Christian, and so I was ...we're never around pubs." She recalled events during her Study Abroad experience that "increased" her faith. According to Heather, one example was a life and death situation (Heather was chased by a pack of wild dogs while taking a hike) when she asked her God for intervention, "I am semi-religious, but I got real religious, 'God help me, help get out of this, don't let me die'..." She believed her God responded when two strangers gave her assistance, thereby eroding one of her home-grown values to fear people. This experience helped her understand that she could cling to and rely upon her old frames of reference for faith, but still absorb and appreciate the realities of new and different cultures. She also described in detail a relationship to a fellow American that she met and befriended while in China who did share many of her religious views. This relationship, "strengthened her faith". The beliefs she formed while growing up in a conservative Christian church were challenged by exposure to cultures whose faith traditions were radically different than her own, "...this girl I met here in China she is one of the happiest people I've ever met in my entire life and...she took me to a predominantly African church in China." As a result of her Study Abroad experience she grew to value and understand religious experiences different than her own, and developed friendships with people of other faiths that impacted her view of the world. This process had a profound impact on Heather's understanding of others when she returned to the United States. She tried to express to her family how the Muslim and other faiths not only did not need to be

feared but could be respected. This was met with opposition and confusion because Christianity was the only faith in their ethos.

Strangers

Meeting people and being a social person is an expected part of the Study Abroad experience. The participant gave many examples of meeting and developing conversations and friendships with strangers during her extensive travels through Belfast, Stockholm, Morocco, and Turkey. "...I was just sitting outside... I didn't know what to do and an older lady and her husband and her two sons sat down with me and started talking to me..." Before her Study Abroad experiences, making connections with strangers was considered counterproductive and dangerous. "I was taught from the ground up don't talk to strangers. 'Stranger danger people are scary' or I was taught that." However, her actual experiences in developing new acquaintances in Study Abroad were positive and enriching. She no longer associated strangers with danger or threat. Instead of avoiding strangers she found herself drawn to peoples of other cultures as a source of friendship, learning and mutual understanding. Strangers made a lasting impression of goodness on Heather. This subgroup of strangers proved significant and meaningful in the data collection. On return home the participant spoke of actively engaging those whom before she may have avoided. Part of this engagement was in response to her desire to be inclusive in her world view.

Freedom

Opportunities that allowed personal freedom to travel, study, read and interact virtually at will during the Study Abroad experience were common. The participant grew more comfortable as solo experiences increased and the pattern of independent action

was rewarded with friends, connectedness and learning. "...this place is just as good as home, people aren't terrible ...not stealing all my stuff, they're not rioting, the US is not the only peaceful place. It was really weird, and I think when I realized that is when I wanted to go everywhere." Often Heather told of striking out from the organized group on her own and pursuing different destinations that had not been planned by the group. This exercise of independence and adventure in a fashion were contrary to her upbringing and prior experiences. Striking out on an impromptu trip to the Great Wall, eating insects on a stick in Vietnam or overspending money to observe a tiger rescue facility all stood out as an expression of freedom. Study Abroad, although not a cornerstone for freedom, was the catalyst for the participant to engage in independent initiatives.

Frustration

An emotion crept into each interview as the participant recounted events that proved to be obstacles to her desired outcome. Most of these frustrating events were associated with her transition back to her home culture after the Study Abroad experience. Her desire to share events from her experience was thwarted by her old preconceived ideologies about strangers, faith, ethnocentrism, gender and family. "I see it as teaching them that there are other people and other lifestyles and other cultures and other beliefs and other religions everywhere in the world. [Life] is not just here." She felt an internal conflict as she tried to serve up her new viewpoints and ways of looking at the world to people she loved who did not want to hear about a brave new world. "It's hard for me to see why people don't understand it...it really ticks me off." Her family reacted negatively when she told them of the particulars of other cultures in a tone that inferred Heather's acceptance and appreciation, "...but my friends here that I see on the regular

basis don't get it..." They did not want to hear about the great Hindu gods or the essential principles behind the Koran or where people in Morocco dined and what they ate. They took solace in their home traditions and frames of reference to which they turned in response to the unknown world. This created in the participant a sense of frustration that prompted her to hold back from stories of her Study Abroad that could further harden their views as well as a sense of emptiness when they did not accept her gift of enlightenment. She still had that taste in her mouth of adventure, curiosity and appreciation. "...so, if he [boyfriend] proposes...I'm going to buy plane tickets to New Zealand, so he'll have to go this time." Church, guns, sports and television did not seem adequate for the times.

Future children

Heather spoke of her future with great anticipation, especially when she recounted aspirations about her family and children to be. She shared concepts and ideas about how she would raise children, develop their concept of self and an expanded concept of others. I was intrigued by the degree of thought she had applied the style of parenting that she would embrace, "...like my boyfriend that never left the country and ...we're pretty serious and were talking about kids and...it's very important to me, that I take my kids ...somewhere very different, where they can see how different their life is from everyone else's." Remembering how people from her home land awakened each day with fear and suspicion brought about by ignorance and myth, Heather would not teach her children to fear those who dressed or worshipped or spoke in ways and patterns different from her own. Instead she would teach them by example to seek mutual understanding and would tell them stories of people far away that she met while traveling the world as a student,

and that they would one day do the same when the time was right and the sun was up. “And it’s very important to me that I take my [future] kids to places like Cambodia or take them to Thailand or places that are safe...but also not traditionally [explored]. It is extremely important to me to pass that on ...especially [to] my children...” The destinations she planned for her children were not the vacation beaches of Mexico but rather remote places in Asia.

Maps

During the interview process the participant spoke repeatedly and with knowing enthusiasm of three maps. These were visual pictures that she displayed prominently in every domicile she lived. She described each world map in great detail, pointing out differences between them: where they were purchased, the style of the map and, the purpose of each, to demonstrate where she may go next or demonstrate where she had already been, and why they were important. “ I only scratch off [on the map] the states, I only scratch off the ones I’ve actually done something in. Because I’ve been to a lot of them...when I was five, and because my grandpa hauled hot shots like trailers...across the United States, so I only cross the ones I’ve done something in [that] I can remember. During the observation portion of the data collection the maps were displayed in the participant’s home. She guided me toward them with enthusiasm, “Ok, these are the three maps I spoke about.” The maps were displayed as decorative art, living artifacts of her Study Abroad experience as well as tools for future travel and dreams. “This one I got in China, so three years or so ago... I take it everywhere even if I am not there for long.” The mapped display further underscored the significance of these items to the participant. They were not hidden but rather put on display for the world to see and for her to be

reminded. The participant said they were visible to her as the last image of the day and the first image of the morning and readily admitted, “that may sound hokey” but it was true. The maps are discussed in greater detail later in the chapter when her meaning making of *places* is further evolved.

Travel

Traveling was described by the participant as a means to demonstrate her new-found freedom, “...and so we were on the ship and then visited countries and that trip is where...I fell in love with traveling...and specifically fell in love with traveling alone...which is interesting as a woman because that’s not very common.” She did not feel limited in any way by destination to countries large, small, English speaking or non-English speaking, familiar, or unfamiliar. “The people in Turkey are amazing. It is a charming Muslim country, so people think that people there are hostile and it’s not. It’s the most welcoming country I’ve ever been to.” Heather had a long list of locations of suggested travel in Turkey, Morocco, and Malaysia which she intended to share with others, as well as countries like Thailand, Australia, and remote places in China she intended to visit on her life journey. Distance from home, length of stay away from home, and solo travel all increased during the Study Abroad experiences. “...You have to figure it out especially when you are by yourself. You know you can’t rely on anyone else to do it...” Travel represented freedom and was underscored by Heather as a right for woman to travel alone. She touted this concept several times and wove this into varied conversations.

Gender

The participant provided many opportunities to gather data based on her narratives that were tied to *gender*. Heather was sensitive to her place in the world in the context of being a woman. She described how she was addressed by the various cultures and opportunities that were available to her because of her gender. Entering the homes of women and spending time in the kitchen or with their children in some countries would be off limits to a man, yet accessible to Heather, "...little old lady invited me and herself with not words and serving me tea and talking to her kids." Conversation with other woman about their families and work were comfortable and relaxed, therefore rich in content. Heather demonstrated how some relationships grew because she shared the same gender with those of different cultures. One example was an impromptu opportunity to visit the home of a woman in Malaysia and again share tea. The hostess had rescued Heather from uncomfortable circumstances brought about by her travels, giving her clothes appropriate to the rain forest to ward off the leeches common to this area. "Anyway, most of my friends around the world are women. I just gravitate toward them to talk to. They are easier to talk to for me." The participant was quick to relate these experiences into current situations of how gender impacts her world at work, how her family places limits on her because of her gender, and how her personal relationships are impacted as she feels herself coming of age as a woman in the world whose experiences have been shaped by her Study Abroad experience. "Study Abroad in general has made me more independent as a woman...because if I can go live in China for a year, I don't know many men that can do that." Reflecting on her future, the participant predicted she knew she could face a male dominated board room because she faced a male dominated

bus ride. She described how she began to embrace her gender instead of considering it a hindrance. This realization of gender as a strength was a powerful addition to her understanding of self and was demonstrated in her approach to relationships and work.

Upbringing

The final grouping of data that formed to create a category was that of *upbringing*. The participant's upbringing was steeped in traditional American values associated with rural regional living. Family support for her higher education was nonexistent, "I came here when I was 17 and did not have family support or any to speak of." Heather did not believe Study Abroad was a reasonable expectation for her. "Going to another place...just was really very exciting to me. But leaving the country is not portrayed as something that is feasible or it wasn't for me until I came to college." She often included storied examples from her childhood that helped define her understanding of gender, role in society, views of self and others, acceptance of different religious thought, opportunity in life, familial challenges, honesty, and respect, all of which could be considered parochial. Saying she was, "raised to stay in the kitchen and keep my mouth shut" and "they [grandparents] think I should get married and raise babies not fly off to China," she was raised to place a negative connotation on those who wore different clothing or had an alternate faith. The participant said these perceptions did not register with her until she was on Study Abroad and was around people who were so different from how she was raised.

