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Study Abroad in a Developing and a Developed Country: A Comparison of American
Undergraduate Students' Experiences in Ghana and England

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Maria Costa

August 2012

Dr. Catherine Glascock, Chair

Dr. Cecil Blankenship

Dr. Virginia Foley

Dr. Pamela Scott

Keywords: England, Ghana, developed country, developing country, study abroad

ABSTRACT

Study Abroad in a Developing and a Developed Country: A Comparison of American Undergraduate Students' Experiences in Ghana and England

by

Maria Costa

This qualitative study examined the differences among the experiences of 7 American undergraduate students; 4 who studied for a semester in Ghana, a developing country, and 3 who studied for a semester in England, a developed country. Using phenomenology as its guiding framework, transcribed interviews were analyzed and the focal phenomenon of the experience was sought. In addition, examination of the literature suggested that study abroad in less developed countries had the potential to impact the experience of students at a deeper level because of the potential for what Jean Piaget termed “constructive disequilibrium” (Blake & Pope, 2008, p. 61).

The data indicated that both student groups had significant experiences abroad but that each group's significant experiences were linked to the nature of their host country. In Ghana, 3 students discussed their sometimes shocking experience as a minority while 1 participant, a 1st generation African-American, discussed the confusing experience of identifying with the racial majority there, but only until she was identified as an American when she spoke.

In England, students were appalled to find the English people so openly expressing racism. They encountered people who were considered liberal by American standards and found they were identified in England as conservatives by English standards; a shock of sorts. The phenomenon

encompassing all these experiences was of the students discovering they were part of a particular culture and starting to understand why they had certain values and attitudes.

Findings of this research merely scratch the surface of the issue at hand and other researchers are encouraged to replicate the study with a larger number of participants, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, and making sure that the shortcomings of this study in regards to validity are avoided.

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DEDICATION

To John Daniel, Daniel Henry, and Laura and Hélio Costa

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I wish to acknowledge the help and support of the members of my dissertation committee and cherished teachers Dr. Catherine Glascock, Dr. Cecil Blankenship, Dr. Virginia Foley, and Dr. Pamela Scott.

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To the brilliant, accomplished, and kind student participants in this study who welcomed me into their lives with open hearts and arms; thank you and I wish you the best in life.

To my parents who, despite having only a 4th grade education, have a messianic belief in the social equalization power of education. I finally finished it, Mom and Dad, at 53!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Context Setting and Historical Outline

Purposeful travel as a means to seek knowledge and personal growth is not a novel concept. Historical and literary evidence exists that throughout the ages people have sought knowledge, adventure, conquests, and prestige by traveling away from home. These travel experiences have been called by various names such as wanderjahr, grand tour, gap year, and the subject of this research study abroad.

Historical evidence of the presence of international students is found in 370 AD Rome when Emperor Valentinian I issued a decree directing international students to appear before a public official to register and be made aware of specific rules governing their stay in Rome; failure to comply with the regulations could have resulted in students being publicly whipped or deported (Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007). This decree came as a result of the government's need to control a growing population of international students, a practice still in existence today in the US and many other countries. The US Department of Homeland Security, for example, requires US universities to track and report on international students throughout their enrollment at the institution.

In the fictional world, we find reference to study abroad in the works of William Shakespeare. Hamlet studied in Wittenberg and Laertes in Paris.

Fifteen centuries after Emperor Valentinian's decree we find American citizens, primarily members of the higher socioeconomic classes, seeking study abroad opportunities mostly in Western Europe. In the 19th Century the wanderjahr, an unplanned year of experience abroad, was popular with American elites as was to a lesser degree the *Junior Year Abroad* or

un-matriculated year of study at foreign universities. The *wanderjahr* was an experience for individuals not yet enrolled in a US college or university while the *Junior Year Abroad* involved an individual who was already matriculated in an institution at home. Today the *wanderjahr* concept lives in the gap year practice where individuals take a year off between high school and college to travel abroad in search of personal and other discoveries. The Junior Year Abroad concept, while still in existence, has been joined by other types of study abroad program formats.

Before the United States established its first graduate school – Johns Hopkins, founded in 1876 – students wanting to pursue a graduate degree had no option but to go elsewhere and Americans invariably went to Europe for this study (Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007). Although undergraduate education was available in Colonial America, its quality was questionable as resources and facilities were lacking when compared to European institutions. For this reason prominent American families sent their children to pursue their undergraduate studies in Europe (Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007).

Because most of the earliest established higher education institutions in the United States were church affiliated, missionary and volunteer work appear as another mode of study abroad format. Yale students, for example, went to China as missionaries as early as 1896; missionary connections led to the founding of the American College of Beirut in 1862 and the American University of Cairo in 1919 (Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007). Traditionally the sites of missionary and volunteer work were outside Western Europe because, whereas American education leaders of the time believed that American students could learn from Europeans, they believed American students could teach those in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Hoffa writes that the above models of formal and informal study abroad represent the precedents of the study abroad model encountered today.

