GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF STUDY ABROAD

by

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A THESIS

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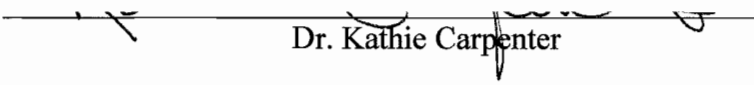in the Department of International Studies   to be taken   June 2010

Title: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF STUDY

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In the age of globalization, it is more important than ever that students gain skills that enable them to communicate with people from other cultures. This research explored the experiences of study abroad participants and the special challenges that men and women faced during a study abroad program in Italy. While women's and men's experiences are similar in many ways, women's heightened concern for their own physical safety could lead to greater gains in intercultural competency. In addition, women may have had increased interactions with people from other cultures. Men are capable of gaining intercultural competency if they prioritize intercultural interaction and take steps to seek it out.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study explores the gendered nature of study abroad, and specifically how male and female students' experiences of a study abroad program differ from each others'. Recent research has shown that, on average, male and female students make different amounts of progress in intercultural competency over the course of the same study abroad programs (Vande Berg, 2009). Through participant-observation of American study abroad students in Italy and follow-up interviews six months later, this study seeks to explore the different ways that study abroad participants and Italian host nationals do gender in a cross-cultural setting. An analysis of how doing gender influences students' opportunities for intercultural learning as well as recommendations for programmatic changes in study abroad programs follow.

Globalization is making our world smaller everyday. The increased pace at which information is exchanged, the growing affordability and ease of international travel, and the global interconnectedness of our economy means that more and more of us are regularly coming into contact with people who are different than ourselves. Where earlier, we may have lived in a small Minnesota farming town, perhaps similar to the mythical Lake Woebegone, where everyone knew everyone else; now that town has ubiquitous high-speed internet access and Hispanic kids are attending the local high

school. The graduates of that high school may be living overseas in France, Egypt, Thailand or India, and in their lifetimes will be dealing with problems that are enormous in scope: global warming, increased migration, a growing world population, terrorism and many more. Our young people desperately need skills in order to make the most of the increased diversity of our society, and the direness of our global problems. The skills most desperately needed are those which enable us to communicate effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds.

The urgency of our world problems means that we need to begin learning effective intercultural communication as soon as possible. This is the kind of communication that allows the farming kid from rural Minnesota to have a friendship with a sophisticated *Milanese*. Intercultural communication enables a businesswoman from China to successfully negotiate a merger in downtown Cairo. It is intercultural communication skills that give each of us the opportunity to make meaningful connections with people who are not exactly like us, who do not always think like we do or see the world the exact same way. Intercultural communication can enrich our lives and help dissimilar people to work together more happily and effectively, as well as help them avoid serious miscommunications, bad feelings, even violence. Intercultural communication has the power to change the world for the better, and in the era of globalization is crucial that we all achieve at least some small measure of it.

Many universities and colleges provide study abroad programs in hopes that their students will be able to gain this essential ability. However, in the past decade or so research has shown that the actual results of these programs vary greatly. It is difficult

for universities to justify encouraging students to undertake the large costs and inconveniences of spending a semester or more abroad when many programs do not bring about a measurable increase in intercultural competency. In fact, for some students, studying abroad seems to actually decrease their intercultural proficiency.

Recently, Michael Vande Berg, et al., published the results of a multi-year, quantitative study that was massive in scope. For six years they measured the intercultural development (as measured by the Intercultural Development Index (IDI)) of study abroad participants enrolled in sixty-one different programs. The IDI is a quantitative measure of intercultural development which places students' attitudes about other cultures along a continuum, from ethnocentric to ethnorelative (Bennett, 1993). By measuring the students' position along the continuum at the beginning and the end of their study abroad program, the researchers were able to measure each students' gain (or loss) in intercultural growth. The study abroad programs which the students were enrolled in varied in duration, composition, academic focus, geographical location and host language- in short, a very diverse selection of study abroad programs. The students surveyed numbered over 1100, a very robust sample size.

This study brought to light a number of surprising findings, but one of the most unexpected was the statistical difference the data showed in the intercultural development of male and female students during their study abroad program. "On average, females in this study made statistically significant gains in their intercultural development while abroad. Male IDI scores, on average, in fact mathematically *decreased* abroad" (Vande Berg, 2009, p. 20, italics original).

Why should this be the case? Dr. Vande Berg presented the findings of his study during the 2008 Forum on Education Abroad conference, a professional association for study abroad administrators. At the conference, Dr. Vande Berg, CEO of one of the largest and most respected study abroad organizations, admitted that he had no idea why the gender difference existed, and asked for the professionals in the room to brainstorm some possible reasons for it. It was difficult to think of a good reason for such a stark gender contrast, and no one was able to come up with a plausible theory.

This study is a qualitative response to a quantitative question. Why did the average male student on a study abroad program actually lose intercultural competency instead of gaining it? Why did the average female student, participating in the same program in the same time and place, gain those same skills? What is really happening when students of different genders study abroad?

Literature Review

Intercultural Competency

In order to properly understand how gender might impact a student's ability to gain "intercultural competency," it is, of course, necessary to find out what the term actually means. A variety of authors prescribe slightly different definitions. Vande Berg's study used the Intercultural Development Index (IDI) as a quantitative measure of students' position along a continuum of intercultural development (Bennett, 1993). The difference between the students' starting and ending point along the continuum showed how much intercultural competency they had gained (or lost) over time.

The IDI is adapted from Milton Bennett's model of the Intercultural Development Inventory. The inventory models intercultural development as occurring along a continuum, with most people starting at the "ethnocentric" side of the continuum and moving (hopefully) to the "ethnorelative" side of the continuum. There are six stages in the IDI; three ethnocentric and three ethnorelative. In order, from ethnocentric to ethnorelative, they are: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration . A decrease in one's IDI means that a person has become more ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism includes attitudes like the belief that one's culture is superior to other cultures, or the denial that other cultures really exist at all. Ethnorelative attitudes include empathy towards people from other cultures, respect for cultural differences, and at the highest levels, the integration of the cultural beliefs of two or more cultures into one's personal world view (Bennett, 1993). Therefore, according to the Intercultural Development Inventory, a person who has gained intercultural competency is one who espouses ethnorelative views.

One problem with Bennett's model is that it assigns value judgments to students' beliefs, such as calling a belief in the universal fundamental sameness of all people "Minimization," a stage on the ethnocentric side of the continuum. Since the word "ethnocentric" has a negative connotation, a student who felt labeled with that adjective could become defensive. In addition, many religions teach that all people are created in God's image, and so are fundamentally the same, and to label that religious belief as in the realm of "ethnocentric" seems insensitive and, ironically, possibly ethnocentric in itself.

The IDI is a useful instrument to measure one's current state of ethnorelativism, but it does not necessarily describe the methods by which this state is attained, or how one reaches the next stage. Bennett suggests activities and teaching methods that are appropriate to each developmental stage, but in order to apply these methods, the stage a person is in must be known. Although the creators of this model claim it is universally applicable, other researchers have found that the IDI does not seem to give accurate results for non-Western students' intercultural development (Greenholtz, 2005), and ironically that Bennett's development model in itself may be ethnocentric. Despite these criticisms, the IDI is the instrument of choice within study abroad research, as we can see from the Vande Berg study's reliance upon it. Fortunately, it is not the only definition of intercultural competency, and it can be used in conjunction with other definitions to give us a better idea of the meaning of this term.

Robert Selby describes "intercultural education" as that which "leads students to learn about the subjective meaning people ascribe to to events and relationships with institutions and other people, and ultimately to themselves" (Selby, 2008, p. 4). Therefore we can guess that intercultural competency, to Selby, is the knowledge of these subjective meanings. However, other authors stress that intercultural competence is more than knowledge alone; it is a set of skills and abilities related to interacting with people of many different cultures. Janet Bennett writes that "intercultural competency" is "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural settings" (Bennett, 2008, p. 16). Therefore competency has three components: thinking, feeling, and doing.

Darla Deardorff surveyed a large number of education abroad professionals in order to find out the field's consensus on the definition of "intercultural competence." Deardorff found that most of the professionals agreed that intercultural competence is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2008, p. 33). We can see that competence in intercultural situations is closely tied to communication and other necessary skills, and requires knowledge of other cultures. Deardorff describes the necessary skills as "listening, observing, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating," and states that "knowledge, which is constantly changing, is not sufficient in the development of intercultural competence," and that students need to use the above skills to "apply cultural knowledge on an ongoing basis" (Deardorff, 2008, p. 38).

Therefore, intercultural competence includes *knowledge* about a particular culture, such as its history and values, as well as the *skills* to apply that knowledge in appropriate situations. For example, people with intercultural competency will do more than simply *observe* a religious candlelight procession through the streets of Perugia; they will go on to *relate* that observation to their *knowledge* about the importance of Catholicism in Italy. All this, however, is still not enough for intercultural competency, if the person does not have the appropriate intercultural attitude.

Deardorff writes that the third criterion, attitude, is the prerequisite for success in the other categories. The most important attitudes are "openness (withholding judgment), respect (valuing all cultures), curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity)"

(Deardorff, 2008, p. 37). Without these attitudes, it's not likely that a person will ever acquire the sorts of knowledge that will allow them to place cultural observations in context. For instance, without openness and respect, it's not likely that they will have the desire to behave appropriately in intercultural situations. Lacking curiosity, it's not likely a person will have a desire to travel to or learn about a new culture.

Accepting the above as a working definition of intercultural competency, how does a person acquire all these commendable skills, attitudes and knowledge? There are not very many undergraduate students I know of who fulfill all the requirements above, and I certainly did not, either, before my own international experience. I may have had the right attitudes, but I had very little specific cultural knowledge or intercultural communication skills. Many students I have met in my professional capacity as a study abroad advisor seem to possess a great deal of cultural or historical knowledge but low levels of tolerance for ambiguity, or vice versa. Each person brings a different set of skills, knowledge and attitudes to a study abroad program. So how does one obtain intercultural competency?

If even half of college graduates had all the skills and attitudes described by Deardorff (respect, curiosity, good communication skills), "[s]ociety would be more peaceful, more productive, and become a generally more attractive place in which to live. Individuals would be better able to understand others who are unlike themselves. Through such improved understanding, a great deal of conflict could be avoided; the world would be a better place" (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 222). With the advent of globalization and increased contact between people of vastly different cultural

backgrounds, ensuring that young people possess these kinds of communication skills is more essential than ever before. Within the field of study abroad, a great deal of research has been focused on just *how* people learn to become interculturally competent.

Models of Intercultural Competency

The research has spawned a variety of explanatory models to show how intercultural competency is acquired. Savicki, et al., describe three general theories of intercultural adjustment (a process which is intended to lead to intercultural competence). "Culture shock" theory describes cultural adjustment happening in three phases: the first phase where sojourners experience "entry euphoria," the second, where students enter a crisis phase when "encounters reveal clashing values between home and host cultures," and the third phase, "recovery," where "sojourners begin to... learn skills and knowledge to help them navigate successfully in the host culture" (Savicki, Adams, Wilde, & Binder, 2007, p. 114). However, this definition, while descriptive of the overall process of adjustment to a new culture, certainly does not tell us *how* a person actually obtains the skills and knowledge that will lead them to the "recovery" phase, except perhaps that the student has prolonged contact with the host culture.

The second model the authors describe, "Anxiety/Uncertainty Management," concerns the anxiety that students feel when they have interactions with host nationals and are unsure about how best to react. The model focuses on the visiting students' lack of knowledge about the host culture, and how this lack of knowledge leads them to feel anxiety and uncertainty. Then, in order to reduce their anxiety, the students will be

motivated to increase their knowledge about the culture. In this way, and through exposure to the host culture, they will gain this knowledge that will eventually relieve their anxiety. Again, it is important to note that this model also relies on interaction with, or exposure to, the host culture.