Themes

The categories of *enlightened, landscapes, ethnocentrism, faith, strangers, freedom, frustration, future children, maps, travel, gender and upbringing* provided the depth and

resource to have four major areas of focused themes and one minor outlier of focused theme. These categories developed the foundation for the participant to build the themes and thus represent the meaning she made from the experience. The categories were synthesized to reveal five distinct themes. The themes appear to be evidenced in the participant's life development. The themes are: People are Good, Independence, The Need to Tell, Places, and the smaller outlier of Race.

Poetry

The use of narrative inquiry along with photo elicitation proved successful for this researcher and this participant. The photos compiled by the participant generated significant meaning beyond the photo representation of the land and image it recorded. For this participant, use of the photos to measure and capture meaning was invaluable. She describes in her own words the importance of the images she recorded. Stories are pulled from the narrative represented by the photos.

Five short poems that I wrote were derived from the participant's structural narrative coded words. The poems delineated by theme, created a rich description to enhance and make sense of Heather's experience as expressed by her words. Each poem is nested under the corresponding theme.

Theme One: People are Good

Heather made a connection to how her Study Abroad experiences and the many stories she chose to share through photo elicitation are perceived and understood in context of her current life. She was especially conscious of her altered worldview of people and how that may impact her future. "[Study Abroad] directly translates into my life and how I look at things and how I view people. What my life is now...make the

most out of anything...begins with...talking to people. Speaking with people from different cultural backgrounds and experience and not judge them by their appearances associated with their culture.” She came to understand that cultural differences were only differences and not ranks of value. “They have their traditional appearance that I may have been raised with a negative connotation to and so ...just because they don’t look like you does [sic] not mean anything.” This is contrary to the snap judgment she was brought up to make about people based on outward appearance, affiliation with certain institutions, gender or nationality. These presumptions were made in the interest of safety.

Living in these varied cultures taught her the importance of reaching out of her safe reality and striking up conversations with people who earlier had been strangers. The circumstances she encountered forced her to have the courage to approach, consider and trust people from different backgrounds, a pattern that is more comfortable for her now. Infusing herself with alternate views and approaching those who are culturally different from her is now very important and also very natural. The ability to engage strangers and make the most of that encounter was described by the participant as, “...willing to speak to anyone.” This influences her ability to make informed decisions as well as strengthens her understanding through the connections she has made from her Study Abroad. “I have this collection of all these opinions and interpretations from different views and backgrounds from all over the world. ...it’s really opened me up as a person.” In her final analysis of self she describes the meaning in these words, “I am a changed person...independent, accepting [of others]...curious. I never knew that there was so

much out there.” The meaning she created from exposure to alternate cultures profoundly changed how she approaches life.

Heather was accustomed to an environment that was weary and suspicious of people. She brought a general fear of strangers going into the Study Abroad experience. However, in some of the most unlikely circumstances she had to rely on the willingness of people she did not know to offer assistance. In Belfast, Heather left the safe harbor of fellow classmates and struck off on her own. She ended up outside a pub just sitting by herself and not knowing what to do. Heather showed me a picture of a family who befriended her at the pub and helped her through that experience. “Because those people ...they didn’t have to sit down and talk to me...random strange girl. And they were so sweet.” They insisted on buying her a beverage, “We have to get you a Guinness.” “And so, I sat with them for three hours. And so, I love that picture.” Strangers also gave Heather safe harbor in Morocco when she was confronted by a group of young men while they were riding on a bus together. “This Muslim lady came up to me and said come with me. And I was like I don’t know you. At that point in time I had not interacted with very many Muslim people. But she could see that all these guys are just in my face and so she took me to her house. I played with her kids and she made me food. And after, she took her hijab off in the house and talked to me in broken English.” Heather’s view of how she reacted emotionally in the face of those she did not know was enhanced from fear to joy. “Study Abroad what it is all about [is] the new experience, weird food, or talking to random people, it’s really fun.” Her newfound perspective was embodied in a landscape picture she pulled out of her archives: “...the picture reminds me that people are inherently good in my view and I don’t think I’ll ever teach my kids not to talk to

strangers because I have had a lot of good experience that I would not otherwise have and when I did talk to strangers.” She realized while looking at the photo and telling her story the implications of the landscape photo to her worldview. “That’s what the picture means...which is weird. That was a really beautiful place and people are so great!”

Heather gained a deeper appreciation of faith-based cultures based on her encounters with people of different faith backgrounds during Study Abroad. “When I came back here *I tell* (emphasis added by participant) people about that [news about other faiths] at home [people]who only hear the bad things about that religion [Islam] and people of that faith [Muslim]. I just really hope that resonates with someone that not all people there are like that.” Heather expressed how her expectations of behavior from people based on their faith had changed. “I hope that it puts another slant on people that religion of people in other countries. So, I’m coming back and *telling*.”

A significant point of reference for Heather that transformed her thinking was her encounter with people with whom she was unfamiliar with. “and traveling and Study Abroad in particular it reminds me that people are inherently good. I don’t think I’ll ever teach my kids not to talk to strangers.” When looking at a photo that created a narrative memory of trusting people, she insisted, “People are inherently good, which I didn’t ever consider. I thought people were inherently evil because that’s what I was always taught. Travel abroad made me rethink that...I did a 360.” It appeared she was transforming in her assumptions about people with whom she was not acquainted from less confidence in that person and herself to greater confidence. The transformation was a two-way street, impacting how she felt about herself and how she perceived others.

Poetry: People are Good

On the bus we all ride.
Men intent me unaware.
Her eyes on me underneath the hijab.
Men depart press me to follow.
Stealthy she moves Woman to Woman.
She guides me away. We look to each other and smile.

Theme Two: Independence

Heather described her first Study Abroad experience of going to Scandinavia. She was with a group of students who did not participate in Study Abroad in the same way that Heather felt was appropriate. They were fighting with each other and she was miserable. After a public eruption by her traveling companions on a quiet city street in Stockholm, she felt forced to make a risky decision, “And I was like, yeah I’m gonna’ leave and after that I just went by myself and it was easier for me... we had like class time and we were free to do what we want...so I went by myself.” This decision to go alone began a series of decisions, each giving her greater confidence and independence to be alone. An epiphany moment occurred when she was on her second Study Abroad. “I think it really hit when I got on a plane to move to China. I thought I can move across the world and no one can stop me. I can do this.” Later in another discussion she tied this new concept of independence into her upbringing. “I was told growing up that you had to have a man with you... that is not true because I can move to China.” While in China, Heather experienced several travel experiences requiring her to take a very independent and assertive stance. “I had a choice to go home or to travel on Christmas break. So, because I was in China for a year I chose to travel. And so, I backpacked in Malaysia and Vietnam and Cambodia, in Asia by myself.” Traveling alone, she was confident.

She described meeting up with some other students and deciding to take a trek together on an impromptu trip. They wanted to see the Great Wall of China, but not at the typical tourist destination, “We kept passing signs that said, ‘don’t go any further’.” The group continued and they were not disappointed at their final destination. Heather described her planning for the event and how the other students she traveled with were not prepared. She shared her water and clothing. They watched the sun set and slept on the Great Wall in a most rural part of China. Decisions made alone helped create increased independence. The experience was transformative. Things would never be the same.

As mentioned, Heather made several references to gender during her storied responses. Many of these conversations described independence. She was sensitive to her womanhood and how her gender impacted the Study Abroad experience, mostly in terms of how she was treated. Heather believed that in her travels within Study Abroad women treated her differently because of her gender, saying, “They were more receptive of me.” Heather recounted two separate stories of how a woman came to her aid in a culture that would not have allowed them to respond her if she had been a man. This allowed her to experience a culture on a deep personal level inside the homes of two Muslim women. Heather also realized that she prefers speaking with women, saying, “I just gravitate toward them to talk to... they are easier to talk to for me.”

She was passionate about travel under the auspices of being a woman and traveling alone. “It means a lot to me I guess that there are people, um, women that do travel [and] are open about it But it’s made out to be that only men should do that...or only men should want to do that...why would you want to travel by yourself as a

woman? So, I get a lot of, um, not really hate...but a lot of like derogatory comments, being a woman, traveling alone.” In our discussions Heather spoke often of traveling alone as a woman and included this topic in more than one formative summery at the end of the interviews. She was quick to include that, other than an uncle who was in the service, she was the only person in her family with a passport. She participated in a year-long Study Abroad in China and recognized the difficulty of that experience. She assessed that not many men could have persevered under the same yet she was successful.

Study Abroad made her to feel and act more independent, “I was supposed to be restricted because I am a woman. And I rebelled against my whole life those ideas.” Study Abroad and the travel opportunities within Study Abroad enabled Heather to exercise this independence. The confidence she acquired allowed her to review other areas of gender that were part of her formative years and to question the relevance of those areas in her life. She was raised to believe, “Woman stay in the house and raise babies. But that is not the only option. There is nothing wrong with that. I want babies but ...I was raised these are the only options for your future and when I left [to participate in Study Abroad] that just was not true.” Heather was willing to reflect on her role as a woman and confront the incongruence between how she was raised and her experiences during Study Abroad.