The United States Internationalism vs. Isolationism Policies Impact on Study Abroad

The United States has had a love-hate relationship with the idea of study abroad and the governing philosophies of those in power determine whether we love it or hate it. A government that espouses a philosophy of isolationism is likely to shun study abroad, while a government that espouses a philosophy of internationalism is likely to embrace study abroad. In 1795 George Washington opined that,

It is with indescribable regret that I have seen the youth of the United States migrating to foreign countries, in order to acquire the higher branches of erudition... a serious danger is encountered by sending abroad among other political system those, who have not yet learned the value of their own. (Washington, 1795, Image 119)

Likewise, Thomas Jefferson, who himself spent time abroad wrote in a letter to John Banister, Jr., “An American coming to Europe for education loses in his knowledge, in his morals, in his health, in his habits, and in his happiness. ...the consequences of foreign education are alarming to me, as an American.” (Jefferson, 1785, Images 501-502; Jefferson, Koch, & Peden, 2004, p. 360). Jefferson said American students were returning from their study abroad as strangers. His establishment of the University of Virginia had as one of its goals that of dissuading American students from going abroad to study (Jefferson et al., 2004).

In opposition to the above views we encounter Benjamin Rush, the 1783 founder of Dickinson College, who said that, “Every native of Philadelphia should be sent abroad for a few years if only to teach him to prize his native country above all places on earth” (Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007, p. 29). Rush later suggested that students should go abroad to learn about things that would be beneficial to the home country (Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007). The tension between isolationism and internationalism is constant in United States politics, and positions change according to the country’s leadership. At the time of this study there is a strong support for internationalism and consequently for study abroad.

The end of World War II created a market for American higher education institutions because universities in Europe were in disarray and unable to handle the demand. This is when the United States began to build a reputation that would lead to its becoming the site of choice for international students who have since come to study here for the same reason that Americans once studied abroad – to seek either education unavailable at home or a better quality education.

In 2007-2008 approximately 600 thousand international students were enrolled in American higher education institutions, an 8% increase from the previous year (Institute of International Education (IIE), 2010). This international presence on our campuses serves as a reminder to American students, faculty, and staff of the existence of the rest of the world. Perhaps it is also a catalyst for awakening Americans to the realities of the ever-shrinking world and their consequent embracing of study abroad as an integral part of higher education curricula. Some say that this awakening is a matter of the US survival as a world leader.

Study Abroad Development

Study abroad as an official part of university business, offered for academic credit, and counting toward degree requirements traces back to the beginning of the 20th Century. In 1923 the University of Delaware initiated a year-long program in France for French language students. Smith College initiated a similar program in Paris in 1925, while Rosary College initiated one in Switzerland. These pioneering programs led to the emergence of three distinct study abroad program designs still used today: the junior year abroad, the faculty led program, and the summer study abroad program (Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007). These programs are defined later in this chapter.

From an administrative point of view, Hoffa and The Forum on Education Abroad (2007) wrote that our higher education system adoption of the modular system of academic credit gave a

boost to study abroad programs, as students could use academic credits from overseas institutions toward their degree requirements in the United States. Study abroad has begun to gather a hint of practicality, which is still a crucial element in today's higher education culture, as the experience abroad is valuable, but so are the academic credits that individuals can obtain from their host institution and use toward their degree requirements at home. Although the modular credit system and other incentives increased participation in study abroad in the early days, the lack of second language competency and finances were and are still barriers to many students' participation in study abroad programs.

Study abroad is becoming a lucrative business and the number of institutions located in non-English speaking countries offering courses taught in English has been increasing, although courses in English cannot be found in all disciplines. American students are fortunate that the emerging educational market uses English as its main teaching language and American students are the target of heavy recruitment for these new programs.

This commercialization of education and of study abroad in particular concerns many in international education, as many believe that a lack of quality control is detrimental to the field. Professionals in the field have been vocal regarding improvement of quality control in such programs. The *Forum on Study Abroad*, one of the most respected professional associations in the study abroad area, for example, has developed guidelines for quality control. Steinberg's (2009) *Standards of Good Practice for Short-Term Education Abroad Programs* is a valuable tool for program quality control.