The "Cultural Learning" approach focuses instead on the students' lack of skills in navigating social situations in the host culture. According to this model, students lack specific cultural skills to relate to their new cultural environment, and respond to social situations in the way they would have if they had been in their home country. Later, "as learning proceeds through exposure to the host culture, skills increase..." (Savicki et al., 2007, p. 115). Simply, "through exposure to the host culture," skills seem to increase almost magically.

However, one of the most prominent criticisms of the adjustment models of cross-cultural encounters is that they are inherently ethnocentric: "The 'ideal' consequence of the cross-cultural encounter of study abroad is not to 'adjust' to the other culture and thus, implicitly, discard elements of one's own culture in the process" (Stephenson, 2002, p. 87). The claim of ethnocentrism lies in the fact that the new skills that the individual learned in order to adjust to the culture will be discarded after they return home, and the student will never have really seen the culture from the inside out. They will have merely adjusted their behavior, not their world view.

In response, Skye Stephenson offers the idea of "cross-cultural deepening" as a better model of the path towards competency. At the same time, however, Stephenson denies that an exact formula of *how* "deepening" is accomplished can be known: "the

process of cross-cultural deepening is truly impossible to quantify and/or systematize... due to the complexity of the process [and] the uniqueness of each situation." (Stephenson, 2002, p. 90). Instead, Stephenson writes that it is a confluence of three factors that lead to intercultural learning: personal characteristics of the student, such as knowledge of the host culture, empathy, or flexibility; characteristics of the host culture, such as difference or similarity to the students' home culture or receptivity to foreigners; and characteristics of the program itself, such as supportive staff, program length, and living arrangements that do or do not provide the student with opportunities to engage with the host culture. These three factors work together to create a situation where it is more or less likely that a student will gain intercultural competency.

Stephenson's model is ultimately not very helpful in that, while it does a very good job of describing the difficulties attendant to a successful abroad experience, the description of the number of factors required for success is daunting. It would be impossible to control for so many factors to be able to know which one needs to change in order to improve a student's learning environment. A final criticism of all the models listed above is that none of them describe what research has shown to happen, at least occasionally: a student's backward progression from being more intercultural to becoming less so, as a result of cross-cultural encounters.

One of the best models is Deardorff's "Process model of intercultural competence" (Deardorff, 2008, p. 36), although this model also has its flaws. In Deardorff's model, factors within the individual work together to create the desired internal outcome (attitudes of respect or knowledge of the host culture). Respect within

the individual creates a higher likelihood of success when the individual interacts with

their external environment and the host culture This success will help them gain more

respect for, or knowledge of, the host culture. These personal interactions create a loop

(more respect leads to more interactions, which leads to more respect, etc.) in order to

foster greater intercultural competence on the part of the student. "The nonlinear nature

of the model emphasizes the ongoing nature of the process... External outcomes [like]

effective communication and behavior – serve to promote further [favorable] attitudes"

(Deardorff, 2008, p. 39). Students are rewarded for appropriate behavior by acceptance

and approval by the host culture, which then creates a feeling of curiosity and respect

within the student, which causes him or her to find more ways to behave in culturally

appropriate ways.

Despite the appropriateness and internal consistency of this model, it is only fair

to point out that it, too, has its flaws. Deardorff herself acknowledges that the model has

a Western bias, since the international educators that she surveyed were of American or

European origin. In addition, this model, like all the previous models, does not account

for the backwards progression of learners who become less intercultural as a result of an

abroad experience. Although Deardorff puts interaction at the heart of her model, she

does not account for how negative interactions with the host culture could affect

students. Instead, she focuses on "meaningful interactions... through service learning,

homestays, volunteering in the community..." (Deardorff, 2008, p. 46), etc. But what

would happen if the students volunteering in the community felt as though their work

was being taken advantage of, or that their contributions were not valued? It is hard to

believe that those kinds of negative interactions would lead to further favorable attitudes on the part of the students. The model cannot account for this possibility.

Finally, a criticism that applies to Deardorff's model as well as all the others, is that the host national is either non-existent or is a totally passive entity. According to these models, it seems that the host culture only exists to have "meaningful interactions" with visiting students, and that the attitudes and intercultural level of the people the students encounter on a daily basis do not matter. In reality, and as my research shows, the attitudes of the host culture can have a very large impact on the intercultural learning of the students. A more reflexive model of intercultural interaction, one that takes into account the intercultural learning of host nationals as well as of visiting students, would be more reflective of reality.

Intercultural Competency in Practice

Whatever model educators or researchers use to describe the process of becoming more intercultural, research and personal experience on the part of educators have shown a number of methods or learning situations to be more efficacious than others. In reality, intercultural competence can be gained in a variety of ways, and not all of them require a sojourn abroad. Some people are raised in a way that assures that they become interculturally competent: "Biracial children, for example, can often operate effectively within each of their parents' cultures and can connect the two" (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 224).

In addition, members of ethnic or gendered groups within a larger society may gain some measure of intercultural competency, since they are aware of the larger, dominant mass culture at the same time that they are participating in a group that has its own cultural codes. Examples of groups could be African Americans, gays and lesbians, transsexuals, women, or Muslims. Members of the dominant group have greater power, meaning they have the ability to choose to ignore the unique cultures of the subgroups. Members of subgroups do not have this luxury, and are required to function in two (or more) cultural worlds (Borisoff & Merrill, 2003). Due to the cultural shifting that they must perform in their everyday lives, members of these groups *may* be predisposed to have higher intercultural competency than members of the mass culture. More research would need to be done in order to substantiate this supposition.

In the classroom, educators can use a variety of methods to help students gain a higher level of intercultural competency. "...[I]ntercultural communication courses often use simulation games, exercises, videos, and other types of learning in which another culture can be experienced by the learner" (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 225). Even in the classroom, the point of intercultural training is to give learners the chance to *experience* living in another culture, as much as possible: "if intercultural communication training is to have an effect... the unalike culture must be experienced. One cannot just talk... One has to *do* it" (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 225).

Classroom training can be undertaken when students want or need to learn intercultural skills but are not able, for whatever reason, to travel and immerse themselves in a different culture. A comparative study of study abroad programs found

that the best way to become more intercultural is to spend a significant amount of time with people of another culture, and then to process the experience with a cultural mentor (Vande Berg, 2009). This pre-requisite of sustained interaction with other cultures is the best justification for a student to undertake the costs, risks and inconveniences of a study abroad program. However, since the same research also showed that, on average, male students become *less* interculturally competent after a study abroad program (Vande Berg, 2009), it seems that male students might want to think twice before studying abroad. "Intercultural contact in many cases leads an individual to become more ethnocentric, prejudiced, and discriminatory" (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 222), and this seems to be especially true for the male study abroad participants. Assuming that the cultural mentoring provided through the program is the same for male and female students, how can educators control for the other side of the equation, interaction with peoples of other cultures? How can they ensure that all students are having the right kinds of intercultural encounters?

It is impossible, of course, to control the environment so that a student can have an authentic experience and a completely positive one at the same time. Due to the nature of intercultural exchange, it is very likely that people on both sides of a cross-cultural interaction are going to experience confusion, curiosity, anxiety, fear, anger, or a number of other intense emotions. These emotions give the experience of crossing cultures its power and allure; the problem is that they can also prevent some people from making further cross-cultural contacts. To structure a student's interactions in the way that is most efficacious for learning, researchers have found that there a number of

helpful ways in which administrators should construct the study abroad program environment.

Research has shown that many factors affect students' ability to gain intercultural competency. Students' language level going into the program can affect their ability to interact with the host culture in meaningful ways. It has been shown that students with higher levels of ability in the local language are more likely to gain intercultural competency (Vande Berg, 2009). In addition, students who have studied a language abroad are more likely to use that language "like a native" with greater fluency of speech (Freed, 1998).

Study abroad programs have been shown to raise "global mindedness" in participants, but do not necessarily guarantee an increase in intercultural communication skills or responsibility (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright, & McMillen, 2009). A longer study abroad program is positively correlated with global mindedness and intercultural competency gains in student participants (Dwyer, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Vande Berg, 2009), although short-term programs can also be effective if they are well-structured (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006). Specific programmatic interventions are necessary to ensure that students gain sufficient opportunities to interact with the host culture. Examples of effective programmatic interventions are internships and volunteering in the community as well as living with a host family and meeting frequently with a cultural mentor (Gonzalez, 1993; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Raschio, 2001; Vande Berg, 2009; Wessel, 2007); however, many study abroad administrators still do not incorporate these elements into program structure. Even when

they do incorporate learning interventions, Vande Berg's study found that the average male student, and not the average female student, will *still* lose intercultural competency when studying abroad. Therefore, something about the difference between being male or female must be at the heart of the problem.

Doing Gender

Given that interaction is a crucial prerequisite to gaining intercultural competency, how does that interaction relate to gender? First of all, what is gender? There are numerous theories of how gender is created and maintained, and indeed an entire field of gender scholarship, but to simplify things a great deal, the current consensus among gender scholars is that gender is a socially constructed concept. Being masculine or feminine, in the way that our culture conceives these ideas, does not necessarily relate to having male or female genitalia, or even an XX or XY pair of chromosomes. Most differences between men and women are not biological; they are cultural.

We all can think of examples of individuals who, in our own experience, blur the lines of what is usually expected of males or females in our culture, or perhaps we ourselves are these individuals. Having XX chromosomes does not mean that all female people will have long hair or wish to have children. Possessing XY chromosomes does not mean that all male people will be muscular or conceal their emotions. These are just some of the stereotypes and expectations that our culture assigns to different genders.

In 1987, two scholars published a landmark article in the field of gender studies that conceived of gender not just as a social construct, but a social construct that is reinforced and maintained on an ongoing, daily basis. To West and Zimmerman, *gender* is something we do, not something we are. They divided the concepts of sex and gender into three components: sex, sex category, and gender:

> *Sex* is a determination made through application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males... *sex category* is... established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category... *Gender*, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category. (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127).

Therefore, our sex is purely biological: our possession of male or female genitalia, or XX or XY chromosomes, or whatever is socially agreed upon at the moment in which we are born. We then are placed in a sex category, which is the outward manifestation of our sex. We cannot be looking at everyone's genitalia all the time, just to identify their sex, so we use sex categories as a convenient shorthand. People boost their claim to a sex category when they arrange their appearance in ways that are consistent with their society's ideas of what men and women should look like.

If we want people to identify us as a biological woman, we dress and arrange our hair in ways that our culture recognizes as female. If we want to be identified as a biological male, we make sure our outward appearance can be interpreted as "male" by everyone we meet. The authors conceive of sex category as a "master identity" that "cut[s] across situations" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 128). Wherever we are,

whatever we are doing, we conceive of ourselves as male or female (even if, for some people, their sex category does not correspond to their biological sex).

Finally, "gender," for West and Zimmerman, is a verb. "Sex categorization and the accomplishment of gender are not the same" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 134). In order for others to place us in a sex category, we may try to appear to be male or female in their eyes, but inappropriate behavior could very easily derail our efforts. A biological man may wear a dress and appear to be female, but he will fool no one unless he also *acts* like a female in social situations. Since there are innumerable social situations in which we must continually prove our sex category, "displaying gender must be finely fitted to situations and modified or transformed as the occasion demands" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 135). Gender is something we *do* in order to prove our belonging to the male or female sex category.

For example, in almost all households that are headed by a man and a woman, the woman does more than half of the housework (Fuwa, 2004). Whatever the reasonings and rationalizations behind this arrangement, according to West and Zimmerman, when the woman does the dishes she is also doing femininity. When the man does not help out with the housework, he is doing masculinity. We often do gender in public settings, like when a young man stands up to give a woman his seat on the bus. He is also doing masculinity in that situation.

In addition, the authors argue, we are all "accountable" for our gendered performances. People in our society are constantly talking to each other, making comments on what happens in our social environment:

These descriptions name, characterize, formulate, explain, excuse, excoriate, or merely take notice of some circumstance or activity and thus place it within some social framework... societal members orient to the fact that their activities are subject to comment (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 136).