Additionally, Heather considered her gender and how it might relate to her career. “I will always strive to be the highest I can be career wise in whatever position...I absolutely will not settle to be less than that just because of my gender. It’s hard to bridge that gap being a woman and also be on top. So, career wise, Study Abroad definitely

enforces that just because I am a woman doesn't mean that like I can't do and be anything that a man can be. And like I said before, my walking into a boardroom... I mean might be scary but I know I can do it. Because I walked to Morocco by myself surrounded by all males and yeah and I was fine."

Some women that Heather met during Study Abroad were stay-at-home moms who perceived caring for their homes and families as a primary mission. Some owned their own businesses and flew to different parts of the world. Heather realized, "There are so many different levels of what women can be." This cultural reality encouraged Heather to consider how Study Abroad made her more independent as a woman. In fact, her experiences were governed in part by the fact she was a woman. She makes note of this during her description of the bus ride in Malaysia. "The Muslim lady did not speak to any of the males on the bus." The fact she is a woman made her more approachable by another woman and opened opportunities for her to be in homes and understand and appreciate cultures in a distinct and personal way.

When she first began Study Abroad Heather looked at being a woman as a hindrance because often she would experience a lack of respect because of her gender. However, as she gained confidence and created her own independence she was able to appreciate her experience based on her gender. "If I wouldn't have been a woman, there are circumstances I wouldn't have had that experience. So now I see being a woman is part of who I am and I'm extremely proud of it. I love all the experience that I've had. I guess, I guess I don't view my sexuality, my gender the same way as I did when I was younger." She now understood her gender as strength rather than a weakness. "I was raised that being a woman is inferior to a man and that's not true. Study Abroad and

traveling has really hit that home.” Heather found meaning from her growth and exposure to different points of view and diverse cultural expressions. She would now reject some beliefs that were formed when she was younger, but would not reject the people who had informed those early attitudes. As she grew and matured she would comprehend other ways to consider the role of gender in her life.

Heather described several times the importance of religious practices in her life. She was clear on how she was guided to believe, “Honestly, I was raised ...Christianity is the only religion... and only a certain sect of Christianity. And if you don’t believe that you’re going to hell.” Her religion affected her view of God and value as a woman. “I’ve always resented, had the biggest beef with all the pronouns of the Bible. All that ‘he’ and I’m like, well God only talks to men so I don’t have to listen to him.” Later she related that although she was a skeptical child, as she matured she revised her terms with God. Independent of her family she came to different conclusions about faith.

Heather repeatedly referenced her upbringing during our discussions. She grew up in a rural part of the state and moved several times. However, she described her most important memories as living with her grandparents on their cattle ranch and described her grandparents as a “big part of my life” and what she considers “home”. Many of these conversations were tied to independence. She spoke of her gender and how that was a significant part of how she was treated in her development as a woman during her upbringing. She compared her upbringing to what she experienced in China. “Actually, I think I was respected a lot more in China specifically in relation to being female than I was growing up... in my family [being female] is very stigmatized. My grandparents are not happy with it at all. They think that I should get married... not fly to China!” She also

gave examples of how not all members of her family apply the relevance of gender. Her grandparents would readily admit, “He is our favorite” when speaking of her uncle.

Heather identifies herself as a person with a high level of curiosity. However, she contrasts this perspective to her upbringing, “I was raised to *not be* curious because I am a woman. And *not be* independent because I am a woman.” Living in a rural farming area, Heather described her treatment as a female, “Everyone told me when I was growing up that you have to have a man with you to go the city or go to the sale barn or go anywhere that was outside this house.” She finished this observation with the emphatic statement. “That is not true.” She expresses her upbringing in an unflattering, authentic response. “Honestly, I was raised: white people are the best...Christianity is the only religion... women stay in the house... I mean it just reinforces people like my grandfather and what they believe, that women are inferior.” In comparison to this understanding as how she was raised, Heather makes an effort to abandon the limitations of her upbringing. “I can do whatever I want to. I’m not restricted to things that I was taught growing up...” This thought process was further expressed in her reflection of her identity as a woman. She found herself reconsidering her assumptions about strangers, especially those of another culture. This reconsideration of independent thought brought about by the Study Abroad experience was transformative.

Heather now describes herself as a very accepting person. She developed the realization that even though you are raised a certain way, it is helpful to try to understand how people come to their state of mind about issues such as gender, religion, race and cultural norms. Independence was fully embraced by the participant during the experience and continues as a cornerstone of her life. Most recently she applied and

received a position at a major firm in Dallas, thus epitomizing the degree of independence she is willing to embrace.

Poetry: Independence

I can climb a tree but there were no trees.
Smooth rocks some stand like pillars all white in the crevasse.
Looking across the prettiest place I've ever been.
I heard this growl no one had warned me I was far away.
Growling and surrounding I stood forever just praying.
I've done this much when I die I'm good content I start walking.
They bite my heels I kick back.
Six surround four look on, they follow.
Do not turn around. A pillar of salt.
Crazy girl speaking weird languages crying they took me back. No money would they accept.
My Grandmother terrified of strangers.

Theme Three: The Need to *Tell*

Overall, Heather viewed her Study Abroad experience in a positive light. She was forced to consider diverse ways to view the world, a process she found transformative. "I think it [Study Abroad] makes me more of an optimist... may have a negative connotation... that makes me naïve... bad things can happen but there's so much out there!" She was open-minded to the vastness of opportunity, "There's more to my life than right her right now... it has made me able to get through rough things easier." The experience changed her view of hope and destiny, "Before [Study Abroad] my entire life I tended to be really depressed about the things that are here and now, after Study Abroad it helps to realize that there's more than this. There is a whole world out there so much to learn and do and see so much more that here [and now]." Expressing this to me, she appeared enlightened. Her countenance changed and she earnestly wanted me to know and understand her view. She spoke often of *telling*, "...to come back and tell... tell like my grandma and my aunts and uncles and my friends about walking and getting stuck

somewhere and a little old lady and the lady invited me in to her house herself with no words and serving me tea and like talking to her and her kids who didn't even know me... and obviously and I don't know how to word that, but she... she was Muslim." She wanted her family to know that her interior being had been transformed by her experiences.

Heather was aware of how cultural surroundings and heritage may impact one's view of the world and the people that inhabit it. As the participant became more comfortable with me, she felt more comfortable telling of her meaning that she made. At one point in the second interview there erupted a firestorm. Heather became highly animated. Her words tumbled out. She tried to express her certainty of ethnocentric thought in a very earnest way as she described coming back to her home culture and the people she cared about. "I was really frustrated with my family and the people I grew up around because they didn't care. They didn't care about the things happening in China ...or Cambodia, or other countries. They only cared about ...their county or even more their town... or their area. They didn't care to know about anything else and it just really frustrated me. ...these, 'dumb people'." Heather's own recognition of her family's ethnocentric tendencies created a desire to inform others. "...but once I got back, this made me want to *tell* more people about it [cultural acceptance]. *Tell* people like my grandma who has never met or known a Muslim person in her life and has a negative connotation of Islam... make her realize that even if she believes her beliefs are the only right way, it does not make everyone else a bad person." Heather often used the term *tell* as a synonym for sharing her enlightenment. She expressed a purpose in her desire to enlighten people at home, "showing other people that and not just about religion but

about different countries. I mean a lot of people in my area think that the U.S. is the best country in the entire world. But there's also other places in the world...so *telling* other people about the other awesome things that are out there is really important to me". The harsh awakening to her own ethnocentric beliefs as she described them came in phases. The first phase was when, "I realized one, it was that the U.S. wasn't the only great country in the world. That was shocking to me." She further described what this looked like to her, "People aren't terrible...The U.S. is not the only peaceful place. I think that was when I realized I...I wanted to go everywhere, I wanted see everything, I want to know more, wanted to know everything. Places I've been so shut off to all my life. I want to share with everyone...because I never knew that there was so much out there. You hear about [other countries] on the news but it was like cool, I've never been there, it doesn't concern me because my corner the world... everything revolves that [my] corner of the world." Heather used her Study Abroad as a teaching opportunity to allow others to know, "there are other people and other lifestyles and other cultures and other beliefs and other religions everywhere in the world. It's not just [good] here." Heather made meaning teaching others by *telling*.

Part of her *telling* was Heather's desire to pass on her knowledge to her future children. She recognized how her upbringing affected her life and had an intense desire to shape the early life of her children in a more informed way. "I never want to limit them to only the things that I believe. Because that's not okay. Because there so many things out there in the world. And it's so important to me, for me, not to do that to my kids. What was done to me." Heather was sensitive to the way her upbringing shadowed her perception of opportunity in the context of gender. Her desire was to alter this in a

planned way. She was already considering how she would change the upbringing of children not yet born. “I want them to know that there’s tons of [opportunity] in the world. I want the girls to know they can do everything the boys can do. And the boys can do everything the girls can do.” She looks to the future with the meaning she made from Study Abroad.

A critical part of the way Heather made meaning was to pass her meaningful experience on to family, her friends, and children. The experience empowered her not to make excuses. In Heather’s words, “... try really hard to find a way to make something happen that you want in life.”

The interviews I conducted with the participant demonstrated areas of frustration in the *need to tell* for her. Some of the Study Abroad experiences were important for her to express after she arrived home, “... that’s the only time... well... there’s been two times that I thought I would die, and that was one of them, but I can’t tell people that... because everyone didn’t want me to go there. I can’t lead the conversation with that I really thought I was gonna die in Turkey. Then they’re probably not gonna really listen to all the awesome stuff in Turkey.” She found difficulty finding acceptance by family members and friends of the transformative meaning she made. Heather found it frustrating to have people that she cares about not appreciate and understand her newly acquired view of the world, and that she must mitigate that frustration with patience. “My friends here...they just don’t get it and there’s not a resource for me to talk about it. It hard for me to see why people don’t understand it. I have to step back and see that.” This was especially frustrating in her close relationships. Her boyfriend had a different view both of the world and the experience of traveling the world, “He’s never experienced it

...how life changing it is. So, that is hard to relate to people about that...so cheesy literally to say the whole world opened up and Study Abroad made me see that anything is possible.” Heather is still trying to make sense of her re-entry, but remains firm in the integrity of her experience, “I can go anywhere, and I should go everywhere that I can and learn as much as I can and talk with as many people as I can.” Part of the participant’s meaning was in her expression of telling and also in her desire to experience more. She developed an appetite for travel. Heather described it this way: “I always want to go somewhere. Instead of scrolling Facebook I scroll plane tickets.” She wanted to *tell* others when they could not hear. She wanted to experience more when they could not go.