The Role of the US Government in International Education

In the last century the US government has provided some impetus by policy and funding to the development of study abroad and international exchange. In 1918 President Woodrow

Wilson urged Congress to agree to the United States joining the League of Nations and becoming a world player instead of choosing the policy of isolationism, a position favored by many at the time. In 1946 the Fulbright Program, a result of legislation sponsored by Senator William Fulbright, created a mutual exchange program for students, teachers, and scholars funded by US government scholarships. In the words of Senator Fulbright,

The tragic horror of World War II ended 30 years ago with the unprecedented destruction by nuclear bombs of two great cities in Japan. Such indiscriminate destruction of life and property by new and sophisticated methods suggested some new approach to international relations was essential. In introducing the basic legislation in 1945 for the educational exchange program, it was my thought that if large numbers of people know and understand the people from nations other than their own, they might develop a capacity for empathy, a distaste for killing other men, and an inclination to peace. (Fulbright, 1976, p. 2)

According to Hoffa and The Forum on Education Abroad (2007) between 1946 and 1993, 71,000 Fulbright students studied in the United States and 27,000 US Fulbright students studied or researched abroad; I was one of those students. The Fulbright program continues to be the preeminent exchange program in the United States, comparable in prestige to the Rhode Scholars program in England.

In 1961 President Kennedy established the Peace Corps, another program whose goal was to encourage Americans to acknowledge both the rest of the world's needs and ours to support them. The Peace Corps mission includes three goals:

1. Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. (Peace Corps, 2008, para. 3)

The Peace Corp program does not send individuals to study abroad; rather, it provides an opportunity for hands-on experiences in developing programs anchored in the volunteers'

expertise and on the needs of the host community. And, like the Fulbright Program, the Peace Corp has at its core the goal of promoting understanding and peace among people of the world.

The International Education Act of 1966 was built on the above precedents and was part of President Johnson's plan for building a Great Society. Once more, the government reacted to international education as a component of national security and the International Education Act as summarize by Theodore Vestal (as cited in Hoffa & Forum on Education Abroad, 2007), proposed:

- To assist the educational efforts of developing nations and regions;
- To help US schools and universities increase their knowledge of the world and the people who inhabit it;
- To advance the exchange of students and teachers who travel and work outside their native lands;
- To increase the free flow of books, ideas, and art, and of works of science and imagination; and
- To assemble meetings of men and women from every discipline and every culture to ponder the common problems of mankind. (p. 128)

In 1991 Congress passed the Boren Act, also called the National Security Education Act, which is administered by the US Department of Defense. The Boren Act made provisions for financial support for education in areas that were deemed critical to the United States foreign policy. It proposed to award (National Security Education Program (NSEP), 2010),

- Scholarships to U.S. undergraduate students to study abroad in areas critical to U.S. national security;
- Fellowships to U.S. graduate students to study languages and world regions critical to U.S. national security; and
- Grants to U.S. institutions of higher education to develop programs of study in and about countries, languages and international fields critical to national security and under-represented in U.S. study. (para. 3)

The most recent study abroad legislation, the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2007, was passed by the House of Representatives in 2009 and is still pending in the Senate. The bill is designed to significantly increase the number and diversity of American

students studying abroad as well as the diversity of study abroad sites. Among the many exciting provisions of the bill is a scholarship to fund study abroad and to increase the number of participants in study abroad programs to 1 million students by 2017 (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA), 2005).

The Iraq wars and the events of September 11th forced the United States into self-analysis regarding its approaches to internationalism. The United States was caught unprepared by the force of the hate against its citizens that developed in some countries and within certain religions and ethnicities, hate that destroyed thousands of innocent people. Was this failure a result of political arrogance compounded by the lack of interest in learning about other countries and languages? Was September 11th the wake-up call for a world where the United States is no longer protected by its perceived power? Is the United States an empire in decline? Is a revival of international education the answer to our peaceful engagement with the rest of the world?

Emerging Issues in Study Abroad

I studied abroad in the United States and that experience both transformed and impacted what path my life would take. I probably would not be a professional in international education had I not studied abroad. My study abroad experience, when compared with the students I work with today, was very different. In 1985 there was no easy means for communication with my family and friends or way of reading news from my mother country, Brazil, on a regular basis. I was totally isolated from my culture and language as there were no other Portuguese speakers at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) at the time. I believe that isolation provided me with a richer avenue for deep learning about my values and those of my host culture. This learning path was tumultuous at times.

Today, technology permits expatriates to keep in contact with their home on a daily basis. I can, for example, read my hometown newspaper on the Internet, watch my hometown city commission meeting online, and telephone and email my parents practically for free and as often as I wish. I now wholeheartedly welcome the idea of having such easy contact with family and culture. But, if it had happened when I first arrived in the United States, I wonder if my experience would have been as significant.

In my work with American students studying abroad, I have found that some of them are in constant contact with home via cell phone, Internet, etc. This accessibility to communication technologies means they can reach advisors at their home university, their families, and friends at any time to discuss even the simplest concerns. By doing so students miss many opportunities for learning to solve their own problems. For this reason I believe technology is the number one emergent issue in the area of study abroad, not with regard to its use on the administration side of study abroad, but in its role within the students' total experiences.