We know that if we start to do gender differently, for instance, if a man refuses to watch football or a woman becomes a football player, people around us will talk about it. Whether they approve or not, they will talk about it, and knowing this is a very consistent pressure to do gender in socially-accepted ways.

The authors also argue that all of our social interactions have the potential to be gendered, and most of them already are. In fact, West and Zimmerman's model relies so heavily on the idea of gender being maintained through social interaction that it is frequently called the "interactional model" of gender. Strangers very frequently do gender with each other, for instance the man on the bus mentioned above, or when a woman touches the belly of a pregnant woman she has never met. Gender is constantly maintained through interaction between men and women, as well as between people of the same sex category. Gender interaction can frequently be as simple as a look or a gesture.

In addition, all gender interaction is based on our shared, intimate knowledge of our society's expectations for each sex category, within every conceivable situation. These expectations can be called gender "scripts." Larger than stereotypes, these gender scripts give us a framework for each interaction so that, knowing the sex category of each individual, we can all perform gender in a socially appropriate way in each and every situation encountered in our daily lives. The authors argue that all members of a society have an intimate knowledge of the dominant culture's gender scripts.

To summarize, the main ideas, as they relate to my research, are 1) that individuals do gender with every single social interaction, 2) that individuals do gender in a way that is consistent with their own culture's gender scripts, 3) individuals are held accountable to others for the way they do gender, and hold others accountable as well, and 4) gender interaction is not reliant on verbal communication, and is frequently expressed non-verbally.

Additional Theories of Gender

Other authors have theorized gender in slightly different ways. To some, gender is a result of social structure, the hierarchy that consistently privileges men over women. These theorists point to the ubiquity of women's lower social standing throughout the world as a result of a social structures that give them fewer legal rights, less access to education, and require them to be dependent on men for their physical safety and financial support (Martin, 2004; Risman, 2004).

Other authors refer to the "gender system," the theory that hegemonic cultural beliefs reinforce the gender hierarchy. These beliefs prejudice people (even women) against women and cause them to assume that women are always less capable or intelligent than men. This system also creates a "self-fulfilling prophesy" by undermining women's beliefs in themselves as autonomous human beings (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Consistently, gender theorists have rejected the notion that biology plays an outsized role in the differences between men and women, and argue that social

interactions are usually responsible for almost all the behavioral and personal differences between the sexes that our culture conditions us to expect. Gender scholars consider most claims of biological explanations for behavioral differences between women and men to be simply another way in which we do gender. Therefore, our understanding of gender relations is almost completely culturally based (interactional), and the role of biology is much less important than the media and our culture like to portray it (Miller & Yang Costello, 2001; Risman, 2001).

However, there is an important gap in the literature and the research on gendered interactions. If the way that we do gender during social interactions is regulated and influenced by our knowledge of our culture's gender scripts, what will happen when two people who are from different cultures attempt to interact? Since almost all (or possibly all) interaction is gendered (or has the possibility to be gendered), this question is highly relevant. There are very few articles in the literature on either gender theory, or intercultural communication theory, that address intercultural communication in terms of gender.

In addition, since gender interaction is not dependent on verbal communication, and can be accomplished through non-verbal interaction like glances, gestures, and body language, sharing a common language is not a prerequisite for individuals to do gender. Therefore, I predict that gender interaction will be extremely relevant to cross-cultural interaction, and that cross-cultural interaction will be highly influenced by the ways in which the people involved do gender.

Study Abroad and Gender

Female students are over-represented among study abroad participants, so studying abroad is already a site of doing gender within US society. Among US study abroad participants, females made up 65% of this group, and males only 35% (Open Doors 2008: Report on International Educational Exchange, 2008). This may be due to the over-representation of females in post-secondary education in America. At the University of Oregon, undergraduate students are 50.5% female; however, in the United States as a whole, undergraduate students are 57% female, and that number is expected to rise (IES: National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Therefore, there is a gender component to post-secondary education, as well as studying abroad as a part of that education, since females are even more over-represented among study abroad participants than they are as members of the undergraduate student population (65% of study abroad participants vs. 57% of post-secondary students). Exploration of that gender component is a topic that is outside the scope of this research; however, it would be an important topic for further study, since perhaps many students choose to study abroad (or not) for the same reasons that they choose (or do not choose) to undertake a college education.

A limited number of articles in the study abroad literature have attempted to describe the special challenges of female participants who travel to a country that has a very different gender system than the United States. Twombly's article was arguably the first to look at the differences between male and female participants in a study abroad program (Twombly, 1995). Twombly studied US students who spent a semester in Costa

Rica and chronicled the female students' struggles in dealing with "piropos," the flirtatious (but sometimes rude) catcalls that Costa Rican men give to young, especially foreign, women.

She found that the female students had trouble adjusting to life in Costa Rica and struggled with a sense of "alienation" from the culture. They felt harassed by the constant piropos on the street but did not change the way they dressed in order to become less conspicuous. They also found it difficult to make friendships with young Costa Rican women. Twombly recommended, among other things, creating a forum for the women to discuss their reactions to piropos and to provide better orientation and in-country support for the female students.

Talburt and Stewart (Talburt & Stewart, 1999) and Anderson (Anderson, 2003) also found that female study abroad participants had difficulty adjusting to the gender norms of a different culture. Talburt and Stewart wrote about a young black woman who studied abroad in Spain, and how she struggled with the racist and sexist comments she received on the street. They also reported that the other students on the program could not seem to relate, or even empathize with this student, even after the topic was introduced in their cultural discussion seminar. They argue that it is "incumbent on programs to create opportunities for discussion of cross-cultural views of race and gender" because this will "enable students marked by their race and gender to understand and deal with their positions [and] it will invite all students to learn from others' experiences" (Talburt & Stewart, 1999, p. 173).

Anderson studied the experiences of ten female students who studied abroad in Costa Rica and also found that they had trouble adjusting to the new gender expectations of their host culture. She found that language proficiency is not enough in itself to guarantee that female students would be able to adjust to the culture. Like Talburt and Stewart, she also came to the conclusion that guided discussion is necessary in order for women to be able to adjust. She then points out that it is very important that female students adopt the culturally-expected behavior of not traveling in public alone, for fear of serious repercussions: "If strangers get the impression that a wandering female is unknowledgeable about local realities and also morally unprotected [unescorted by a male or a family member], social inhibitions may be loosened and she may find herself in real danger" (Anderson, 2003, p. 36).

Other studies have found that women have unique challenges when studying abroad in a new culture, and that US students have difficulty conforming to differing (usually more restrictive) gender expectations in their host countries. On a study abroad program in Russia, female students made fewer gains in language skills than male students because they were excluded from conversations (Brecht & Ginsberg, 1995). Researchers have also looked at gender and homestays (Gutel, 2007), the complexities of gender and race among white and black study abroad students in Africa (Landau & Moore, 2001), and general cross-cultural differences in gender (Jessup-Anger, 2008) and described female students' challenges in all these situations.

However, none of these studies explain the Vande Berg study's finding that, on average, female students made greater gains in intercultural proficiency than did male

students. That, "while the IDI scores of female participants increased significantly, the IDI scores of males in fact *decreased* slightly (Vande Berg, 2009, p. 20). All of the previous study abroad literature on gender would cause one to believe that women would make fewer intercultural gains than men, when in fact, the opposite tends to be true.

Many of the qualitative studies have focused primarily or exclusively on female participants to the exclusion of male participants, even though both women and men participate in doing gender. It would seem that, although researchers show female students having negative experiences like harassment, difficulty meeting local women, cultural alienation, and possibly serious personal safety concerns during study abroad programs, culturally, on average female students are greater beneficiaries than males. There is a unique place in the literature for a study like this one, which studied the experiences of students of both genders in the context of their unique opportunities and challenges in intercultural learning in Italy.

Background Information

Italy is the second most popular study abroad destinations for American students (after the United Kingdom), hosting 12% of all study abroad participants in 2007, for a total of over 27,000 visiting American students in all that year (Open Doors 2008: Report on International Educational Exchange). Italian law generally grants equal rights for women, but in practice, the public accepts a double standard. For example, the current Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, has been accused of having had extra-marital

sexual relationships with women as young as 18, with little political fallout (Poggioli, 2009). Married women in Italy still do much more of the housework than their counterparts in the United States. In addition, Italy ranks quite low compared to 21 other industrialized countries on a Gender Empowerment scale (GEM), having a GEM of .26 (compared to the GEM of the US of .68), on a scale of 0 to 1, where 1 is the most egalitarian country (Fuwa, 2004, p. 785).

Perugia is a medium-sized hill city and one of the most important cities of its region, Umbria, in central Italy. The old, central part of Perugia is built on a hill, the cobblestone streets are very narrow, and most people get around by walking. My subjects were placed in various apartments scattered around within the central part of Perugia, for the most part within the old city walls.

Perugia is also the site of the ongoing Amanda Knox murder trial, which has received widespread attention within Italy and the US. Amanda Knox is an American study abroad participant from the University of Washington, and in many ways very like the young women in my study. Her roommate in Italy, a young woman from Britain, was found murdered in their shared apartment. Amanda and her Italian boyfriend were accused of murdering her after what the prosecutors termed an "orgy gone wrong." Amanda Knox has since been found guilty of the crime, and was sentenced to 26 years in prison, though American news reports characterize the evidence against her as unfounded. It has been hinted at that one of the main reasons for Amanda Knox's conviction was her unusual behavior soon after the crime had been committed (Martin, 2009). Excerpts from her personal diary and information relating to her sexual partners

has been leaked to the press. Ms. Knox is appealing the decision. Possibly because of this sensational story, the citizens of Perugia are sensitive to the presence of young foreigners in their city and monitor their actions closely. My subjects did not seem to be aware of this recent historical context.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

My motivation for this study springs from several different sources. As an undergraduate, I participated in a year-long study abroad program in Milan, Italy. At the time that program began, in September of 2002, I had never been in Italy before and I had not studied the Italian language at all. I had never traveled independently and had never lived outside of my home state of Minnesota. I had many of the prerequisites for intercultural learning, most specifically the attitudes of openness, respect, and curiosity. Italy taught me to be more tolerant of ambiguity. I gained a great deal of knowledge about the history, culture and language(s) of Italy during that year long period. I also felt I obtained some measure of the personal transformation which is supposed to result as an outcome of a successful study abroad program. However, the downfalls of my particular program were that I took classes with American students and lived with them, as well. I had very little social interaction with Italians, something the students in my study also lacked.

Since completing that program, I have worked in study abroad administration for four years, helping other students choose programs, enroll, get ready for their trip, and provided support while they were there. When I went to Perugia for this research project, my Italian language level was sufficient to understand almost all Italian spoken

within my hearing. My speaking and reading levels were sufficient to allow me to

arrange outings for the students on the program.

The Perugia Program; Subject Demographics

I chose the Perugia program mainly because it took place in Italy, the time frame

was convenient for my own needs, and I guessed correctly that I would be able to secure

an internship since it was a program administered by the University of Oregon, where I

was enrolled as a graduate student. It took place for eight weeks in the months of July

and August 2009. It was an intensive Italian language seminar, where the students

earned twelve credits (the equivalent of one year of college-level study) in eight short

weeks. No previous Italian proficiency was required for admission to the program, but

all the students except two had studied the language for at least one year before

participating. Those two students had not studied Italian at all before participating.

Therefore, all students were in the beginning/intermediate Italian language level.

Twenty-six students enrolled in the program, twenty-five of whom agreed to

participate in my study. I was very lucky in that I happened to have chosen one of the

only programs that had an equal number of female and male participants; most study

abroad programs have more women than men. I had twelve female and thirteen male

subjects. Almost all the participants were enrolled at the University of Oregon as full-

time students, and were generally representative of that University's demographics.

Although I did not survey the students on their races or ages, I surmise from their

physical appearance that most or all of them were white. All were within the typical

study abroad student age range of 18-22, with one exception, a student in her fifties. Only one of the students was openly gay. In my notes, I kept track of them by a coding system in order to maintain anonymity: the female students were randomly labeled from 1F-12F and the male students were randomly labeled from 1M-13M.