Poetry: The Need to Tell

I’m coming back and telling.
She invited me in and served me tea.
Pretty colors and pillows we sat on the floor.
The kids running in and running out taking the cookies.
Cooking something that smelled amazing.

Theme Four: Places

Of the eleven photos Heather chose to use during the photo elicitation, most depicted places and not people. This created a moment of epiphany for her during one of her narrative stories. An ostensibly tranquil landscape would erupt with meaning from the participant. From the narrative she would recall the meaning of the picture. A barren territory with idyllic rock formations, free of trees in Turkey (figure 4), became the foundation of a narrative demonstrating the meaning she found with strangers and her ability to trust them. She juxtaposed her meaning to her grandmother’s fear of strangers. “So, the funny part is... I called my Grandmother and told the story and how scared I was of the dogs and her first words...were, ‘Heather you got in the car with two guys you

didn't know!" This contrasted with the meaning she drew from the experience that resulted in her concluding that all peoples are inherently good. This process was again repeated in another storied narrative she shared from a scenic photo taken in Malaysia. This photo of a mountainous area and lake (figure 1) became the basis for a storied response of kinship between two women from different cultures who formed an authentic connection with one another after only moments together.

Another connective experience took place in China, thousands of miles from the hills of Turkey. Looking at a photo (figure 2) of the Great Wall in a rural space, Heather began with a narrative description. "...it was so pretty. It was beautiful watching the sunset and the sunrise there and it was so cold." She told about the people she traveled with and the difficulties they overcame before getting to The Wall. When looking at a landscape photo of Malaysia with mountains in the background, water in foreground, and fog coming up against the water, I ask Heather how the image impacts her memory of the Study Abroad experience. "It reminds me of where I was and who I was with...so this picture really reminds me of him which is weird. [pause] Even though this picture is of the scenery, what I remember is the people. I think that a lot of my Study Abroad travels revolve around people more than the place...though this picture is of the scenery." Heather appeared to be coming to the realization that the photos of locations were triggers for her to remember notable events. They were a catalyst to very personalized meanings that she constructed to the Study Abroad experience.

This repeated concentration of landscapes in her photo elicitation also helps explain why Heather, who has a strong relationship with her grandparents, and who experienced homesickness during Study Abroad, would gravitate toward places that

mimic her rural upbringing in order to bring her comfort. While in China, the city of Beijing would overwhelm Heather. She would find a park, a place free of people, to seek comfort in her surroundings. She describes this process, “um...so I would seek out these places like parks. Where there were not a lot of people. And just be peaceful for a while... And not be in the city. So, I love looking at that picture [Royal Gardens] because it just reminds me of peace to me (Laugh). Yeah, so that I guess I really seek out peace because (laugh) that’s also why I love that picture so much... (figure 3)”. Places were important to her because they would bring her back to her geographical and familial roots.

As earlier referenced, three maps were discussed in the collection portion of the first interview. Heather detailed each map from her memory during more than one interview collection. Seeing the three maps displayed on the wall in her bedroom during the observation led to a stunning realization as to the reality of the collection. The three repeated images, and her storied responses to them as she contemplated them, were rich and deep in meaning. Heather expressed the meaning in a symbolic way, “...so now I have three maps above my bed. One is a scratch off map...one is a really old looking map...and one is an old map background with words on the front that says ‘Adventure is waiting’. I look at that when I go to sleep ...honestly true every night.... And every morning when I get up, that’s the first thing that I see. I look at all the places ...things that are out there. Before I went on Study Abroad I would’ve even cared and so that...I means it’s...experience the world...just so exciting for me. Experiencing the world is a big part of who I am now.”

On entrance to her bedroom I could see the three maps neatly hanging on the wall above her bed. This further clarified my understanding of the importance of the maps to the participant because of the proximity to her personal space and the way they were carefully clustered together as the primary image she would observe each day upon waking. She stated the maps always went with her and were on every wall by her sleeping space, even if on a short Study Abroad.

Maps are very symbolic to Heather, for they represent her past and her future. The scratch-off maps that allowed her to rub off the coating and display the visited country underneath are visually compelling because they bring into focus what Heather had passionately described to me. Although she had traveled many places, thus far there is so little was scratched off the map. “The world is so big and there is so much more to see...I didn’t scratch off all of this because there so much more to China than just that but...because I was only in a certain spot you can’t scratch off the whole thing because there so little I did.”

Poetry: Places

Summer Palace in China.
So peaceful, one of my favorites.
Beijing with twenty million people.
Hard for me, coming from nowhere.
I would seek out these places.
Peaceful for a while.

Theme Five: Race

Race was not as pervasive as the prior four meanings, however this outlier was still an area of meaning for the participant. Heather recognized and related to me several instances of ethnic bias she practiced while traveling. In Belfast, she was sitting alone

outside a pub and not drinking when a group of people confronted her, “They lost it because they are Irish.” She made a cultural assumption that Irish are heavy drinkers. While on another Study Abroad trip Heather revealed another cultural stereotype as well, “and this girl [American classmate] threw her engagement ring down the street...in Stockholm Sweden! Where it’s very quiet and peaceful.” The participant believed that all Scandinavians were peacemakers and do not argue in public. While in China, when speaking about a group of male students she met in China, she described them as, “...a group of very rowdy rich frat boy ‘looking’ people. I think most of them were from America or England.” Again, the participant expressed a cultural bias, in this instance that young Americans were rowdy and rich. Heather was also reflective on her ownership of cultural bias based on her own family. Sensitivity to race was made evident when she spoke of her grandmother, “My grandma’s Native American and she was taught her whole life that it was a dirty thing and she had to hide that part of her and she still does, because white people are the best and that just really sad to me.” Race and stereotypes associated with race were part of her formative development that carried over into her Study Abroad experience. However, she also indicated that these assumptions may need to change. When describing a group of young men in Vietnam, Heather stated, “They were from Mexico. I figured they would know English, which was kind of rude, and they did.” She agreed that it was cultural bias to assume that the Mexican students would know English. “I knew that was not reasonable think those things about an entire race.” In Malaysia she demonstrated a racial bias, but also demonstrated a move away from a stereotypic assumption, “...it was still kind of scary to me. You know she was Muslim and had on the hijab. She was Muslim and she invited me into her home and didn’t blow

me up or stab me like everyone seems to think most Muslim people are going to do.”

Heather was open to facing her own bias. Her willingness to push against her prior belief system allowed her to create meaning.

Poetry: Race

I needed a break.
Oldest rainforest in the world.
Um Muslim lady...
Very derogatory ideas about Islam.
Not reasonable to think these things.
Kind of scary. I hope that resonates
Not all people are like that.

Understanding the Participant

Identifying who Heather is helps to clarify what meaning she may make of the Study Abroad experience by being sensitive to her responses that are important to her. Heather is an independent, respectful woman with cultural values tied to her rural upbringing. She respectfully answered my questions with; “Yes Ma’am or No Ma’am”. As our familiarity increased, use of the formal terms lessened somewhat but never completely disappeared. She is strongly attached to her family and relates many of her experiences through that perspective. She is religious, patriotic and finds personal value in her honesty. She is frugal and seems to prefer simplicity. Heather has a clean, fresh appearance with little makeup, and she clothed herself without fuss. In tandem, the front room of her home was plain and free of personal items out of place. Heather was sensitive to race and describes how her grandmother, although American Indian, attempted to conceal her heritage because she determined that her Native blood to be less valued.

She is absorbed in learning and travel. I determined some of her general characteristics from our time spent together. She often spoke of where she grew up. She spoke about the land, describing the mountains with tenderness. It is hoped that by understanding in part who Heather is, that I as researcher may be able to link data that is meaningful in relation to what she finds important. Several personal characteristics emerged about the participant; one was truthfulness. At the beginning of her second interview I asked Heather about her thoughts on what we had spoken about at our last meeting, whether she had been reflecting on what we had discussed. She looked at me with sincerity and said, "I've been working on some other stuff truthfully." She did not want to disappoint me, yet she was willing to be honest. This helped me have confidence in her responses as honest and credible.

Heather is also dependable and obedient. Her grandparents asked her to take them to Montana. This would be a long drive, taking several days. They wanted to see their son, described by Heather as their favorite. Heather laughed when she told me that her grandfather said, "Heather, you made your Grandmother high!" They were happy that Heather was taking them to Montana. This trip, although a difficult request to fulfill, gave her joy.

Heather is financially conservative. On Study Abroad she was careful how she allocated her money. Her professor had to bring her back into perspective, encouraging her to participate in a local event, to travel to an animal reserve, that she otherwise would not have attended due to financial concerns. Because of an unfavorable money exchange, it appeared she was spending more money than she was. "And that always reminds me how my mind changes. I was in China perspective."