The literature is lacking on the issue of how communication technology and its advantages in facilitating contact with the home-culture influence study abroad learning or about what role the American corporate culture plays in the experiences of students abroad. When abroad Americans' contact with American culture, especially corporate culture, is practically unavoidable. Look for pictures of daily life anywhere in the world and you will see American brands everywhere. American movies, books, music, and food are available in translation, pirated, and in the case of food somewhat adapted to the tastes of the locals. It is practically impossible, unless you are in an isolated country, not to be affected by aspects of the American culture. What influence does the United States culture, especially the corporate type, have on American students abroad? Do they feel safe because they see familiar sights? Do they feel

disturbed with the idea of the United States culture colonizing the rest of the world? Or is this cultural view of the United States anchored in wealth, perfection, and freedom, something new to the students because it is created by corporations?

Another emerging issue in study abroad is the fact that around our campuses there are thousands of students who will never study abroad but who need to be prepared to work in a global society. How will institutions add an international dimension to their college experience and by what means?

And the emerging issue that has the most significance to this study is the fact that institutions and the US government are making study abroad in less traditional developing countries a priority and plan to send a record number of American students to study in nontraditional sites in the next 10 years. . What impact will this new paradigm have on the field?

Statement of Purpose

If we were to look at study abroad as an avenue to accessing educational opportunities or quality educational opportunities unavailable in the home country, Americans would have very little incentive to study in another country. This is especially true of developing countries where students would encounter both educational and living standards viewed as sub-par by American standards. Historically, the United States has been unique in its approach to study abroad as Carlson, Burn, Useem, and Yachimowicz (1990) indicate,

Whereas the European tended to be more interested in the contribution of the experience abroad to students' ability to function professionally in another country and culture, the U.S. interest was on students' gaining a greater knowledge of and concern for other countries and international issues as well as enhanced foreign language proficiency. (p. 113)

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of American students studying in a developing country (Ghana) and the experiences of Americans studying in a

developed country (England). The idea of studying students' experiences in developing versus developed countries is supported by three concepts:

1. that the majority of American students have traditionally chosen to study abroad in developed Eurocentric countries,
2. that study abroad in developing non-Eurocentric countries is expected to increase significantly in the near future, and
3. that study abroad research is scant, even more so in regards to studying in developing countries.

If we are to follow the proposal of the Lincoln Commission and send thousands of students to developing non-Eurocentric countries, we must better prepare our students for the experience and seek to understand the impact of such experiences on our students' lives. Further, studies of such nature may bring to the surface unexpected issues related to this paradigm shift.

The literature, although lacking in specific studies regarding students' study abroad experience in developing countries, is clear that there is a need to understand how location and characteristics of the host culture, especially if dramatically different from the home culture, impact such experiences.

While Americans continue to study abroad mostly in Europe, there has been a shift toward study in developing countries. In 2007-2008 there were 262,416 US students studying abroad for academic credit, an 8% increase from the previous year. The percentage of US students in African countries grew from 2.8% in 1998-1999 to 4.8% in 2007-2008, while the percentage of US students in Asia grew from 6% in 1998-1999 to 11.1% in 2007-2008 (IIE, 2010). This modest emerging paradigm further supports the need to compare the experiences of students going to study in a developed versus developing country. To address the issue I

conducted a qualitative study to identify differences in the experiences of students studying in developed Eurocentric countries versus those studying in non-Eurocentric developing countries.

Research Questions

The five research questions are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developing country (Ghana) and the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developed country (England)?
2. What are the themes of the students' experiences?
3. What are the similarities and differences among the students' experiences?
4. Is there a relationship between the identified themes and specific country or culture issues?
5. Is there an essence in the experiences that students describe?

Significance of the Study

The Lincoln Commission's goal is to support 1 million American students abroad by 2017 and to encourage more students to seek placement in developing countries (McPherson, 2005). If the trend holds, there will be a significant increase in the number of American students studying in developing countries in the next 10 years; it is incumbent upon those in the international education field to become more knowledgeable about how this new paradigm will impact all involved parties. Study abroad research is still in its early stage. The addition of a new element – students in greater number studying in developed nations – will require that professionals conduct studies particular to the situation.

Definition of Terms for the Study

For this study, the following definitions apply:

Academic credit – “A defined measure of academic accomplishment that is used to determine a student’s progress toward a degree, a certificate, or other formal academic recognition. In the U.S., credit is most commonly counted as credit hours (or CREDITS or UNITS at some institutions) that are assigned to each course. Some institutions count courses rather than credit.” (Bolen, 2007, p. 168)

Communication Technologies – Tools that permit easy communication or timely information across time and space via telephones, computers, faxes, television, etc.