The program was led by two University of Oregon Italian professors and one Italian graduate teaching fellow. I was able to offer my services as a second graduate assistant. I was responsible for scheduling and arranging excursions for the students on the program. These excursions were completely voluntary and not all the students attended, especially as the program progressed and they became more independent. Examples of excursions and activities that I arranged were: a day trip to the neighboring city of Assisi, a ferry trip on Lago Trasimeno, a day trip to the Cascate delle Marmore, and various dinners hosted at my residence that I shared with the other graduate teaching fellow.

Qualitative Methods

I decided to make my study completely qualitative for a number of different reasons. I considered using the Intercultural Development Index as a marker for how much my students had gained in intercultural competency as a result of the program, but the cost of training and certification in order to use the Index (several thousand dollars) was a great deal more than I budgeted for this study. In addition, the Index as an instrument has received mixed reviews of its efficacy (Greenholtz, 2005; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghere, 2003) even though it is the instrument of choice in

much study abroad research. Although quantitative measures are usually seen as more prestigious (Griffin, 1986), feminist scholars argue that qualitative methods are more appropriate for researching women's lives and the complex relationship webs of which their lives are composed (Grant, Ward, & Xue, 1987). Feminist gender researchers have a long history of using qualitative methods:

> The most common strategy advocated by feminists in a search for a collaborative and non-exploitive relationship with the participants in their/our research project has been some variant of a qualitative methodology, either based on in-depth interviews or, less frequently, on participant observation and ethnographic research (McDowell, 1992, p. 406).

In order to avoid problematic researcher/subject power imbalances, many feminist researchers tend to favor qualitative methods. Since my research relies heavily on feminist thought, especially the West and Zimmerman model of gender as interaction (West & Zimmerman, 1987), it is appropriate to place my research within the feminist tradition. Therefore, I chose the qualitative methods of participant-observation and semi-structured interviews as the best ways to understand and interpret the lived experiences of my research subjects.

Participant-Observation

During the program, I engaged solely in participant-observation as my supervisors felt that engaging in interviews during that time would be a conflict of interest. If, during the course of an interview, the students had disclosed something they had done that might require disciplinary measures, it would have been my duty to report it. Therefore, I took notes and engaged the students in informal conversation, but conducted no formal interviews until six months later. My supervisors agreed that, after

the program was over, if simple alcohol or drug transgressions had come to light, it would not necessitate follow-up. In the end, none of the students disclosed anything to me that would be considered a behavioral infraction.

Since the students had signed consent forms, they knew about the focus of my study and were actively engaged in brainstorming hypotheses with me. They would ask, "what have you found out?" and shared their theories on the subject. Their thoughts were helpful to me although I did not feel as if I was ready to share a hypothesis yet. Looking back, my participant-observation phase was an important part of my study. Since I had been in Italy with the students, they felt more comfortable talking with me than they probably otherwise would have, and when they spoke about other students who had participated in the program or program activities, I knew who and what they were talking about.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted over the phone approximately six months after the end of the program, in January and February of 2010. This time frame was very beneficial to my research as the six months had allowed the students to readjust to life in the US and reflect on their experiences. I do not believe that they would have been as introspective and thoughtful about what they had gone through if I had interviewed them directly after the program ended, or during our last day in Italy. Being back in the US for a few months had allowed them to incorporate the study abroad experience into their regular lives. The interview questions were open-ended. I had some ideas about what

the differences might have been, but allowing the students themselves to lead our conversations was deeply illuminating.

Some examples of interview questions were: How was your time in Italy? What was the best experience you had there? How would you describe Italian culture to someone who doesn't know anything about it, based on your experiences in Italy? Do you feel that your experience was different from what a [man/woman] would have experienced had they been in your place? In what ways? Did you experience any sexual harassment, or did you witness someone else being harassed? [If so], what happened? How did you change as a person as a result of your study abroad experience? For a complete list of interview questions, please see the Appendix. I conducted the interviews over the phone and simultaneously typed the students' responses. My subject pool for the interview was smaller than the original participant-observation group: I interviewed twelve students in all, seven male and five female students.

My final interview question was "What is your gender?" The students and I usually laughed that I had to ask them such a silly question. They then predictably said "male" or "female." Only one student (8F) was confused by the question and said "Oh, I'm straight," and then laughingly corrected herself, saying "female." Although it was a bit awkward, I felt it was necessary to ask the students their genders, just in case one of them could have been doing gender differently than mainstream American culture, or was an intersexed, transgender, or transsexual person. Our shared discomfort with this important demographic question is due to one of the fundamental tenets of West and Zimmerman's "Doing Gender:" my having to ask them their gender implied that they

were not doing gender well, and perhaps were failing to display their sex category correctly (West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to our culture, if a person is doing gender well, there should be no doubt about whether they are male or female, and if there is a doubt, that person is doing gender wrong. However, none of the students reported being a different gender than the one they display on a daily basis.

Limitations

There were many limitations of my study. The small subject pool almost guaranteed that my students would not be representative of the hugely diverse group of American students who study abroad each year, but I hope my students' experiences are at least somewhat reflective of the whole. The study was also limited in time and space. My students only studied abroad for eight weeks, and my interviews were conducted six months after that. Although intercultural competency is a lifelong pursuit, their thoughts and actions that take place after those six months will not be included in this study.

Another limitation was that my role during the program was as an administrator, not a peer. At the dinners I hosted in my home, I was prohibited from serving the students more than one glass of wine, or even from letting them touch the bottle of wine themselves. I understand the caution on the part of my superiors who instituted these rules, and of course I did not desire to get my subjects intoxicated. It was not the inability to serve alcohol so much as the presence of the rules themselves that created a greater social distance between my subjects and me.

Later, I noticed during the interviews that occasionally the students would mention an experience having to do with drinking alcohol, but then quickly shy away from speaking more in-depth about it with me. My personal study abroad experience entailed a great deal of alcohol consumption, and I am sure that many of my subjects used alcohol while they were in Italy. This was a part of their experience that they were not comfortable sharing with me, but I believe that learning more about the ways students use (or do not use) alcohol on a study abroad program would be a very important area for further study.

My own gender may have limited my ability to research this subject. I felt that I connected well with both male and female students, and I befriended students of both genders. However, I am female, and that fact in itself could have influenced the ways in which the students interacted and spoke with me. In addition, my experiences as a woman in Italy may have colored my views. My personal opinion of the catcalls and whistles that young women (including me) receive when they are in Italy is that they are disgusting and offensive. This opinion may have influenced the ways that I spoke and wrote about this subject. It is impossible for me to know the intentions of those who catcall and whistle at me since I am not male or a native of Italian culture and I did not have access to Italian cultural informants. I can, however, study the effects these interactions had on my subjects, which is the basis of a large part of my study.

The tone of some research undertaken on study abroad students is bothersome in that occasionally it can be cynical about students' motivations or about "kids these days" in general. I am happy to say that I had the opposite experience: I am deeply grateful for

and humbled by the interactions I had with the students. Their passion, hard work, and curiosity about the world make them excellent cultural ambassadors and I am hopeful that they will continue to have cross-cultural experiences. We should all be so lucky to be able to spend time with such wonderful and enthusiastic young people.

CHAPTER III

GENDER SIMILARITIES IN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF STUDY ABROAD

There were many more similarities than differences in the students' experiences of the study abroad program. Although my analysis will be focusing on the differences between students' experiences, it is absolutely necessary to explore the similarities. One of the most important similarities was that both the male and female students said that they enjoyed the study abroad experience a great deal.

11M: [It was] the best time of my life for sure.

8F: It was really good... it was wonderful for me. One of the best experiences I ever had.

1M: It was not [the] best experience, but overall an amazing time.

5F: I loved my time in Italy.

10F: It was amazing. [laugh] Everything about it.

Even if some students had complaints about the structure of the program, or certain aspects of the experience, they all seemed to agree that it had been a positive time in their life and they were glad that they had done it.

Another similarity was that all the students interviewed felt that they had learned something, although what and how much they learned did vary. Some students emphasized the amount of Italian language proficiency they had gained:

> 10M: My best experience [was when] I actually made an entire hotel reservation in Italian without a mistake... I made the whole reservation in Italian, and then I was like, 'finally!'

> 5F: That was my main goal: learn to speak. In maybe two, three tenses, be able to communicate with my landlady, my baker, the vendors at the vegetable stand. I definitely accomplished them, and I did better than I expected...

> 11F: I wanted to be able to hold extended conversations with an Italian person, and I wanted to dream in Italian, and I had a dream in Italian in August, I told everyone, I was so proud, I had a 40 minute conversation with a man in Rome, we were joking, it felt completely natural.

What was somewhat surprising is that more students did not emphasize having learned a great deal of Italian language. The program was an intensive Italian language seminar, and the students earned the equivalent of an entire year's worth of Italian credits in eight short weeks. However, it seemed that the other things they learned were more meaningful to them.

Both male and female students also agreed that they had learned about other cultures. The Perugia program differs from many programs in that the American students had more opportunities to interact with other foreign students than with Italian nationals. The program took place during the months of July and August, the most popular time for Italians to leave cities like Perugia in favor of an extended seaside vacation. In addition, due to the Italian language school's location in Perugia, the city is always teeming with international students who only stay for a few months. Possibly because of this, it seemed that the Italian permanent residents were not overly interested in making friendships with the foreign students.

The American students on the program were placed in Italian classes with other foreign students from all over the world, from China to Argentina to Turkey to Australia,

and it seemed as though they found it easier to make intercultural connections with these students than with Italians in Perugia. Both male and female students had learned about the various cultures of the other foreign students who were in their classes or lived as their roommates.

> 13M: [T]he people from Argentina, they were so, just a different perspective on how the world functions...
>
> 11M: Yeah, [I went on a date] with a girl from Turkey, I hung out with her for like a week, I made her dinner one night and we went out one night... [it was] kind of surprising, I was able to communicate with her about just about anything.
>
> 8F: ...[W]e had a lot of Chinese students in our class, [we] talked to them, [I] made a friend from Argentina, in the conversation class... everyone would talk about their countries.
>
> 5F: I didn't think it was that big a deal that Claire [5F's Taiwanese friend] and I hung out, but it was a huge, it was a big thing, I think [to the other Taiwanese students]... in Taiwan, they judge a lot. I think their culture sets structures, and then they realize it's not like that, we [in the US] have certain structures but nothing to the extreme...

One of the male interview subjects pointed out that through making friends with gay students he was able to learn about gay culture, an opportunity for which he was grateful: "I don't know how to say [this] without being rude, I'm from a small community and that was something I'd never experienced before, we had a lot of talks about gay culture. That's something I got out of the trip that I don't think anyone else did." All the students who felt they had learned about other cultures were pleased with the experience, although many also felt they would have liked to have learned more, or made deeper interpersonal connections with people from other cultures.

Most, but not all, of the interview subjects also felt that they had learned something about themselves as a part of the study abroad experience. While they may

not have experienced a total self-transformation or a major change in their world view

over the course of the eight weeks, both female and male students said they felt they had

gained independence, confidence, or even greater tolerance as a result of studying

abroad:

> 5M: I feel like I just became a lot more open as a person. I kind of have
> communication, social-type anxiety, I don't like being around new people... but
> over there I was forced into it... It's a lot easier to talk to people [now], easier to
> be a new situation here... that kind of changed me.

> 10M: I changed a little bit. Maybe not. I don't know. Honestly I don't know. I
> like to think I became a little more outgoing.

> 11F: When I came back a lot of people noticed I was different. I always had a
> boyfriend in college, I've always been with him in a social setting, this was the
> first time in my life I was totally by myself in a social setting, meet[ing] new
> people all by myself, being independent like that was so awesome and exciting,
> now I can go to a party and meet people... I'm totally confident.

> 6M: I think I might be a little more understanding now than I was before, just
> meeting the different cultures and realizing that not everyone thinks the same
> way or was raised the same way, learning a lot about the struggles of [learning] a
> language really opened my eyes to people who are trying to learn English in the
> US, a lot of Americans don't realize that it sucks coming to a foreign culture and
> learning the language and leaving your culture behind... it's not easy and I gained
> a better perspective on that.