When speaking of her boyfriend she describes him as privileged with educational opportunities at a “fancy school and wearing fancy clothes with travels to rich people [in] Mexico.” She views his travel as frivolous. Heather struggles with the idea of travel as vacation verses an opportunity to gain knowledge and gain an appreciation for alternate cultures. Heather views travel as a source of education not entertainment. “I put a lot more value in traveling to learn and to experience the culture and know people, not just to ‘see things’ and not to ‘stay in the fanciest hotels’ or go to the ‘spas and the rich people stuff.’” She realizes her bias in this area and works to appreciate other travel objectives. “I realize I have a negative connotation of those thing and that’s not fair...I’m trying. [I know] because of my specific experience I tend to discount automatically...going to Mexico to lay [sic] on the beach.”

Transformational

Participating in the Study Abroad programs was a transformative experience for my participant in several core areas. The meaning she made from the experience, as well as the impact on her personal and intellectual development enabled her to cast aside some of the manacles brought on by prejudice practiced in her home and state where she had lived all of her life, and which had both overtly and subtly suggested that she could not do certain things and reach certain because of her gender. The Study Abroad experience proved otherwise, as several examples will reveal.

In Stockholm she determined to travel alone. From this she became independent. In Malaysia she was intimidated when eyed by groups of men on a bus and needed to trust a woman who was wearing a hijab thus embrace a feared religion. In Turkey while on a hike she fled for safety when chased by a pack of wild dogs and out of necessity

trusted two unknown men who did not speak English and whose chivalry did not allow them to accept any money in payment for their kindness. The participant circumstantially made friends from different religions, countries and, customs who before seemed like natural adversaries. The meaning she made transformed her ideology to realign her perspectives of people based on their religion and cultural customs such as how they worshiped their God and how they dressed. While on Study Abroad the participant was required to travel in crowded public transportation services where at times she would be the only fair-skinned blond person on board. When that reality caused fear, confusion, or opportunity, the participant was forced to draw on her educational background, personal courage and pure survival instincts to problem-solve and reach forward so she could continue the Study Abroad experience.

These experiences would be repeated as she moved into her life development post Study Abroad as the participant applied the meaning she created from the experience. She created meaning from what had otherwise been cultural deficiencies such as gender, ethnocentrism, upbringing, or religious affiliation and shaped those realities into strengths. She learned to trust people who wore different clothing and practiced a different religion, whom she had earlier not only mistrusted but even feared. This meaning she found in her experience created the intense need to tell others and enlighten them to her new understanding, sometimes resulting in great frustration on the participant's part. The meaning the participant made from the Study Abroad experience was plentiful and transforming in her life development.

Summary

This narrative inquiry of a woman's meaning made from the Study Abroad experience generated several themes which underscore the participant's transformational experience. Woven through the interview responses, observation, document analysis and photo elicitation were the following data categories: enlightenment, landscapes, ethnocentrism, faith, strangers, freedom, frustration, future children, maps, travel, gender, and upbringing. Emergent from this group were four major themes and one outlier: People are Good, Independence, The Need to Tell, Places and the outlier theme of Race. A description of each theme is evidenced by participant quotes and notes from analytic memos. All were explored. Poetry pulled from coding weighted the findings. Finally, an understanding of the participant allowed a framework for understanding. I also created an acrylic painting to document in a visual way the categories and themes inherent in this research (Figure 2). Appendix F is a guide to understand the visual artwork.

Concluding Remarks

The research focus for this study is to hear the voice of a woman through the consideration of the Study Abroad experience through the exploration of the meaning made into post-Study Abroad life. Chapter four unfastens the emerging themes from the rich descriptive data gathered from the participant. The participant appeared to have several areas of meaning she pulled from the Study Abroad experience that she continues to infuse into her life development. This experience transformed the perspective of one undergraduate female student from the inside out. These five themes may now be compared to the literature to further explore how they relate to past research in order to consider how the findings might impact knowledge.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Recent global and national events indicate that the education institutions and the community at large is finding a deficit when it comes to advancing cooperation, mutual understanding and joint problem-solving among nations, even among long-time friends and allies. The political institutions are not helping; in fact, they seem to foster disunity and adversarial behavior. Financial institutions are under constant scrutiny from regulators, customers and international governing entities. Religious institutions seem to promote mutual suspicion and mistrust. Lately no one has accused churches, temples and synagogues of cooperating and working together too much. Where is the answer among this dysfunction? It seems that education institutions are one of the world's last great hopes to bring cooperation and mutual understanding among nations. Solving the problem will be like putting together a large jig-saw puzzle, made up of scores of disjointed pieces. Study Abroad programs are a piece of the puzzle, and could be at the forefront in the quest for economic advancement, gender equality, and political understanding, and could perhaps make a substantial contribution to the local, national, and global community. This process begins with listening. Hearing the voice of the female participant is a part of the process and contributes to the necessary knowledge in addressing this problem.

The incorporation of Study Abroad as a vehicle for equipping students in their educational journey continues to increase in frequency. Remarkably, there is little study of the particular “meaning making” that a female Study Abroad student gains from the experience. This study addressed what a female student Study Abroad participant considers meaningful as she transitions from the world of academia to post graduation life.

Comparison of Findings with Previous Literature

In recognition of the meaning the participant made from the Study Abroad experience, the real-world implications of making sojourn opportunities available to young women are profound, particularly from a leadership development perspective. James McGregor Burns (1978), in his seminal work *Leadership*, discusses two categories of leadership: transactional and transformative. Transactional leadership focuses on activities such as management, organization, supervision and group performance. These activities are more closely related to clerical functions. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, involves inspiring people to make changes through raising awareness, promotion of harmony and cooperation, addressing the higher needs of the follower and engaging the full person of the follower. Participating in the Study Abroad programs was a transformative experience for my participant in several core areas of meaning. A comparison of her meanings is compared to previous literature.

Previous Literature

Previous research areas considered various perspectives associated with Study Abroad. However, in this research the meaning drawn from the experience and applied

by the female Study Abroad student in her life after graduation, was particularly compelling.

Areas of prior research set forth in the literature reviewed several topics relevant to the study, including Study Abroad programs, gender disparity, gender perception, campus internationalization, employer value, access to Study Abroad and workforce competencies. This study focused on the primacy of allowing a woman's voice to be heard concerning the Study Aboard experience. These findings were addressed in several of the former research areas considered in the literature review. They may contribute to higher education knowledge with this added opportunity to hear the voice of a woman and understand salient thoughts about her participation in an internationalism context.

Workforce Competences.

The impact of Study Abroad on career in past research indicated the participants used skills gained during the transformative experience (Franklin, 2010). The willingness of the participant to develop identity with the new culture creates an awareness of the usefulness of the sojourn (Bell et al., 2016; Jackson, 2016). The participant in the current study exhibited this willingness and used opportunities associated with self-reliance to forge a path into new career aspirations as the participant reflected on entering a male dominated environment. As the participant stated, "If I can go to Morocco than I can go into a board room." Research by Chapman (2011) linked Study Abroad to career. The participant demonstrated this same relevance in the document analysis of her vita. She connected her experiences with Study Abroad to conversations she initiated in prior interviews as a topic that created favorable impact in her career development. Additionally, the support and encouragement of alumni through social media created

career opportunities. Study Abroad was a resource in the demonstration of changes in competency skills that may relate to work for the participant. Workplace readiness was strengthened in the participant's experiential learning.

Although workforce competency may be a net gain for the participant in terms of confidence and tolerance, the participant stated that her gains were not inclusive of language as a competency, nor did she suggest her gains were beyond general personal growth. In contrast to prior studies on competencies, the participant did not imply gains were specific to a particular skill or field. Some prior studies support the consideration of the impact of Study Abroad on career advancement by looking at the experiences acquired during the process. An area of future research recommended in one prior study that Study Abroad would, "... reveal the changing employment contexts within which student[s] apply their Study Abroad experiences" (Dwyer, 2004, p. 161). This study allowed the participant to reflect upon her meaning making from the Study Abroad experience, while currently engaging in her post-undergraduate academic life. The study also considered what an individual woman found important, and did not focus on one particular area of meaning, but rather on the various meanings she wished to express with an inimitable voice.

Campus Internationalization.

Outreach programs are one component of the internationalization efforts of the university (Simpson, 2010). The participant in my study was partner to this growth through a yearlong Study Abroad program in China, where she worked with students to encourage enrollment in her home university. The participant's recruitment to this Study Abroad demonstrated an international emphasis the university will use to garner global

participants as referenced in NAFSA (Association of International Educators, 2005). Her experience reinforced the prior research of Miller-Perrin & Thompson (2014) that stated the new image for higher education includes an international emphasis along with the traditional demands of university study. This was evidenced by the time and commitment the university allocated to the recruitment of Chinese students in a Study Abroad program.

The participant's deepened understanding of other cultures was made evident in the meanings she created, and gave credence to the federal emphasis for universities to heighten their internationalization offerings. These efforts were made manifest in this student. Her outcomes support the success of this internationalization process.

This study differed from the prior literature in that the goal of the study was not to explore the depth of internationalization, but rather to consider how inclusion of Study Abroad program in the educational experience may generate meaning for the participant. Prior research indicated the need for success in a strategic plan to support the institutions, strengthen curriculum, research and international spirit. Listening to the voice of the participant may allow this strengthening to take place in a more robust fashion, thereby promoting an understanding of the purpose and true success of the internationalization process.

Study Abroad Programs.

Study Abroad programming in universities continues to foster inclusion and increased student participation (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014). One prevailing political agenda encouraged participation for all students at various educational settings. The purposeful use of multiple opportunities in locations, disciplines and time frames

was a positive part of the Study Abroad experience. The variety of opportunities offered to the participant, and her involvement in three separate Study Abroad education opportunities, demonstrates how increased involvement is achieved by the institution accommodating the student. This supports prior research (2014) that documents the intent to send more students to Study Abroad as a priority in higher education. This was made evident in the repeated encouragement for the student to attend multiple Study Abroad programs rather than a singular Study Abroad experience. It is important to note that in the participant's case some of her funding for the program, as well as encouragement to enroll in Study Abroad, came not from the specific Study Abroad opportunities, but rather from specific individuals who saw potential in the participant and were interested in fostering her opportunities as a student.