Cultural identity – “The (feeling of) identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as s/he is influenced by her/his belonging to a group or culture. Common characteristics and ideas may be clear markers of a shared cultural identity, but essentially that identity is determined by difference: We feel we belong to a culture, and a group defines itself as a culture by noticing and highlighting difference with other cultures.” (Bolen, 2007, p. 180)

Cultural immersion – “The extent to which a sojourner is immersed in the host culture, i.e., interacts extensively with host culture members” (Bolen, 2007, p. 184).

Culture – The “set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (OHCHR, 2001).

Developed countries – Developed countries are also referred to as high-income countries where the population has a high standard of living. According to the World Bank classification, Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United States are considered developed countries (The World Bank, 2012).

Developing countries – Developing countries are those with a low or middle level per capita income. According to the World Bank classification, Albania, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, India, Kenya, Nepal, Yemen, and Zimbabwe are considered developing countries (The World Bank, 2012).

Direct enrollment – “Study in an overseas university without going through a provider other than the student’s home institution” (Bolen, 2007, p. 190).

Faculty-led programs – “A study abroad program directed by a faculty member from the home campus who accompanies the students abroad” (Bolen, 2007, p. 190).

Higher Education – “A subcategory of post-secondary education that leads to or toward a university degree” (Bolen, 2007, p. 166).

Intercultural competence – “The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardoff, 2004, p. 184).

Island programs – “An informal term, sometimes used pejoratively, for a center-based or faculty-led program whose format promotes little cultural immersion. In an extreme case of an island program, American students live together and study together in a strictly classroom setting” (Bolen, 2007, p. 191).

Study Abroad – “Education abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student’s home institution” (Bolen, 2007, p. 176).

Delimitations and Limitations

The fact that I was not able to observe the participants in their study abroad environment limited the scope of the study’s interpretations, as they will be based solely on students’ self-reported experiences. Another limitation was the fact that by selecting to interview students who studied abroad for at least a semester, I reached mostly traditional age college students as it is rare for a nontraditional age students to study abroad for that long.

I tried to approach sampling in pairs so that I would have a better match of students’ characteristics regarding gender, major field of study, socioeconomic status, age, etc. But

recruitment of students was problematic and I could not be selective of the students interviewed. Rather, I interviewed all the students I could find. Fortunately, however, there were some characteristics that matched in the two samples. Most of the students were majoring in the Humanities, most of them were of traditional college age, all of them were from a middle class background, most were White, and one was African-American.

Even if I had been able to select students with similar characteristics, I must acknowledge that differences in personality, interests, socioeconomic status, and the ongoing maturity process for traditional age college students may impact the differences in their experiences, and it is clearly impossible to control these variables. I discuss such differences as they pertain to the sample used when I analyze the data and report such discussion in Chapter 4.

An unexpected limitation was that I interviewed students in cycles and both groups of students were interviewed at various times during their graduating semesters. As a result, I was not able to work with them on the review of the interview transcripts and follow-up questions. Once they graduated, the students moved away and had other more pressing issues than reading a 19-page interview transcript.

The fact that I studied abroad and count such experience as a turning point in my life required careful handling of how students were interviewed with no prompting and how data were reviewed and analyzed with no preconceived expectations. Failure to practice what Moustakas (1994) calls epoché may have impacted the scope of the study, especially in regard to its validity.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, the main supporting theory behind qualitative research, is a philosophical school of thought whose main focus of study is that of “seeking the nature of

perception, remembrance and other human experiences” (Farber, 1966, page 49). Such a philosophical approach also underlies phenomenology as the qualitative research design that I used for this study. Merriam (2009) asserts that phenomenology is suitable mostly for situations where intense human experiences are observed, which is true to the subject of this study. While abroad, students’ experiences are challenging and intense because, among other things, they lose their cultural frame of reference and are forced to confront themselves as a cultural minority.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Vygotsky’s and Piaget’s theories of development and learning served as the theoretical framework for the study; I paid particular attention to their idea that development involves struggle and dissonance (Lewin, 2009). Che, Spearman, and Manizade (2009) proposed that the idea of dissonance and struggle was central to learning for students studying in less developed, less Eurocentric sites. Their statement that, “Participation in study abroad programs in less familiar destinations has the potential to promote students’ growth in more significant levels than for students going to more popular, Eurocentric study abroad sites” (p. 104) comes from their belief that study at such sites would involve a deep level of struggle and dissonance. Consequently students in less familiar destinations would be called to engage at a deeper level both cognitively and emotionally. It is important to note that Che et al. (2009) emphasized that students in such situations can be successful only if they have the proper preparation and support. A more in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework appears in Chapter 2.