> 6F: One of my goals was to get out of my comfort zone and expand my horizons,
> I'm more comfortable in uncomfortable situations, [I] feel like I can do more
> now. I'm more open-minded.

Both male and female students, as we can see from the quotes above, made strides in

intercultural competency. They had learned attitudes of openness, respect, tolerance,

and had gained knowledge about other cultures. Several students, both female and male,

showed off excellent observational and analytical skills when talking about the

differences between US and Italian culture. However, it was clear that some students

had gained more than other students, and I will discuss the possible reasons for this discrepancy later.

Finally, the last important similarity between men's and women's experiences of the study abroad program was that both men and women made close friendships with other students in the program. They also have maintained these friendships after their return to the US (a task made easier by online social media and the fact that most of the students attend the same university). The students said that these friendships are important to them and that their shared experiences in Italy were the basis of ongoing get-togethers. They share photos of their trip with each other, message each other through Facebook, and continue to process their experiences in Italy with each other.

These were the main similarities between male and female students' experiences in Italy. I believe that their experiences were more similar than dissimilar. The students themselves also seemed to see things that way- that there had been small differences in the way that men and women on the program spent their time in Italy, small differences in the way they felt about their experience, but for the most part, equivalent. During our time in Italy, they would ask me "what have you found out?" and would be disappointed when I could not say. However, I am now prepared to make some assertions on what I see as the differences between women's and men's experiences in Italy.

CHAPTER IV

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF STUDY ABROAD

Personal Safety

Females' Personal Safety Concerns

One of the main differences between the men's and women's experiences in Italy was that several the women reported feeling a sense of "paranoia," and the men did not. In addition, all the women stated that they felt the need to be "cautious" at all times, and that they also tried to travel in groups whenever possible. The men I interviewed spoke about their own need to be "aware" of their surroundings, but they did not generally take concrete precautions to keep themselves safe, and they never felt the need to travel in groups.

> 8F: ...a part of me would have liked to just have gone to Rome [by myself] and seen what would have happened, I didn't feel comfortable doing that. In a country where I don't speak the language, there's certain places in the US where I wouldn't... maybe I'm a little paranoid. Anywhere you are, you don't wanna be in downtown Portland at two in the morning trying to find a hotel by yourself. You never know.

> 11F: I would tell them [other American women] to go out and make sure they have a lot of experiences out of their apartment but also be careful around the Italian men, I wish someone had told me, don't make eye contact with Italian men, to be careful but also to go out...

> 6F: ...there was never a time by myself, but I would have been uncomfortable by myself, but I made it a point to never be by myself... even a month after I got back I was still carrying my purse in front of my body.

> 10F: [My Italian landlady would] always warn us about boys. I feel like I was always pretty smart about that. I did take what she said to heart. I was always very careful to never be by myself.

> 5F: I would tell them [women going to Italy] to observe first and get used to how that culture treats foreigners. Every person is different, they shouldn't feel like they're being judged, learn as much as possible, be open, but perceive someone's intentions, my paranoia is setting in... outwards actions towards you... I was cautious, it never hurts to be cautious.

These quotes were in responses to direct questions on the differences between men's and women's experiences, and were not the first aspect of the trip that the female students mentioned. This is because, as 8F points out, they were used to being cautious of their surroundings, and use this kind of defense strategy within the US, as well. 8F would not want to be out alone at night in Portland [Oregon] without a place to stay. Constantly being cautious was not unique to their experience in Italy.

"Women worry more than men do in the same situations: going to laundromats, using public transportation, or being downtown alone after dark" (Gordon & Riger, 1989, p. 14). This fear of public places arises out of a concern for their own personal safety. "Girls are socialised into a restricted use of public space" because in certain spaces "the behaviour of any stranger encountered is potentially unpredictable and uncontrollable... research suggests that women perceive only men as strangers" (Valentine, 1989, p. 386). Women perceive certain spaces as being more dangerous at certain times or in certain situations: after dark, when the spaces are dominated by young men, or is the previous site of a known attack, among others (Gordon & Riger, 1989; Valentine, 1989). Specifically, women fear strange men and their potential for harassing or violent actions towards themselves as women.

In their daily lives, some women experience a greater amount of fear than others; however, even those women who report never feeling fear still take precautions to guard their own personal safety in public (Gordon & Riger, 1989). Like 11F, they want to live their lives and make sure they have "experiences out of their apartment," but realize that a realistic approach to the world is to act defensively. Defensive measures that women regularly use include: avoidance of certain areas at certain times, traveling in groups, avoiding eye contact with men, carrying mace, or wearing shoes that are easy to run in. Men very rarely use any of these self-defense tactics (Gordon & Riger, 1989).

As stated before, this difference in the way that men and women experience their environments is true of their lives in the US as well as their relatively short sojourn in Italy. However, this behavior they were used to undertaking at home, in a familiar environment, was heightened by their being in new place. Because "...a woman's perception of her safety in her local neighborhood... is strongly related to how well she knows and feels at ease with both her social and physical surroundings" (Valentine, 1989, p. 388), she will probably act more cautiously than usual in a place that she does not know well, such as a city like Perugia. As she starts to get to know a new neighborhood and the people in it, she will start to feel more safe.

These feelings of safety or fear have special relevance for women traveling abroad. Although all the women interviewed did travel to different cities around Italy, went out to restaurants and bars at night, and in general did almost all of the same things the men did, they did these things with a heightened sense of caution, or awareness of their surroundings. The men did not feel the same need for caution. The women's lack

of information about the social norms in Italy made almost any man a potential attacker. They found that traveling in groups and avoiding eye contact with Italian men made them feel safer.

Twombly found that her female study abroad participants in Costa Rica also felt fear and apprehension about traveling alone, and that this contributed to a feeling of "alienation" (Twombly, 1995). Anderson warned that female students should travel in groups to protect themselves from possible violent attacks in that country (Anderson, 2003). Both these authors see this caution on the part of the women to be a negative thing, and a marker of their lower status in society. However, even though it is unfair that they should have to do it, it is possible that women's tendency to engage in constant, automatic appraisal of their environment and the people in it, coupled with their refusal to give up the opportunity to make the most of their international experience, could have a positive side. The female students' constant appraisal of their environment could have the side effect of being very beneficial for cultural learning, provided their fear is not overwhelming. Observation, paying greater attention to social cues (even if the reason for it is in order to discern who might be an attacker or a friend), analysis and evaluation are several of the skills necessary for intercultural competency as described by Deardorff (Deardorff, 2008).

It is worth noting that, in US culture, females in general are socialized to be more socially observant than males, as well as being better non-verbal communicators. "In Judith Hall's (1984) extensive review of studies of differences in decoding non-verbal messages, women were found to be significantly better decoders of nonverbal cues than

were men" (Borisoff & Merrill, 2003, p. 276). Researchers have posited various

theories for why this is the case, but it is generally accepted that those of lower social

status (such as women and minorities) are required to more closely monitor the emotions

and facial expressions of the dominant group (white males). "People who are oppressed

have heightened needs to anticipate and to understand others' nonverbal messages... this

is the reason for the greater interpersonal sensitivity of women and other less dominant

persons" (Borisoff & Merrill, 2003, p. 277). White males may not even realize that

others are providing them the service of anticipating their needs, because their

observation skills may not be as fully developed as females'. White male students may

begin an international sojourn at a disadvantage in understanding the importance of

nonverbal communication.

The experiences of the female students in Italy meant that every day they needed

to use skills like analysis and evaluation as well as utilize their knowledge about the

culture. As 5F recommends, women should try to "observe first... learn as much as

possible, be open, but perceive someone's intentions." Women should scan the

environment, gain culture-specific knowledge about social norms, and continually

analyze and evaluate situations. 5F was referring to women's personal safety concerns,

but she well could have been describing a method to become more interculturally

competent. Women's focus on their own personal safety could also have the beneficial

effect of making them better cultural learners.

However, these coping strategies could also have the opposite effect and lead

women to stay in their apartment where their safety is certain. An undue amount of

caution could prevent women from having meaningful interactions with strangers (especially local men) because they feel threatened. None of the women I interviewed allowed their fear to totally prevent them from having experiences in the culture or interactions with local people, but in an extreme case it is easy to imagine that a woman would avoid experiencing the culture altogether. In fact, Twombly reported that one of her female students did just that (Twombly, 1995).

Males' Lack of Personal Safety Concerns

As much as the women speak about being "paranoid," men also believe that women need to be "careful." When they speak about safety or the difference between women and men in Italy, men list self-defensive measures that women should engage in, but they have no such prescriptions for men in general or for themselves. They believe that men should be "aware of their surroundings" in a vague way, but none of the men interviewed allowed any kind of fear for personal safety to inhibit their personal freedom to move about as they wished.

> 13M: I could walk around the streets alone at night, but a woman couldn't do that, they had to be more cautious.

> 11M: Girls need to be careful, especially, [this is a] terrible stereotype, if you're a blonde [woman], they don't see many blondes, they like to whistle... girls need to watch out for that. Guys have an easier time.

> 10M: For girls... I always remember that thing that happened to [12F]. Girls are different. Guys can always be a bit more... just keep your eyes open.

> 5M: It's a little different. I feel like you just feel like a lot safer going over as a man... a lot of people watched the movie "Taken" before they came over. Like a lot of girls just had that feeling like that kind of stuff happens more often, maybe it does... I felt a little bit safer as a man, I think.

1M: I'm the type of person, I wouldn't be a target because I'm a man but also because I'm very large, obviously Caucasian male... I was always very aware... In large crowds, put your wallet in your front pocket or in my backpack. I'd just be aware and thinking about it... a woman traveling [would be] a little more vulnerable because people would have their eye out for you. The kind of people who are trying to take advantage of you.

Clearly, the men interviewed considered the women to have a greater need to be cautious and did not generally consider that they needed to take the same precautions themselves. None of them reported that they avoided walking alone, as the women did, or that they ever felt their personal mobility to be limited. They went where they wanted to go, whenever they wanted to. Some of them even went out of their way to escort the women home at night to help keep the women safe, or to help prevent catcalling.

Men are more frequent victims of every violent crime except rape and yet they do not react by restricting their behavior, suggesting that something more than crime is implicated. Rarely are men warned not to go out at night because they will be victimized, even though they are victimized more often than women (Gordon & Riger, 1989, p. 122).

Some of the men on this study abroad program were victims of petty theft and non-violent crimes. None of the male students were victims of violent crime, fortunately. The men I surveyed clearly believed that they were not at serious risk for crime, even though they knew that some of their fellow students had been victims of non-violent theft. The thought that they could be victims, too, was not a serious consideration for them. Instead, both male and female students focused on females' perceived vulnerability to violence or harassment.

The female students feared it, the male students talked about the females' risk, even 10F's Italian landlady repeatedly warned her about Italian boys and the need to

keep herself safe. One of the reasons for this is that some women on the program

actually did have frightening experiences in Italy. Their fears were founded on fact.

> 8F: [12F] and I were walking underneath the road, [we] were flashed... I was fine, I mean relatively, I mean whatever, that was very traumatizing, not really, just like disgusting. It was during the day at like 11 o'clock. It was, after that we never walked down underneath there again.

> 11F: I had one guy who tried to take me to his car, "you should come out of town with me tonight," he was older, he tried to take me, grabbed my wrist, I had to tear myself away from him, he wouldn't let me leave, that was scary...

> 5F: [My friend] told me she was attacked, definitely confronted the guy, [he] tried to grab her hand, she fought him off, next time, don't do that, I'll come and get you and we'll walk together.

I do not mean to imply that the women on the program did not have *reason* to fear that

they would be victims of assault. The evidence of the women I interviewed clearly

showed that they were targeted for relatively innocuous annoyances such as whistling

and catcalling, as well as the scarier and potentially more violent incidents detailed

above. However, even if it is reasonable for men and women to insist that women need

to take precautions, it is unreasonable for them conclude that men do not need to take

any precautions. Simply because none of the men on the program were victims of

harassment or violence did not mean that they were not at risk of becoming victims. In

Costa Rica, Anderson distinguished between male and female students, pointing out that

male students had a tendency to engage in "exploratory" behavior while abroad

(Anderson, 2003, p. 29). This exploratory behavior could lead them to situations where

their safety was compromised.