The Study Abroad program created enhanced meaning. The participant suggested during the interview process that some of the meaning she gained was transformative in nature. One example was the transformative view of strangers from negative to positive. This transformational experience related to prior work (Bell et. al., 2016 Jones, et. al., 2012) that supports the same conclusion; however, the student did not choose the university based on programs available as campus internationalization subscribes, but she rather happened into the opportunities as her education and connections to educational mentors increased.

Study Abroad is a way to be competitive in a global education experience. Deciphering the impact of Study Abroad for this participant was granted through hearing the woman's voice. The prior research examined how this voice may impact the

government and private sector. The participant indicated through her meaning making that Study Abroad did impact her development both personally and professionally.

Employer Value.

The value of Study Abroad to an employer in prior research found evidence to support a connection between real education, experience, and work (Fischer, 2016). Therefore, if the student can apply the Study Abroad referenced on the resume to an employment position, the employer would likewise find value. The participant in this study also found this application to be a valid platform in her experience. The participant used the interview process as a way that introduced her international experiences in a positive light. This was accomplished through the attempt to connect the Study Abroad experience into her work environment, as well as provide a relationship link to the interviewer. She mentioned in one interview how she and the interviewer became absorbed in discussions that surrounded the Study Abroad experience which resulted in building a strong mutual rapport. Additionally, the active recognition by the participant as to what is relevant to potential employers in work and how this relates to Study Abroad, helped the employer to recognize value. Therefore, if the student can apply the Study Abroad on the resume, this association could increase employer value. This concept was validated in the experience recounted by the participant when describing how she anticipated that she would bring the topic of Study Abroad into the discussion in a coming interview. (Fischer, 2016; Herren, 2008; Tucker, Gullekson & McCambridge, 2011) The participant's experiences are echoes to prior research of what the participant experienced, demonstrating she was savvy enough to weave the Study Abroad into her interview discussion. Although the participant could relate her experiences into value for

the employer, what was most compelling in this study was the meaning she drew from the experience. This meaning was intimately individual to her, rather than being a specific skill she may have learned in order to enhance her value to a potential employer, as was the focus for prior studies.

If the workplace seeks a sophisticated global understanding, as was suggested in prior research, then the participant fits this profile, and demonstrated how she approached her life development with potential employers.

The Long-Term Impact of Study Abroad.

Universities are highly aware how Study Abroad may impact the learner over time. This sensitivity could increase the strength of the program's relevance as it relates to career. Studies by Franklin (2010) indicated gains from Study Abroad may be seen ten years past participation. Therefore, perhaps Study Abroad has long term impact on a past participant's career capital (Potts, 2014). This research did not have the longitudinal depth to fully compare to implications in past research, however the potential long-term impact on the participant in this study was palpable. She chose to consider future impact in her conversations of family, life, work, and community relationships. Her intention in her personal as well as public life was inclusive of Study Abroad impact. Some prior research provided evidence that Study Abroad impacted the early career. The participant armed by the Study Abroad experience, demonstrated the career capital as described by Potts (2014) through her aggressive ascent into competitive work environments and the participant's need to tell.

The sojourn is an accepted practice at most universities, and Jackson's (2016) work indicated students agree that there is impact from the sojourn experience over time.

Some areas of impact may include work, professional contacts, and language development, as well as daily decision making. The study for this research is distinctive in that gender is a primary consideration. This discovery is valuable because it contributes to the collection of knowledge gathered from a female voice, which was mostly absent from past research consideration.

The recent literature suggests that former Study Abroad students respond to the environment with skills from their sojourn experience (Dwyer, 2004). This research reflects a connection between the sojourn and post-graduation life for a female participant as she reveals her own meaning from the Study Abroad experience. The topic supports the need for additional qualitative studies and long-range impact studies. The tremendous depth of data available is ready for harvest.

Change Associated with Study Abroad.

The participant was changed from her Study Abroad experiences. Change in the participant documented from past research indicated a level of self-awareness associated with the Study Abroad experience which allowed the participant to appreciate the influence the experience may have on her life (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014). Some research supports that the global experience is especially relevant to students in this period of their life development (Parris, Nyaupane, & Teye, 2014). The appreciation for other cultures is the most lasting change from Study Abroad (Jackson, 2016). The intercultural competence (IC) inclusive of confidence, persistence, and risk taking, were gains for the participant. The participant readily reflected this research, finding the desire to pass on what she learned from the Study Abroad experience to her own future children. The participant was not married and her children are not yet born, yet she was

considering how she would alter their upbringing as compared to her own childhood, based on meaning created from her Study Abroad experience. This intention supports established research (Lumkes, Hallett, & Vallade, 2012) that participants change how they live after the experience. Then again, the object of this study was not to determine the change experienced by a large number of students who were associated with Study Abroad, but rather the meaning this singular participant drew from the experience.

Access to Study Abroad.

Past research documented how barriers to Study Abroad limit participation. The current research for this study supported that the participant's original lack of interest in Study Abroad was tied to her lack of funding and lack of family support, two common barriers to Study Abroad availability. However, she participated in three Study Abroad trips over her undergraduate experience. In her case, the barriers were negotiated by members of the educational community who helped bridge the gap between home study and Study Abroad studies (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Boroncio & Boroncio, 2010). In the participant's situation, friends of the university and university educators guided her through the process, helping her acquire funding and navigate barriers to education abroad. When considering broad-based human development in education, Chickering's (1987) classic work supports why the participant was able to access Study Abroad. The contact that was developed between the participant and faculty was a reflection of the first of Chickering's seven principles. The mentorship and individual interest by friends of the university were the determinative factors in the participant's enrollment in the first Study Abroad. Subsequent enrollments were self-driven and motivated by the gratification of the first. Although access is a factor in the

ability for students to participate in Study Abroad, for a white female access to Study Abroad was also typical.

Additionally, because the participant was a white female traveling and studying alone, some might consider her as an entitled student utilizing her parent's financial resources. Actually, Heather had little or no parental assistance in paying for college and her travel abroad. Any help she received came from the university and friends of the university. In this regard, the participant met a university official who prompted her to these high achievements while she was serving tables at the local Panera Bread restaurant. She had no awareness that Study Abroad was an option. Access to Study Abroad was a barrier for the participant, a barrier she had to overcome in order to participate.

Gender Disparity as it Relates to Participation in Study Abroad.

Gender disparity associated with Study Abroad is long standing. Women have studied abroad at a higher rate than men. The participant for this study was female and met the typical criteria group of a six to four ratio females over males (IIE, 2015; Shirley & Olson, 2006). Thus, the reasoning for this study is that a rich trove of data exists, but is undervalued and under-examined, indicating a gap in research. This reality is further supported by the same observation in the research of Cartwright et al. (2015). The gap in research may be the lack of consideration of voice from the lens of gender. Likewise, when soliciting who the participant would be in this study, much of the interest expressed by the group that responded was related to my desire to hear the woman's voice in the experience. Most of the prior studies associated with gender disparity addressed why men

fail to participate as frequently as women in Study Abroad. In this research, the desire was to acknowledge that women have a relevant but often ignored voice.

Gender and Study Abroad.

Beyond the fact that females participate more than males, the experience of Study Abroad may be affected by the gender of the participant. For example, the participant found that women from some countries would more easily initiate a conversation with her than they might with strangers of the opposite gender. Although they did not know her personally, or even recognize her, some women made contact with the participant because she was a woman. Jessup-Anger's (2008) research finds that beliefs about gender are tied to our cultural identities. In this research, the participant identified that her experience was profoundly linked to her gender. She believed that some opportunities to relate to women of the visited country were made available because of shared gender. This experience of gender as a framework for the Study Abroad experience supports the work of Cartwright et al. (2015), which found that women reflect the world through gender inside the experiences of Study Abroad.

Meanings of the Participant in her life development

To further distill the essence of this research, it is important to recognize that the past research included workforce competencies, campus internationalism, Study Abroad programs, employer value of Study Abroad, access to Study Abroad, change associated with Study Abroad, long term impact of Study Abroad, gender disparity, and gendered differences in the study experience. However, there is a gap in the research that addressed how the female participant makes meaning of the experience.

The voice of the participant leads the researcher to reach several conclusions when examining the data. The five emergent themes from the data were: People are Good, Independence, The Need to Tell, Places, and the outlier theme of Race. These were all profound themes that the participant voiced when she spoke about Study Abroad. Supporting these five motifs were repeating categories that the participant revealed through the methods described herein. The categories were: enlightenment, landscapes, ethnocentrism, faith, strangers, freedom, frustration, future children, maps, travel, gender and upbringing.

For this participant, the shifts in her thinking were associated with what she believes about other cultures, people she does not know on a personal level, her perceptions of roles and gender, and religion. The meaning she drew from the experience was transformational in that she describes herself in a growth mindset not an abandonment of her upbringing, but rather a continued pattern of growth that augmented her strong foundation.

Although these five emergent themes supported by the data could also be similar to another participant in another study, the implication and weight of the themes are unique to the participant, and represent her individual voice as an addition to knowledge. There is value in her voice and experience that is not intended to be generalizable, but rather honored as a solo note that rings clear.

Meaning made through Study Abroad for the participant was associated around those experiences. For this participant, the place she existed in her personal life development had the upmost association to the meaning she made throughout her Study Abroad experience. The developed self she brought into the experience was her identity

as a person. The most valued meanings the participant made from Study Abroad were evidenced in the participant's choice to alter or adjust her attitudes, actions or beliefs. This was then linked to a change in the process of how she conducted certain areas of her life. These areas of life were: her work, her view of parenting, her view of cultural identity, gender expectation, dreams of the future and self.