Chapter Summary

Study abroad is not a novel concept; evidence of its presence can be found in historical accounts from as early as in the 5th Century AD. In the United States study abroad started as a question of necessity as higher education in the country was either unavailable or considered

substandard. After World War II the US higher education system started its ascent to what is considered the best higher education system in the world. Study abroad has been subject to US government policies. The Fulbright program, the Peace Corps, and more recently the Gilman and Boren scholarship programs and the Lincoln Commission are examples of government programs aimed at supporting study abroad.

American students have traditionally chosen to study abroad in developed countries, although there is a modest shift in this trend. Additionally, the Lincoln Commission proposal on increasing the number of Americans studying abroad includes a provision to encourage study in nontraditional developing countries. The purpose of this study is to compare the experiences of American undergraduate students who studied at least a semester in Ghana or England. The literature suggests that there is a link between the depth of the experience and the host site characteristics.

The goal of this study was to provide international educators with additional knowledge to help them understand the emerging paradigm in study abroad. It is imperative that the educational professional consider how sending a large number of students to nontraditional destinations impacts all the parties involved. I used the qualitative research method and its phenomenology research design to conduct the study with a convenience sample of seven students. Piaget's and Vygostky's theories of learning served as the frame of reference for the study.

Research findings are beneficial to those in the field as an avenue for further inquiry. I do not expect that this research alone will provide any final answer to a question that is, in essence, a moving target, as the world is changing at a dizzying and unprecedented pace. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the population.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Context Setting

Study abroad is not a novel concept. The subject of this research, “Education abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student’s home institution” (Bolen, 2007, p. 176) can be traced back only to the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

If we were to look at study abroad as an avenue to accessing better quality education, Americans may have very little incentive to study in another country. This is especially true in developing countries where American students may encounter both education and living standards that are considered subpar by American standards. Traditionally, American students go abroad seeking cross-cultural experiences, while the rest of the world approaches study abroad with more pragmatic eyes or as a necessity in educating citizens who work and live in the global village.

While Americans continue to study abroad mostly in Europe, there has been a shift toward study in developing countries. In 2007-2008 there were 262,416 US students studying abroad for academic credit, an 8% increase from the previous year. The percentage of US students in African countries grew from 2.8% in 1998-1999 to 4.8% in 2007-2008, while the percentage of US students in Asia grew from 6% in 1998-1999 to 11.1% in 2007-2008 (IIE, 2010). This modest emerging paradigm and its consequences deserve scrutiny.

Study Abroad and International Education Research

Research in study abroad has been sparse, although there has been a significant increase in the amount of published research since the 1980s. Bolen (2007) indicated that in the 1970s,

there were 189 research based articles, reports, books, or presentations about education abroad; that number increased to 377 in the 1980s and 675 in the 1990s (Bolen, 2007). He estimated that by 2009 there would be over a thousand articles on the subject.

A review of three comprehensive bibliographies on US students abroad by Weaver (1989), Chao (2001), and Comp (2008) provided a longitudinal picture of the study abroad issues of this research. Although several issues remain constant in the literature: impact of experiences on students' personal growth, second language acquisition, outcomes assessment, etc., we can discern a few changes. For example, in Chao (2001) and Comp (2008) we found a series of documents related to minorities' participation in study abroad, institutions' liability related to study abroad programs, and study abroad discussed as part of the US foreign policy. Even though the bibliographies noted included information on research that analyzed outcomes for students in specific (mostly developed) countries, there was nothing akin to this study or a comparison of students' experiences in developed versus developing countries or how the developing country's culture may impact learning. Wells (2006) stated that, "Studies with the express purpose of examining the impacts of studying abroad nontraditional versus traditional locations are virtually nonexistent" (p. 115) and "Study abroad research has rarely included nontraditional versus traditional locations as a main focus" (p. 116). I found statements indicating that further research is needed in determining the impact of geographical location on learning outcomes. I address such literature in more detail here.

Lewin (2009) said that the changes facing study abroad are revolutionary and are not related to size (number of participants) but rather to one of philosophy. From a goal of achieving high culture, where culture is used in the sense of someone who has vast knowledge and experience or is *cultured*, study abroad is now more about developing knowledge, skills,

attitudes, and experiences required for living in a *flat* world. It appears that American institutions are now looking at study abroad closer to the way institutions in Europe have always looked at it.

Carlson, Burn, Useem, and Yachimowicz (1990) state,

Whereas the Europeans tended to be more interested in the contribution of the experience abroad to students' ability to function professionally in another country and culture, the U.S. interest was on students' gaining a greater knowledge of and concern for other countries and international issues as well as enhanced foreign language proficiency. (p. 113)

Opposition to the democratization of study abroad argues that a shift in goal from culture acquisition to making a global citizenry commercializes study abroad and transforms students into mere global consumers. The proof, some allege, is the widespread proliferation of for-profit study abroad programs, many of questionable quality. A World Bank document issued in 2007 reports that, "Higher education has today become a tradable service, which although not yet on the same scale, is similar to the trade of telecommunication or financial services" (Bashir, p. 7) and that in 2005 the US exported an estimated \$14.1 billion in educational services. This is clear evidence that for the United States higher education continues to be a successfully exported commodity, and that other countries will follow suit as is evidenced by the number of study abroad programs aimed at English speakers worldwide. Lewin (2009) stated that it is valuable and possible to build a global citizenry without consumerism, "Democratization of study abroad may allow us to carry out the work of the enlightened university and replace magic with reason, absorptions with critical distance and consumerism with citizenship" (p. xvii).