In fact, men need to take precautions to protect their personal safety in Italy for

the same reasons that women do: they are unfamiliar with their physical surroundings,

lacking specific knowledge about the area, such as which are bad neighborhoods and which are good ones, and their lack of knowledge of the culture and Italian language means that they would not be able to read a social situation in order to know when it is dangerous and when it is not. The students' emphasis and focus on women's safety might have tended to make the men less safe.

Several of the men reported "exploratory behavior," and that they put themselves in situations that might have been unsafe, such as staying in a "sketchy" hotel in Napoli, falling asleep on the subway late at night, or simply walking alone at night in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Many of the men explained their behavior away, by making statements like "I wouldn't have done that if I were a woman," or "girls have to be more careful." The implication is that, because they are men, they are safer, even though they do not have enough information about their environment in order to make an accurate assessment of safety.

As we can see, women's conscious notion of safety can be juxtaposed with men's conscious or unconscious notion of privilege, which can trump safety concerns. The men felt that, because they were men, they did not have to worry about personal safety. This reflects their assumption of privilege, their ability to move about in public space without restriction. Although the males may not have been consciously aware that they held this privilege, they exercised it daily. Their unexamined reliance on male privilege to use public space meant that they might have underestimated the risks of physical assault or violent theft. This assumption of privilege meant that they were less aware of their surroundings than the female students, as well.

Within American culture, "[i]t seems that *crime against women, whatever the motivation of the individual criminal, has the cumulative effect of reinforcing social norms about appropriate behavior for women*," (Gordon & Riger, 1989, p. 122, italics original) but crimes against men do not have the same effect. The students knew about the incidents that had happened to the female program participants, and, without knowing for sure the motivations of the people involved, assumed that all the incidents were directed at the women *because* they were women. For them, the lessons to be learned from these incidents were that women were at risk, not young people, foreigners, or any group that might include the men. This is one more way that we do gender. Except for the incident of the flasher, it is not clear that this was the case. The students interpreted the incidents using US gender scripts and came to the conclusion that women, and not men, should practice caution and defensive strategies. This interpretation might have given the men a false sense of confidence and actually increased their risk.

Intercultural Interactions

Another discernible difference between the women and men's experiences was that some men were extremely less likely to have made friends and had meaningful interactions outside of their immediate peer group of American students. Even 6F, a female participant who was one of the only students who had studied no Italian before arriving in Italy, was able to make English-language friendships with other foreign students she met while in Perugia. Although the female as well as male students

reported that they had difficulty meeting young Italians their own age, especially young Italian women, some of my female interviewees reported that they did have interactions that were meaningful to them with older Italians in their neighborhoods.

However, most of the men said that they had few intercultural interactions that were meaningful, or, in the cases of 1M and 10M, none at all. These men said that they would have liked to have had meaningful interactions with Italians or deeper friendships with other foreign students, but that, for some reason, they found it difficult to meet or get to know these people.

> 1M: Yeah, I learned a good amount [about Italian culture]. We were only there for two months so it wasn't super in-depth. I thought it was funny that we met no Italians. It was ironic to me. They were all used to foreigners running around so they kept to themselves... except for the guy that ran Merlin's [a Perugian nightspot], I don't think I made acquaintances with any Perugians. Any locals.

> 10M: You know, I wish I made more of an effort to get to know someone, but most of the people I got to know were students at the University for Foreigners, Chinese, this guy Leo, he was the funniest guy, other than my teachers, I didn't meet any Italians, especially my age... The one thing I wish I had done, would be to talk to strangers a bit more. Try to engage the culture a little bit.

In contrast, all of the female respondents could mention at least one meaningful intercultural relationship that they had formed during their time in Perugia (and sometimes more than one). 5F became close friends with a Taiwanese student and 8F befriended a Turkish girl, 11F and 6F spent a great deal of time talking and connecting with their international roommates, and 10F treasured the mother-daughter component of her relationship with her older female Italian landlady. In addition, the female students also reported a greater number of incidental interactions with Italians in their neighborhoods, while males were less likely to have incidental interactions, as well.

In contrast to the majority of male students, one of the male respondents, 13M, reported having a great deal of intercultural interaction with other foreign students studying Italian in Perugia.

> 13M: I met two Italians, but it was difficult to meet the Italians [because] they didn't go to our area. I met them through my foreign friends that I met there because I was hanging out at their apartment [and they had] met Italians [because they had been] living there a long time. [I met Italians] through making efforts to go to dinners. I enjoyed everyone from our program but I preferred hanging out with foreigners, I could hang out with Americans any time but I wanted to push the people I could meet and hang out with.

It is clear that it was *possible* for the male students to meet foreigners and Italians and make friendships with them. 13M prioritized meeting non-Americans because, as he said, he could "hang out with Americans any time." One of his unstated goals might have been to gain intercultural competence; he certainly went about it the right way. Another male student, 6M, had an unique experience in Italy. His grandmother and grandfather had emigrated from Italy to the US when they were young. One of 6M's goals for the program was to learn Italian well enough in order to be able to communicate with his grandparents' Italian family. After the program ended, he visited them for an extended stay.

> 6M: ...With my family, it was so crazy, because they, my grandma's sister and my grandma, talk once a week and they know about my life, when they saw me for the first time, they took me in as one of their own sons, I've never even met these people, they're so kind and generous and understanding and ready just to help with anything you might need, that was a pretty insane experience, those interactions were priceless.

6M was able to have extended interactions with Italians because he was related to them by blood, and they took him in "as one of their own sons." He had somewhat of an insider's experience with the culture, something that certainly would not be available to

all students, especially in the context of an eight-week study abroad program. However unique his experience, it was clear that 6M benefited greatly from these interactions with his family. He is planning to return for an Italian cousin's wedding and foresees a continued trans-Atlantic relationship. As I mentioned earlier, 6M believes he became more "understanding" of people who are emigrating to the US and trying to learn the language, "it's not easy and I gained a better perspective on that." 13M benefited as well, believing he became "more open, more willing to try new things" as a result of his experience abroad.

Compared to 6M and 13M's belief in their own personal growth, 10M was unsure if he had experienced personal growth or a change in his world views. He did not seem to have been impacted much by the experience in terms of his personality, although both he and 1M said that they enjoyed themselves very much.

> 10M: I changed a little bit. Maybe not. I don't know. Honestly I don't know. I like to think I became a little more outgoing... I could talk all day about Italy. I had a blast.

1M thought he had changed as a result of the experience, although he could not say for sure how he changed. One difference between his response and the other students' is that 1M believed that the reason for his personal change was his close friendships with the other male students on the program and his traveling adventures, and did not attribute the change to any intercultural exchange or understanding.

> 1M: Definitely [I changed]... Even if I don't feel it right now, it's still kind of hitting me. I don't see [11M] or [4M], we were together the entire time, just being together with two or three really close people and experiencing things... we really bonded and became friends, it still hits me, like, "hello, you did that," it's still weird... If something bad happens and you learn from it, I feel like I never had any terrible situation, nothing that was life-changing.

Why were the female participants on the program more likely to have had deeper intercultural relationships and friendships as well as incidental interactions with Italians in their environment? Structurally, both men and women experienced the program in the same way: women and men had the same housing situation, same Italian classes, they lived in Italy for the same moment in time, and had the same general level of Italian language background.

The Caution Principle

One reason for this discrepancy might be that, just like the American women in my study, non-American women use "caution" when assessing situations involving men they do not know. This means that when Italian women or foreign students studying Italian in Perugia have the opportunity to meet one of the male participants, they will proceed with caution until they feel safe. This also means that the men in my study might have experienced this caution others employed towards them as an inability to meet non-Americans. In fact, several of the male students did report encounters that exemplify others using this principle of caution towards themselves as strange men:

> 1M: I never got any cold shoulders or stink eyes or anything, everyone was pretty helpful, ignored me but no hostility.

> 10M: I remember there were these Turkish guys, while they were friendly to us, they weren't quite trusting, this all gets lost in translation, there were Turkish girls in our class, and the Turkish guys weren't the happiest about that, we were seen as the typical American male, one track mind, that kind of thing, cautious is the word for it. They were always friendly to us.

Both these male students experienced others being cautious towards them, or ignoring

them. In addition, 10M found that women were not the only ones who employed the

caution tactic- the Turkish men in his Italian class used the same strategy. According to

10M, the Turkish students, both male and female, thought that the American men might

have "one track minds" towards the Turkish women, and might make unwanted

romantic or sexual advances. 10M interpreted the Turkish men's actions as being

protective of the Turkish women, although he acknowledged the possibility of the

interaction's meaning being "lost in translation."

> 5M: ...we stayed at a hotel... we got there the first night and we asked for a
> room... me and [12M] and [4M] were in a little shack out behind everything in
> the middle of nowhere, a little dingy nasty place, the next morning we went to
> leave and we didn't know we were coming back and [7M] was talking with the
> guy who stayed there, he was helping to translate with some people who were
> staying there with the Italian that he knew, so when we came back they guys
> gave us a six-person apartment for the same price.

5M experienced another example of a stranger using caution when dealing with him and

his male American friends. For the first night, they were put up for the night in a "dingy

nasty" shack that was in "the middle of nowhere." It is impossible for me to know the

intentions of the male hotel employee who placed them there, but it could be that he was

also using the principle of caution towards strange men. If the shack was already dingy

and nasty, there would not be much damage the young men could do to it if they were

determined to party and get raucous, and since the shack was in the middle of nowhere,

they would be less likely to disturb the other guests.

However, it's likely that once 7M proved that they were safe guys (by providing

the translation service), the hotel employee no longer felt the need for caution, and put

them in a nicer apartment for the same price as they had paid for the shack. He might

also have felt as though 7M did him a favor by helping out and wanted to repay him. In

either case, when 7M went out of his way to have an interaction, he was able to do so,

and was rewarded for it.

5M himself used the principle of caution towards a strange man who might have

been his new roommate:

> 5M: The very first day we moved into our apartment our roommate was the guy
> from the Czech Republic, we didn't know him yet, I went downstairs to get my
> bags, [he] was there outside the wrong door yelling at a lady on the second floor,
> I looked at him and said, "he's gotta be looking for our apartment." I asked him
> "if you are looking for this apartment, on this program," I made him use his key
> to make sure he was really our roommate.

Although 5M relates this as a funny story, he also shows that he employed the principle

of caution towards an unknown man. He made his likely roommate use his own key to

be sure that he himself was not going to be victimized, or taken advantage of. 5M

clearly assumes that everyone would know why he would ask the strange man to use his

own key, and believes the caution principle to be well-founded. Through 5M and 10M's

experiences, we can see that men, as well as women, seem to be employing the strategy

of caution towards strange young men.

In addition, the caution strategy likely holds true across cultures:

> Because a gendered division of labor and a gender hierarchy exist in roughly
> similar forms across many cultures, social role theory (Eagly et al., 2000)
> predicts cross-cultural consensus about which traits are associated with men and
> women (Rudman & Glick, 2008, p. 88).

Social psychology research has shown that, across Western cultures at least, people of

both genders have similar stereotypes and perceptions of men and women. Men are

perceived as adventurous, strong, active and wise, but also as forceful, aggressive and rude. Women are perceived as affectionate, sensitive, attractive and charming, but also as dependent, fearful and weak (Rudman & Glick, 2008). These stereotypes of the two genders are automatic, and everyone knows about them, even if personally they subscribe to an alternative or less conservative view of gender. People's stereotypes influence the ways in which they react to strangers.

Studies in social psychology have also shown that "[a]lthough stereotypes of each gender were, on average, rated positively, stereotypes of women were more positive than stereotypes of men in every nation studied" (Rudman & Glick, 2008, p. 93). Although people are more likely to *respect* men, they are more likely to *like* women. Stereotypically, men are perceived as "bad but bold," and women as "wonderful but weak." In fact, Italy was the country where female stereotypes were the most highly rated in comparison to male stereotypes (Rudman & Glick, 2008, p. 94).