Other research considered gender as a way to look at the Study Abroad experience in relationship to a long-term impact, cultural awareness gains or safety. However, this study was framed to allow the participant to determine her own meaning, without being limited to specific areas or categories, making meaning in her own terms.

Implications of the Research

In this context, there are other possible implications from this study. First, learning may result from how a person views self. Therefore, understanding what is important to the learner, and the background of the learner, may result in higher education initiatives that enhance participant satisfaction and increase positive results. Although this participant related how Study Abroad impacted the way in which she met some daily challenges, the most profound meaning was associated with how she approached the world with respect to the inclusion of thought and acceptance of people, and the courage to believe in herself.

The transformational meaning for the participant may reflect back to the goal of the higher education institution to provide learning opportunities that make a strong contribution to society. Student development in the art of communication between cultures, learning to listen in an active and persuasive way, learning to analyze information from a global perspective, the development of international relationships, and

adaptability are all examples of possible implications (Tillman, 2010). The opportunity for graduates to appreciate and understand dynamic diversity will provide calming, educated voices in a world quick to choose sides and find fault. In a political way, the Study Abroad, experiences could impact the greater community of nations through the rich deep interaction across borders, cultures, and communities. Working in tandem with state economic development offices, in establishing programs, and sharing contacts from the Study Abroad experience with state officials on international projects are examples of how Study Abroad experiences could be applied in a practical fashion. Outcomes for students may be demonstrated holistically and globally through the understanding of oneself as an American citizen and the synthesis their beliefs from the experience (Dolby, 2008; Tillman, 2010; Twombly, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012). In an ever-changing world, student access to cultures, different from their own provides active learning experiences that are strong and allowing the development of an open mind free from misplaced fear and able to make informed decisions in one's life and work, and thus impacting the greater community and perhaps the nations. This aspiration fulfills the institution's responsibility to the community, and validates the resources allocated to Study Abroad programs.

Implications for the University

There are scores of other students who want and need to have a "Heather-like" experience but they are blocked by both external and eternal forces that hold them back. Like Heather, they were told "women don't travel alone" or "travel abroad is only for rich kids" or "terrorists hate Americans...don't go over there." The university should continue to take measures to answer these false assumptions and make Study Abroad for

both women and men to seem like a natural and expected part of an educational experience, and encourage students to have a Study Abroad experience before they graduate. Graduation rates may increase through Study Abroad participation (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012). Communicating the research findings that supports Study Abroad as active learning may retain students, therefore impacting the institution's bottom line (2012). These mandates may help students fulfill their employment dreams and be responsible citizens in a changing new world.

This study was fruitful in meaning for the participant. She recently took a position with a large commercial real estate company in Dallas, and the Study Abroad experience impacted her opportunity to land the new position. The most recent literature by Schmidt and Pardo (2017) supports that the income potential of Study Abroad participants did not surpass the study-at-home student. However, in this study the participant believes the human capital gained through Study Abroad will help her in the future through the meaning that she made. The value tied to hearing the voice of the participant is profound. Additionally, the participant was able to identify the meaning and demonstrate the value of the same experience in her life development. This meaning was exhibited in the emergent themes that flowed from the collection of data.

Implication for Higher Education

What could this mean for the ivory tower institution? Study Abroad programs have been traditionally purposed toward exposing university students to other cultures. But universities could also focus on listening to students when they return through relationship building and cooperative symposiums blending ideas about curriculum and

experience. The returning student's meaning could add value that fosters a mutual understanding and cooperation among our world partners.

The purpose of Study Abroad within the institution may be categorized in four areas: curricula, cross culture, career enhancement and student development (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012). The attraction of students to the university and the retention of students both play into the financial benefits associated with the Study Abroad for the institution, and serves as the major vehicle for internationalization (2012).

Therefore, what should a university president or department head take away from this participant's meaning making from the Study Abroad experience that might benefit their institution's mission and purpose? What are the brass tacks? Several ideas come to mind. First of all, explore in an objective the benefits of Study Abroad. Resources for the university are limited and continue to shrink. However, the benefits of Study Abroad are valuable for the student, immediate community of stakeholders, as well as the national stakeholders and international business partners to know and be aware of. This is in part exhibited through the cultural learning outcomes from campus internationalization (Twombly, et al., 2012).

Secondly, recognize that a Study Abroad experience may be a transformational encounter for a student, especially a female student. Some of the limitations that western society places on women are eroded in a positive fashion when young women learn to carry out complex life activities in a different culture. They not only "transact" with education plans, living accommodations, language differentials, interpersonal challenges; but as in the participant's case, the impact was more than ministerial and logistical, it was transformative. Just as the participant was able to express the meaning she made from the

experience, she can also carry those transformed attitudes back to her home culture and act to transform the environment around her. In a “reverse Peace Corp” emphasis, the Study Abroad participant brings the understanding and growth in international competence (IC) developed overseas and returns to her home country to apply what she learned from her Study Abroad, hopefully generating more mature thought and understanding among her peers.

Thirdly, create more incentives and opportunities for Study Abroad students to bring their transformative experiences back to their home environments in order to pass on what they have learned, and reduce the frustration brought about when peers do not resonate with their experiences. Some suggestions for higher education could include forming seminars led by the returning Study Abroad students. The education seminars could be designed to brainstorm ideas to promote mutual growth and understanding between varied cultures, so the Heathers of the academic world can build on her experiences and not let them fade into obscurity or die from frustration with the passage of time. Schools could also encourage the participants to publish their experiences in appropriate journals and publications and receive academic credit or scholarship benefits when completed at an excellent level. Study Abroad participants could serve as ambassadors to foreign universities building relationships to garner more international students. Perhaps implement an adopt-a-country program with the plan to send one hundred Study Abroad participants to the chosen country and the goal of drawing out one hundred foreign students from that country to the domestic country. Develop an on-line web presence for all Study Abroad alumni from the domestic university to promote the experience to new enrollees and potential donors giving voice to the Study Abroad

participant. In general, efforts should be made that tap into their dynamic experience and not allow some of the positive outgrowths to slip away with the passage of time.

Finally, schools could increase scholarship opportunities for aspiring Study Abroad students so those in marginal financial circumstances can participate. Attitude is important to include as a resource for participation (Miranda, 2013; Whatley, 2017). Students need to believe they can participate. Financial capability is a part of this belief. Study Abroad students generally pay for the basic cost of attending their home university, plus additional costs associated with Study Abroad (Whatley, 2017). Grants or loan aid may help students afford the experience (Miranda, 2013; Whatley, 2017). My participant, worked several jobs and lived in near poverty conditions in order to pay her tuition bills and living expenses. She was not a person who thought Study Abroad was an option. However, friends of the university stepped in and gave aid. Foundations set up by the university may play a pivotal role in the increased Study Abroad participation of underrepresented groups through focused funding.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future areas of research in response to this study could stem from several areas: processing the Study Abroad experience, factors that motivate a female Study Abroad student, female Study Abroad students and travel independence, how does gender impact the Study Abroad experience, generational influences from Study Abroad, in what ways may a Study Abroad participant tell their stories with clarity and emotional satisfaction, and a longitudinal study on how meaning making with the same participant may prove enlightening. And finally, would other Study Abroad women find meaning in a similar or dissimilar fashion?

The impact of Study Abroad on women and travel was profound for this participant. She was very passionate about the opportunities of woman to travel solo. She reflected that some of the opportunities she experienced during Study Abroad came from being a woman and traveling alone. The individual travel component was demonstrated by this participant as a way for her community to look at womanhood in a different light. The independence associated with solo international travel empowered her and transferred into her life. Research that looks at woman and travel may be insightful.

Another topic may be how does gender change the Study Abroad experience? The participant reflected on the value of gender in her opportunities during Study Abroad. Therefore, research concerning how do men and woman make meaning from Study Abroad based on gender may prove meaningful.

How would the generational influence of the Study Abroad experience process over time to other future students in their family? The participant was emphatic that her meaning would be shared with her children. Because of the historical governmental support for Study Abroad, there are many students who now have children who may participate; thus, there is a rich trove of data that may allow a longitudinal study in this area. Accordingly, a study that explores how meaning from the Study Abroad experience is passed on to future generations could be discerning.

What factors motivate a female Study Abroad participant to tell her story with such intensity? The participant was passionate about the telling others of her transformational epiphanies made during Study Abroad. Understanding what drives this intensity is a topic that could merit future research.

In what ways may a Study Abroad participant tell her stories with clarity and emotional satisfaction? The participant was frustrated when she returned to her home country and found little understanding from family and peers as she tried to disseminate her new understandings. Looking at how women or students in general find ways to make sense of the Study Abroad experience upon returning home could prove insightful. Finally, did other Study Abroad women find meaning in a similar or dissimilar fashion? It could be valuable to examine other groups of Study Abroad women to see if there were similarities in the ways meaning was created.

Reflection on Research

As a woman researcher, I believe I was a good fit for the participant to open herself to my questions with an honest voice. She described how during the Study Abroad experience she related to women and had opportunities based on her gender. Because we are both women, this may be assumed to have continued into her willingness to share the rich description of her experiences during the narrative inquiry process with me. However, my work to correctly identify the emerging themes may be clouded by my own desire to reflect the significance of that the participant is a woman.

The research confirmed my thought that some level of meaning making could be made from this type of educational experience. My surprise was the depth of meaning and the long-term impact the meaning had on this participant. As one involved in education for many years, this experience changes my thinking on the degree of value of what is termed experiential learning, or learning by doing. When engaging students, it may prove increasingly significant to add tasks that require the student to adapt the knowledge you want them to learn in challenging ways.