Study Abroad Outcomes Assessment

Outcomes assessment plays a central role in higher education and is frequently associated with accreditation and funding issues. Administrators and faculty are called upon to provide evidence that their programs are worth funding because their outcomes fulfill the mission of the

university to provide education relevant to students who will compete and work in a global community even if they never leave the country. This project examined the fits within the assessment parameter.

“An outcome most generally can be any kind of result, impact, effect or consequence of something, in this case, of education abroad” (Meyer-Lee & Evans, 2007, p. 62). Outcomes assessment is very broad and can refer both to the cognitive and affective realms. Study-abroad assessment is complex because, among other things, the experience is short, the impact is consequential, and the experience is holistic. The position of one’s holistic learning is aptly described by Paulo Freire (1998), a renowned Brazilian educator, who in the preface to his book stated,

We must dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without the fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish or unscientific, if not antiscientific. We must dare in order to say scientifically, and not as mere blah-blah-blah, that we study, we learn, we teach, we know with our entire body. (p. 3)

Freire addressed this issue because he had concerns about viewing learning through a Positivism lens. Perhaps the expression “knowing by heart,” present in many languages and that we discard as reflective of the ignorance of the ancient past, does have merit; that knowledge is experienced with our entire body and not only in our brain.

Assessment methods can be direct or indirect but preferably both. Direct methods are related to the content or subject area and measure how much students know about the course content, what skills and tasks they can perform as a result, and other aspects of the subject. Direct assessment tools are tests, portfolios, papers, projects, etc. Indirect assessment, however, is, “Related to the act of learning, such as factors that predict or mediate learning or perceptions about learning but do not reflect learning itself” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), 2007, p.32) and to how the “evidence collected thru indirect methods lead

to inferences about change” (Deardorff & Deardorff, 2007, p. 91). Methods used in indirect assessment are surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In this study I used indirect methods of assessment with in-depth interviews as the primary research tool. Some researchers seek to study multiple types of outcomes while others may concentrate on a specific outcome. The literature review that follows regards these two approaches.

Multiple Assessment Studies

One of the most cited multiple assessment studies in the area of study abroad is from Carlson et al. (1990) who conducted a quasi-experimental quantitative research project whose goal was to determine, “What difference, if any, student abroad makes to students in their undergraduate careers and later lives, or, put differently, the outcomes for students of study abroad” (p. XII). The project brought together American and European institutions, but the review only concerned itself with the American side of the project. The US institutions participating in the project were the University of California, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Kalamazoo College; the study involved both enrolled students and alumni. Over 200 students, including those in the control group, were involved in the project whose methodology included questionnaires and, for the alumni sample, an extensive phone interview. Enrolled students answered the questionnaire both before and after their study abroad experience, which took place in Europe during their junior year.

Findings of the Carlson et al. (1990) study indicated that returning students increased their knowledge of other countries and foreign languages. In addition the students increased their understanding and developed concern for the way they consider international issues. The study also determined that study abroad alumni indicated that the impact of the experience in their lives is, “One theme that is interwoven into nearly every aspect of their lives it is the creative

integration of their cosmopolitan and localities identities, the selective and combining of socially derived cross-cultural and local-cultural repertoires” (Carlson et al., 1990, p. 112). The authors said that a solid research tradition must be developed in regards to study abroad and detailed some areas of need regarding further studies. Among such areas they included the necessity to understand the relationships among several of the program characteristics including geographical location.

Another project on study abroad multiple assessment studies that is frequently cited in the literature is the GLOSSARI (Georgia Learning Outcome of Student Studying Abroad Research Initiative) (Sutton, 2007) that began in 2001. The study’s objectives were to,

Identify cognitive learning outcomes attributable to diverse study abroad experiences for students at a wide variety of public institutions; identify impact on academic performance indicators; identify impact of study abroad on core liberal arts aspirations (critical thinking, leadership, adaptability, etc.); identify program characteristics that optimize learning outcomes to guide future program development; identify students’ characteristics that predict likely participation and successful participants and refine, replicate and disseminate methods for assessing the impact of study abroad on student learning outcomes. (Sutton, 2007, slide 9)

The GLOSSARI study initially involved 250 study abroad students and 250 students who did not study abroad. By the second phase of the project the sample consisted of 500 students in each group. Sutton’s (2007) six measures of learning outcomes were,

1. knowledge of verbal resources (slide 14),
2. sensitivity to cultural context (slide 16),
3. knowledge of self as a cultural being (slide 18),
4. functional knowledge of cultural practices (slide 20),
5. knowledge of world geography (slide 23), and
6. knowledge of global interdependence (slide 25).