Therefore, due to the caution principle that women (and men) employ when evaluating strange men or unfamiliar situations, in addition to most people's positive stereotypes of women and less positive stereotypes of men, men may be less likely than women to have intercultural interactions, at least in Western cultures. This hypothesis was qualitatively borne out by the student responses in my study; however, some enterprising researcher needs to undertake quantitative research in order to substantiate it.

If, as I suggest, women are more likely to be approached by strangers and are more likely to have intercultural interactions, it would then follow that women would be

more likely to gain intercultural competency. All the models of intercultural competency I surveyed theorize that interaction with local people is crucial to the process of gaining the necessary skills, knowledge, and even attitudes that make a person more interculturally competent. Even classroom approaches to teaching intercultural communication rely on role-playing and other techniques of simulating interaction, when actual interaction may not be possible. Since increased interactions are the only way to improve competency, and if women are quantitatively experiencing more interactions with non-Americans, and especially more *meaningful* interactions, then it would follow that women are more likely to gain intercultural competency skills.

"Skating" through the Culture vs. Gender Accountability

However, although women *may* be more likely to have intercultural experiences, interactions and relationships, that does not mean that men are incapable of doing so. The examples of 6M with his Italian family and 13M, who went out of his way to attend dinners in an attempt to make intercultural connections, show that men are certainly capable of creating experiences in which these interactions can take place.

Although 6M's experience was unique and could not be reproduced, any student could take 13M's strategy and adapt it to his or her own situation. In fact, men may *need* to take 13M's strategy and make a pronounced effort to prove to strangers that caution is not necessary when dealing with them. This involves being aware of how they, as strange young men, are perceived, realizing that others might approach them with caution if at all, and then taking the steps to reassure others that they are safe.

As the examples of 1M and 10M show, men seem to have the unfortunate ability to skate through the culture without having any substantial interactions or relationships with anyone outside their peer group of other American men. If a student were not interested in learning about the culture and only wanted to have a superficial experience, men, more than women, would be able to do so. It is depressing to hear 10M say, "the one thing I wish I had done, would be to talk to strangers a bit more," or hear 5M state, "I didn't have much experience with Italians myself," when personally I know that both these students had the right attitudes of openness, respect, and curiosity which are the prerequisites for intercultural competence. Perhaps if they had known that, as men, they might need to try a little harder in order to have interactions with non-Americans, and that interactions are the only way to gain intercultural competency; if they had known that increased intercultural competency was a goal to which they could aspire, they might have been able to make the first step.

Although women *may* have had more intercultural interactions, it does not mean that every interaction they had with a non-American was positive, or perceived by the women to be positive. I am neither a native of Italian culture nor a man and am not qualified to assert what an Italian man's reasons or intentions were when he whistled at the American women. Was it meant as an innocent compliment to a pretty girl, or was it "assertive or aggressive behaviour" intended to "intimidate and embarrass women" and consequently a "spatial expression of patriarchy" (Valentine, 1989, pp. 388-9)? In Italy, my guess is that it is a little of both. Twombly found that the piropos (catcalls) that her female students received inhibited their cultural learning (Twombly, 1995), but it also

seems that the Costa Rican piropos may have been more sexually explicit and offensive than the catcalling my female subjects encountered in Italy.

Unlike some of Twombly's female students, none of my subjects reported that they avoided going out or that they removed themselves from experiences because of fear of catcalls. Instead they took defensive measures against them by traveling in groups and then went about their business as usual. Another difference is that Twombly's students seem to have been individually placed in homestays, which meant that the female students may have been forced to travel alone going to and from class. My female subjects lived in apartments with other young women and so were able to pair themselves up whenever they wanted to go somewhere, thereby ensuring that they could have experiences in the culture with a minimum of fear. Anderson recommends that students be placed in pairs in homestays because it helps women feel safer as well as facilitating cultural learning via shared reflection (Anderson, 2003).

It seems that the catcalling the women received in Perugia, as well as the scarier incidents with the flasher and the man who tried to pull a female student into his car were negative interactions, but not negative enough to inhibit the female students' cultural learning. The experiences were not negative enough to dissuade the women from leaving their apartments or to avoid going back to Italy in the future. Being subjected to mild catcalling, with the understanding that it is an authentic part of Italian culture, may have been beneficial to the females' experiences, in that their increased exposure to Italian culture via catcalling may have helped them to learn more about Italian gender norms and expectations:

8F: Italian guys, my perception, their relationship with Italian women is different than the way they treat American women. I think that when they do that [catcalling] it's for their friends to show off...

5F: I don't know if it's just Perugia, or Italy in general, you would get hit on a lot, kind of like New York... because I'm not blonde, I have Italian in my blood, because I looked Italian enough... I didn't get approached as often... if I was in a group with my roommates, all blonde... definitely a confidence booster [that people mistook me for being Italian]... it felt like I fit in just a little bit more.

8F was able to make a deep analysis of Italian male culture because of her observation of the men who catcalled her. She believed that the men did it for social stature and to raise themselves in the eyes of their male friends, an example of a way Italian men could be doing gender with one another. 5F was able to use the men's catcalling (or lack of catcalling) to gauge how well she was blending in to Italian culture. She had an advantage, she acknowledges, because she appears ethnically Italian, but when she does not receive catcalls she knew that she was doing gender appropriately for Italian culture.

When out and about in public in Italy, the female participants found that they were never excused from accountability for the way they were doing gender. They were open to scrutiny, comment, and possibly judgment, from Italians and other foreign students in the area.

6F: I didn't get yelled at as much [as some of the other women], but I still, you couldn't walk anywhere without being stared at up and down, I got used to it but it was kind of uncomfortable, it doesn't happen here, yeah it does, but not to the point where the men stare at you there, but by the end I was used to it.

10F: [My Italian landlady] was very motherly, didn't want us going out late, going out with boys because they would take advantage of us, "you're so beautiful, you're so skinny," very complimentary, always warn us about boys.

5F: ...they [the Taiwanese students] viewed [12M] and I as a couple even though we were just friends and we sat together and it was a new class so we just wanted to hang out in a class. No, no! We're not together at all!

5F: ...the woman across the street from Steve? I noticed her watching me all the time... "she's watching me, I know it!" Some people are nosy. Extremely [so] around the neighborhood.

All the female students were aware that their bodies and their actions were available for comment from the people around them. Often this comment took the form of catcalling or staring from the men on the street, and blonde women found this to be especially true. Their status as young foreign women made them the particular objects of attention from Italian men, as 8F noticed. 10F's older female landlady commented a great deal on the beauty of the women living in the apartment. The attention was complimentary, but it was still clear that 10F and her fellow students were accountable for the way they looked. 5F found that other students in her Italian class watched her actions very closely, and was surprised to find out that her romantic life was the subject of speculation. She was also somewhat offended that the old woman on the street seemed to be monitoring her movements. None of the male students reported that they felt any pressure to act like an Italian or conform unduly to Italian culture. Instead, they felt the opposite: that they were ignored. More than the male students, the female students found that their status as foreign women held them accountable to new kinds of gender expectations.

5F was able to use cultural feedback to judge her gender performance. When she stopped hearing the whistles and catcalls, she knew she was doing gender correctly for Italian culture. Because of the nature of the way Italians do gender, with catcalling of foreign women a common practice, women have access to this cultural feedback when men do not. Women are not able to "skate" through the culture, like men are, and so are

forced to make concessions to Italian culture. These concessions can be annoying or inconvenient, but they are authentic. They also could have positive repercussions on their cultural learning. Foreign men in Italy are rarely forced to make concessions and are not usually held accountable for the way they do gender in the same way that foreign women are. Therefore men do not feel the same pressure to conform to social norms and as a result their cultural learning could be inhibited. Over time, the feeling that they are being ignored could cause them to give up on intercultural learning.

It may have been that the female students in Twombly's study were overwhelmed, and were experiencing too great a challenge, and the male students in Vande Berg's study were challenged too little.

> As Sanford and others argue (Sanford 1966; Bennett 1993; Lou and Bosley 2008a), students learn most effectively in environments that provide them with a balance of challenge and support. If confronted with too great a challenge, students retreat from the learning environment, physically or psychologically – and they become bored if they receive too much support while experiencing too little challenge (Vande Berg, 2009, p. 21).

When Twombly's female students were too challenged by Costa Rican men's piropos, some of them removed themselves physically from the environment, rarely leaving their homestays. Other female students in Twombly's study tuned out psychologically, and avoided interacting with the culture, or wore headphones while walking in public (Twombly, 1995). Therefore, if female students feel unsafe or too "challenged" by the culture's gender expectations, they will be unable to learn or adapt and will remove themselves from the environment. A host culture's lack of challenge (or too much "support") could end up having the same effect on male students. However, some cultural annoyances, such as the whistling and catcalls that my female students

experienced, might be the right level of "challenge" that is beneficial for learning. The challenges that students encounter, as well as their ability to deal with and learn from those challenges, would likely be very specific to the alchemy of host culture and personal characteristics of the student.

Intersectionalities

Finally, more research needs to be done on the intersectionalities of gender, race, age, nationality, and other personal characteristics in a cross-cultural setting. Intersectionality is a growing and important site of continuing feminist research (McDowell, 2008). Gender is important for researchers to study because, as a "master identity" it is salient in almost all (or all) social situations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Race might be considered another "master identity," similar to gender in that it may be important to understand the racial dynamics of any social situation, even among members of the same race. However, age and nationality may become salient at different times. In a cross-cultural setting, performing nationality may become as important as performing gender (Lappalainen, 2009).

Nationality may never have been salient to the students before they left the US; for many of the students, this trip marked the first time they had traveled abroad. When performing gender in Italy, most of them began by performing gender according to the gender scripts of American culture. However, in learning more about Italian gender norms and cultural values, some students learned about the differences between Italian and American culture. In observing Italians, the American students learned more about

what being American means ("we do this, they do that"). At that point, the students began to be able to perform their nationality, or, if they were skilled enough, attempt to perform a different nationality.

In illustration of this idea, 5F comes to mind: when she was able to use the Italian men's catcalls as a way of judging how well she was fitting into Italian culture, was she evaluating her gender performance, or her nationality performance? When the catcalls subsided, was she doing gender successfully, or doing "Italian" successfully? It was probably a bit of both. More research needs to be done on the salience of nationality in a study abroad setting, students' changing understanding of their own and others' national identities, and nationality performances in order to make sense of the delineation between the two identities.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study focused on the gender differences in students' experiences of study abroad, it found that, on the whole, female and male students had quite similar experiences in Italy. They made friends, learned Italian, explored Europe, and generally enjoyed themselves very much. The gender differences were both internal and external. For female students, their internal feelings of paranoia resulted in their constant appraisal of their environment, and possibly to a higher level of cultural observation. The external cultural factors of the catcalling or the flasher caused them to heighten their awareness, but was not severe enough to dissuade them from going out in the world and having intercultural experiences.

It seemed that the male students found it more difficult to meet local people, or to have intercultural interactions. This might have been due to internal attitudes, but in the case of my subjects it seemed it was also due to the ways that others interacted with (or avoided) them. Since intercultural interaction is crucial for intercultural learning, this could have had a profound effect on their intercultural development. However, the male students who made it a point to seek out interactions were able to meet people from other cultures, make friendships, and learned just as much or possibly more about Italian culture than some of the female students did.

Finally, the female students were more challenged by the gender expectations inherent in Italian culture, and seemed to experience a greater sense of accountability for the way they were doing gender in Italy. This could have been the challenge they needed in order to learn effectively. More than female students, male students found they had the privilege to "skate" through the culture without making concessions to Italian gender norms. The male students were not made to feel accountable for the way they were doing gender in Italy, and this may have negatively impacted their cultural learning.