In addition, the way in which data was collected through the photo elicitation process was very beneficial to the narrative inquiry methodology in this study. The use of a visual image that was important to the participant weighted the value of the response. This type of collection allowed the participant to center on what was central to her, and invoked memories that were important to the meaning she created. This method could prove to be a strong addition to data collections and insightful understanding for future qualitative studies.

Concluding Remarks

This study focused on the perspective of a female who participated in the Study Abroad experience and the meaning she drew from Study Abroad and how that experience may or may not have been reflected in her life. Strong meaning making was made by the Study Abroad participant connected to the experience. Transformational could be used to describe how the opportunity to Study Abroad impacted the meaning she made from the experience. Her reflection of the experience is individual to her, and relates directly to who she was before the experience and the events that occurred during the Study Abroad experience. Her unique voice was the catalyst associated with the study.

The importance and contribution of the knowledge from this study lies in the evidence supporting the importance of the experience as described by the participant. Knowledge gained from experiential learning is strong and impacts the learner over time in a profound way. The exploratory value associated from this study is unique to the participant. The reflection she shared as a woman is important because it begins to fill in gaps from the historical narratives that document history through voice. The precise

meaning the participant made from the Study Abroad experience is not generalizable to others, but readers may regard the findings as transferrable to other cases and contexts.

Women experience Study Abroad at a higher rate than men. Thus, the unique voice of a woman is important to the addition of knowledge. The relationship between these two facts revealed a gap in research supporting this study and shined light on the question of how a female participant created meaning from Study Abroad. The participant in this study was able to express several thematic responses that reflected meaning making. It is hoped that these contributions will be of value to the individual participant, leaders, educators, and future participants in the exploration and addition to knowledge.

Figures



Figure 1. Landscape Malaysia

Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)

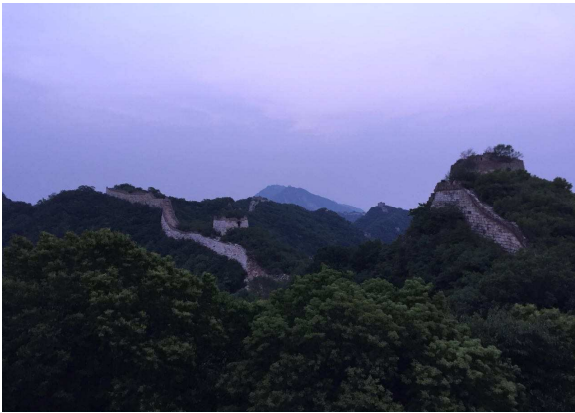


Figure 2. Great Wall of China

Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)



Figure 3. Summer Palace Beijing China
Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)



Figure 4. Vast Landscape Turkey
Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)



Figure 5. Amusement Park Stockholm Sweden
Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)



Figure 6. Tiger Reserve Harbin China
Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)



Figure 7. Participant on Bridge Iceland
Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)



Figure 8. Home of Muslim Woman Turkey
 Note. Reprinted with participant permission (2018)



Figure 9. Spencer, N. J. (2018) *Meaning Making* Acrylic Stillwater, Oklahoma
 Note. Reprinted with artist permission (2018)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions for the Female Study Abroad Graduate

The pre-Study Abroad experience

1. Why were you motivated to participate in Study Abroad?
2. How did you decide to participate in Study Abroad?
3. How were your expectations realized before the Study Abroad experience?

The post-Study Abroad experience

Please consider your chosen photographs when answering these questions:

4. How do you describe your photos of the Study Abroad experience?
5. How does the image impact your memory of the experience?
6. How did the Study Abroad experience influence your transition from student to life experience?
7. How has the Study Abroad experience made meaning for you many years after the experience

Appendix B

Participant Contact

Contact # 1

Hi _____,

You were recommended as a possible candidate for my study by_____.
Please read the attached letter and let me know if you think this could be a good fit.

Kind regards,

Nancy

Dear Study Abroad Alumnus,

My name is Nancy J. Spencer. I am a graduate candidate in the Educational Studies Department at Oklahoma State University. I am conducting research about the female experience of Study Abroad. The title of the study is: *The meaning making of a woman in her life development through the Study Abroad experience*. The research question is: How do participants make meaning of their Study Abroad experience? Because you participated in a Study Abroad experience and are now post-graduation I am asking you to consider participating in my research project.

Participation in the research will include the following. Three interviews over a four week interval, checking for accuracy of the interview transcript, a selection of photos taken during your Study Abroad to use as prompts during the interviews, inclusion of your personal vita or resume to document your experience, and one thirty minute observation of the environment. Additionally, there may be a telephone conversation to clarify data content questions. The completed time commitment is expected to be 3.45 hours. All data collected will be confidential and protected by using a pseudonym. If you are interested in participating in this research project please relay through email and I will contact you at a time convenient to you to begin the process.

Kind regards,

Nancy J. Spencer
(405) 332-6651
n.j.spencer@okstate.edu

Contact # 2

Dear _____,

Thank you for your positive response to the research proposal. I believe you will be a perfect candidate for the study. Attached please find the informed consent document that will explain the research in a more complete way as required by the IRB.

Please read the document. I will have a copy of the document at our first meeting for you to sign.

To begin the research:

1. Choose three days and times convenient for you. This may be during the day or during the weekend.
2. Choose a quiet location that is good for you. This may be at your work place, home, or another location that will allow at least 30 minutes of conversation.
3. Collect 3 or more photos from your Study Abroad. You may email a digital file to me so that I can print or you may bring the photos with you.
4. Send a digital copy of your resume or vita.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate. The woman's voice is significant in the construction of knowledge. Please send your chosen times and dates back soon. I look forward to meeting with you.

Kind regards,

Nancy

Appendix C

Informed Consent Document

Project Title:

The Meaning Making of a Woman in Her Life Development through the Study Abroad Experience

Investigator:

Nancy J. Spencer
PhD Candidate

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to explore the meaning making from the voice of a woman who participated in Study Abroad as an addition to the collection of knowledge. This study involves research. You are being asked to participate because you completed a Study Abroad experience while at college and are now graduated. The type of information sought is a verbal response to questions about your insights.

Procedures:

You will be asked questions about your meaning making of the Study Abroad experience in three separate interviews that will each last 30 minutes or longer.

The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and sent back to you to read and approve. Approximate time needed to complete the approval is 30 minutes or longer for each interview.

A follow-up phone call will be made to you from the researcher to clarify any questions. The call could last 15 minutes more or less.

You will be asked to collect several photographs from your Study Abroad experience for the interviews.

You be asked to send your vita.

A 30 minute observation will be conducted of the environment.

The total amount of time required to participate in this study is approximately 3 hours and 45 minutes with five interactions over an anticipated four-week period.

There are no physical discomforts or inconveniences associated with this research.

Risks of Participation:

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits:

There are no expected benefits to the participant other than the contribution to knowledge.

Confidentiality:

The information collected from this research protects your confidentiality.

A pseudonym will be used in all transcribed data. The data will be stored on a computer in a locked office. Only the researcher and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. The audio recordings will be destroyed after 45 days. The data collection will be stored for three years. The data findings will be reported in a dissertation.

It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

Compensation:

There are no compensations offered for participation. There is not a dependent relationship involved (student/professor) or extra credit associated with participation.

Contacts:

You may contact the researcher about both the research and subject rights.

Nancy J. Spencer
Researcher
n.j.spencer@okstate.edu
(405)332-6651

Dr. Tami Moore
Advisor
Tami.moore@okstate.edu
(918)549-8107

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participant Rights:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty. The subject's participation may be terminated by the researcher for lack of described involvement.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the prospective participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Study Abroad Locations

Study Abroad #1-Summer

Six countries Europe - Ireland, Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, United Kingdom
(England, Scotland).

Study Abroad #2- Year Long

Year Long - China -excursions to Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia.

Study Abroad #3- Spring Break

Spring Break – Europe – UK (England, Ireland, Wales)

Personal Abroad Trip – Spring Three Month

Morocco, Spain, Turkey, Israel solo backpacking

Appendix E

Photo Elicitation

1. China - Screen shot Summer Palace in Beijing. River bridge with people walking over bridge.
2. Iceland – Standing on rustic bridge river behind green lower mountains in background.
3. Northern Ireland - Outside of Pub in Belfast, an older woman sitting next to participant.
4. China - Holding a tiger cub in Harbin, China
5. China - Holding a skewer with a scorpion night street scene Beijing, China.
6. China -Great Wall of China ,distance photo several miles long rural area.
7. Malaysia – Mountain in background small water/fog in foreground surrounding the lower area objects.
8. Turkey – Vast landscape no trees rocks some large like pillars.
9. Sweden - Amusement Park Stockholm Sweden on water's edge.
10. China - Older white male with participant in cherry orchard eating berries.
11. Turkey - Woman and son who shared her home.

Appendix F

Painting Explanation

This work is reflective of the research findings in several ways. The numeral 5 signifies the five emergent meanings, colors, and languages. The abstract form in the background represents the countries the participant traversed. The Moorish pattern characterizes the veiled layered meanings. The pink embodies the participant and her gender as the base of the painting. The dark blue elicits her upbringing that she chose to exchange for greater understanding. The dark melon symbolizes her growth and deepened strength. The violet and blue represent her hope for the future and the green denotes the land she finds comfort in. The languages of Chinese, Arabic, Turkish, Danish and Malay represent the meanings gathered from her cultural Intelligence. English is used as the key.

VITA

Nancy J. Spencer

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE MEANING MAKING OF A WOMEN IN HER LIFE DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

Major Field: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in your major at
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in June 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in History at the University
of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma 2006.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Art at Oklahoma
Christian University, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1982.

Experience:

Professional Memberships:

Cooperating Council for Oklahoma School Administration CCOSA