Unfair as it may be that female students are subjected to whistles, catcalls, a feeling of personal vulnerability, comments, stares, and occasional attacks while in Italy, the silver lining is that this unfairness may have benefited their learning. Culture is not fair. When learning about a culture, one must comprehend the good with the bad. Having been subjected to some of the bad parts of Italian culture, female students may have been better positioned to appreciate the good, as well.

The male students' freedom to avoid accountability for the way they were doing gender allowed them to learn less about the culture. The male students I spoke with never questioned this freedom. They simply thought it was normal, if perhaps a bit unlucky for the women, that they should enjoy freedoms that the female students could not. Around the world, males in general have more freedoms than women do, and so it is likely that this situation would be replicated in other study abroad environments besides Italy. However, when race and nationality are added to the equation, the outcome could be very different. More research needs to be done on such

intersectionalities of personal identity in cross-cultural situations in order to understand how complementary or conflicting identities contribute to or detract from students' opportunities for cultural learning.

Programmatic Recommendations

What are some ways that study abroad administrators can avoid this gendered cultural learning divide? Obviously, the first is to ensure that female students feel physically safe. Anderson's recommendation of pairing female students in housing situations is beneficial for their peace of mind as well as their learning (Anderson, 2003). No one can learn effectively when they constantly fear being grabbed, pinched or assaulted.

Many study abroad programs use the orientation as a time to talk about safety, and reserve a specific portion to talk about "women's issues" of safety. This practice of creating a gender division at the outset implies, "Ladies, we need to talk," and the male students are implicitly invited to zone out, or are excused from the conversation altogether. Addressing personal safety concerns just to women, and not also to men, ghettoizes the women almost as much as catcalls do. Male students need to learn about what the female students will experience in the form of harassment or catcalls. These are not "women's issues;" they are cultural issues. Men need to be helped to confront the evidence of their own privileges (such as the privilege to move about freely in public spaces), and question the reasons for them. I do not advocate blaming or shaming male students, simply discussing cultural facts in as neutral a way as possible. Ideally, it

would be an ongoing topic for conversation within the group for the duration of the program.

In addition, it would be helpful for all participants if their study abroad program would educate them about what intercultural competency is, and what the latest research has shown about how it can be attained. This could be crucial for some well-meaning students who have the right attitudes of curiosity and respect but have only vague ideas about what a study abroad program is "about." Intercultural learning need not be the hidden agenda of study abroad programs- it could be out in the open for all the students to see and aspire to. Many students could become more involved in their own learning if they were given some direction and a small push to get started.

It could also be useful for male students to learn that, in Italian culture at least, they may need to make an extra effort in order to meet local people and have intercultural interactions. As young males, likely they are already used to others treating them with caution, but with some guidance they could take the necessary steps to show others they are safe to approach. Some specific and concrete strategies, such as not banding together in groups larger than three, making it a point to say hello to neighbors, etc., could get them started on the right track.

This research has shown that the specific cultural context, the place where the study abroad program happens, can have a large impact on the students' learning. In Italy, at least, it seems that female students have an edge when learning about the culture. Other studies have shown that female students had greater difficulties dealing with gender expectations that singled them out or ignored them completely (Anderson,

2003; Twombly, 1995). "Doing gender" is a useful analytical tool to tease out the ways in which a specific culture expects us to perform our sex category, and the consequences we could experience if we do not do gender "correctly." More research needs to be done on the specific cultural contexts of how we do gender when we cross cultural borders.

Activities for Cross-Cultural Gender Learning in Study Abroad

Gender and Public Space

Here is a simple activity that could demonstrate to students the deep divide between males' and females' lived experiences in public spaces, and help students to start thinking about how society creates and maintains gender:

The orientation leader draws a line down the middle of a chalkboard or large piece of paper. Neither side of the board would be marked. The leader then asks the assembled group of students to think of examples of ways that they keep themselves safe when they are out in public alone. Expected answers from the female students might be: walk in groups, carry pepper spray, be aware of who is walking behind, or park near streetlights. If the students are slow to get going, the leader could also suggest some of these and ask the students to raise their hands if they use these safety strategies, and then ask for more suggestions. As the students call out answers, the leader writes the females' answers on one side of the board, and the males' on the other, without specifying that that is what he or she is doing. Then, when the students have run out of ideas, the leader points to the board and asks if the students can guess what the divide on the board might mean. Likely they will be able to guess that it represents the difference between males'

and females' experiences of public space.

This could then lead to a discussion of females' experiences of fear in public spaces, and how this fear contributes to females' limited use of public space and/or reliance on males for personal safety. It could also lead to a discussion of ways that males can help females feel more safe in public, such as: when walking behind a woman who is walking alone at night, cross the street so she does not feel so nervous, escort female friends home at night, join in take back the night rallies, etc. Finally, it could lead to a discussion of how society blames some victims of rape as "asking for it" by being in the "wrong place at the wrong time," instead of making public spaces accessible to all people at all times. This last discussion might only be possible if the students have had some previous exposure to feminist ideas.

My thanks to Lindsey Foltz for the idea from which this activity is adapted.

Performing Gender in a Cross-Cultural Setting

The second activity could be used during the course of an actual study abroad program to illustrate how different cultures do gender, as well as help the students work on their intercultural skills of observation, analysis, and evaluation:

The leader asks the students to think of a funny, sad, or confusing encounter they recently had with a person from the host culture. Then, the leader will ask the students to write down the script of the encounter, capturing the words spoken as accurately as possible. The leader will then ask if one of the students would like to see their script performed. After a student is chosen, the leader would then ask for actors to act out the

script. The actors need not be the same gender as the people in the script; in fact, it

could be more illustrative of how we do gender if the actors are different genders than

the original participants of the script. While the actors are being chosen, the student who

wrote the script would transcribe as much of it as possible on the board or an overhead

projector for all the students to see.

The actors then act out the script to the best of their ability, with the help of the

original student, the script writer, to give instructions for greater authenticity. The leader

could insist on several takes until the script writer is satisfied that the performance is a

faithful representation of his or her experience with a person from the host culture. The

leader will then ask the larger group (including the actors and script writer) for

descriptions of what happened in the encounter. The leader should insist upon simple

observation; no analysis or evaluation should be employed under after the students have

described the encounter in detail.

After the encounter has been described, the leader then asks the students to

analyze the encounter. What was the host national thinking? What was the script writer

thinking? What stereotypes might each have had about the other? What were the

motivations of each person? If it was funny or sad, what were the reasons for this? The

leader can act as a cultural informant and provide culture-specific knowledge if there is

some part of the encounter that is inexplicable to the students.

Finally, the leader will ask the students to evaluate the encounter. It is important

that they not attempt to evaluate the situation without first describing it (observation)

and analyzing it, since accurate evaluation is not possible without undertaking the first

two steps. Was the encounter successful or unsuccessful? Who benefited from the encounter, and in what way (monetarily, socially, etc.)? Who lost out on the encounter, and in what way? If stereotypes were involved, are they accurate in this case? Why or why not? What underlying cultural values (i.e. independence, importance of family, respect for authority) were present in the encounter, both for the host national and the student? Was gender important to the encounter? What about age, race, or nationality? What are each culture's ideas about these categories, as they relate to the encounter?

The rest of the students could then be invited to share their experiences with host nationals and attempt to discuss the cultural values or stereotypes they encountered, either verbally at the time of the activity, or if time is too short, as a writing exercise. This could also be a useful activity to pair with second language learning, as a way to introduce and discuss the use and meaning of colloquial expressions in the host language.

Cross-Cultural Gender Expectations

This activity can be used to help the students explore how different cultures do gender by listing the kinds of expectations that their culture has for each gender. The leader can then ask the students to contrast this with the expectations for different genders that they have seen in the host culture (or in films or television shows that depict the host culture, if the activity does not take place during a study abroad program).

First, the leader distributes a number of men's and women's magazines that originate in US mainstream culture. Examples might be: Cosmopolitan, Woman's Day,

Men's Health, or GQ. A small number of tabloid magazines such as Us Weekly or OK! Magazine could be mixed in, as well. The leader will ask the students to page through the magazines and study both the articles and photos. Then, the leader will ask the students to detail the expectations the magazines have of males. Examples might be: that males should be strong and muscular, that they want to be sexually promiscuous, or that they always care about sports. Next, the leader will ask the students about the magazines' expectations of females. Examples might be: that females should be thin, that they struggle to balance a career and a family, or that they are interested in the latest fashions or new beauty products. Using the magazines as a proxy for culture gives the students something to focus on and evidence for the culture's gender scripts. Instead of making generalizations themselves ("all women want to be thin") they are able to point to the culture's expectations of gender ("this magazine says that all women want to be thin"), which will hopefully reduce essentializing and stereotyping on the part of the students. Instead, it allows students to be critical of how the magazines engage in essentializing and stereotyping of males and females.

Then, the leader asks the group to think of ways that the host culture stereotypes males and females, and specifically, how these stereotypes are the same as or different from those in mainstream US culture. The leader can provide specific examples from his or her own experience, or the students can add their own observations. The leader should be careful to try to keep the conversation neutral, although this may be a hard task. Separating the observation of gender expectations from evaluations of those expectations will be difficult. Later, once some expectations have been pointed out and

the leader has written them on the board, the leader will then ask the students what they think about each culture's gender expectations.

This activity requires more than passing familiarity with the host culture in order to have a fruitful and nuanced conversation; therefore, it would be most efficacious at the middle or end of a study abroad program in the host country.

My thanks to Katie Rodgers for the idea from which this activity is adapted.

Conclusion

In a globalized world, we will have more occasion to interact with people from different cultures. In order for these interactions to be enjoyable and successful, it is important that we gain some measure of the skills of intercultural communication. Although studying abroad is a great way to learn about other cultures, we can seek out intercultural interactions in our own communities, by getting to know people of a different race, nationality, religion, or other cultural background. Learning more about the ways in which learning these intercultural communication skills are impacted by doing gender means that study abroad programs or other intercultural training programs can become more effective in transmitting these skills to students. This in turn can lead to more students who are able to successfully communicate and enjoy connecting with people who do not see the world in the same way they do. Ultimately, in a rapidly-changing world, our ability to work together to solve global problems is dependent upon our ability to understand, respect, and value the cultures of other peoples.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.How was your time in Italy? What was the best experience you had there?

2.What was the worst or the most frustrating thing you encountered?

3.What was the funniest thing that happened while you were abroad?

4.Did you feel that you learned a lot about other cultures- either Italian culture or the culture of someone else you met there?

5.Did you meet any Italians? How did you meet them- what were they like?

6.Did you meet any other people who were not Americans? What were those people like? What kinds of interactions did you have?

7.Did you do any traveling before or after the program? Did you visit any of the different regions of Italy? If so, how were they different from Perugia?

8.How would you describe Italian culture to someone who doesn't know anything about it, based on your experiences in Italy?

9.What tips would you give to other [men/women] traveling to Italy or participating on this program, so they could learn from your experience with the culture?

10.Did you have any goals about what you wanted to achieve while in Italy, like learning the language or even seeing the Colosseum- what did you hope to get out of the experience?

11.Did you achieve your goals? How or why not?

12.Would you do anything differently if you could do the program over again?

13.Do you feel that your experience was different from what a [man/woman] would have experienced had they been in your place? In what ways?

14. Do you think that you received any special treatment because of your status as a [man/woman]? Do you have an example?

15. Did you experience any special limitations or privileges because of your gender?

16. Did you experience any sexual harassment, or did you witness someone else being harassed? What happened?

17. Did you go on a date with any non-Americans? What was that like? How did your different cultures help/hurt that situation?

18. Do you have any thoughts on the difference between men's and women's experiences in Italy, as you saw them in our group?

19. In what ways did Italy or Italian culture turn out to be different that you expected it to be? In what ways were your ideas about Italy or Italian culture confirmed?

20. Did [men/women] in Italy behave differently than [men/women] in America? How? Did you feel pressure to act the same way when you were living in Italy? Do you have an example?

21. Do you think you will go back again?

22. How did you change as a person as a result of your study abroad experience?

23. Did I miss anything, or is there anything else I should know?

24. What is your gender?

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