The first phase of the GLOSSARI study involved students' self-reported learning outcomes. As the second cohort was initiated, a skills and knowledge testing component was added to help researchers understand, "Not just what they say they know, but what they actually know" (Sutton, 2007, slide 13). By 2007 results of the study indicated that students who participated in study abroad improved their academic performance upon returning and persisted at a higher rate to graduation. In addition they were able to better adjust to new situations, take risks when appropriate, be able to interact in a different culture, learn to withhold judgment, become sensitive to language and cultural differences, and develop personal awareness of how they react to others (Sutton, 2007).

Another multiple assessment project was started by Michigan State University in 2000 to measure the impact of study abroad on students, faculty, and the university as a whole. Ingraham and Peterson (2004) reported on the status of the project that, at the time, was in its second phase. The study sought to assess how study abroad impacted students' intellectual and personal growth, intercultural awareness, and professional development. The researchers administered before and after the sojourn a survey of participating students along with faculty observation reports and secondary sources for data collection. The research design was based on the theory of gestalt of study abroad and employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Ingraham and Peterson's (2004) survey before departure contained 33 questions including those regarding students' expectations of their experience; the survey administered after the sojourn focused its questions on the outcomes of the study abroad experience. Participants provided a self-assessment when taking the survey and by the time the results were compiled, the study had used 2,500 students' surveys in the analysis.

Results of Ingraham and Peterson's (2004) data analysis after the sojourn for students who participated in study abroad programs in 1999-2000 focused on the goals of intercultural awareness, personal growth, academic performance, language learning, and professional development. The quantitative data garnered from the instrument used after the sojourn were organized by the program length; one of the initially visible findings was that the longer time was spent abroad the stronger the results seemed to be after the sojourn, although the study does indicate that regardless of program length, results from after the sojourn were strong (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). When independent t-tests were conducted comparing scores from before and after the sojourn, however, the results were different. For the factors *Intercultural Awareness*, *Language Learning*, and *Professional Development* no statistically significant differences were found. The personal growth and academic performance goals revealed significant statistical differences but on the opposite side of improvement: sojourn test scores from before were higher than the sojourn test scores from after. The authors suggested that perhaps the findings were a measurement issue or related to the fact that mean differences were very small.

Alternatively, the *gamma change theory* espouses that the experience abroad led students to reevaluate their after the sojourn experience based on a different scale than the one used for before the sojourn experience (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). In other words students know themselves better after studying abroad and may realize that their self-assessment from before the departure was inflated.

Faculty reports were analyzed qualitatively and revealed that study abroad impacts students at a significant level in intellectual and personal growth. As the authors state when reading the faculty reports, "It is striking to see on balance how large an impact on personal growth the study abroad experience has" (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004, p. 93). This study

provided helpful insights into the pros and cons of using measurements from before and after the sojourn. There are so many facts interceding between the two assessments that it is difficult to document if any changes were indeed the result of a specific intervention.

Another large study (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004) on the outcome of study abroad was conducted at the University of Delaware, which is one of the pioneers of study abroad programs – its first junior-year abroad program was started in Paris in 1923. The study examined whether students studying abroad on a short-term program acquired global mindedness to a greater level than those students who enrolled at the home campus in similar courses. For the purpose of this study global awareness was defined as a composite that included “intercultural awareness, personal growth and development, awareness of global interdependence; and functional knowledge of world geography and language” (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 167). It is important to note that the study purpose was to measure perceived versus actual outcomes regarding the factors above as well as the fact that only students in short-term programs were included in the study.

The Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) study used an anonymous survey with 20 multiple-choice items. Student participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to each item. In addition, the survey asked students to report on a series of activities they may have engaged in during the previous 30 days. A control group of students taking similar courses at the home campus was asked to respond to the same survey. A multivariate statistical analysis was conducted (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004).

In the intercultural awareness measurement, significant differences were found in all but item 14 of the questionnaire, which asked if the participant “consciously withheld judgment on international event/issue” (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 170). This result indicated that students

in the abroad group were more likely to recognize that “the whole world is not like the U.S.” (p. 170) and that “there are other cultures that exist very differently from our own” (p. 170).

In the category of personal growth and development, the difference was significant in the responses mean (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Students reported a greater interest in the arts, a result perhaps of the fact that University of Delaware programs regardless of major include excursions to fine art venues and events.

In the category related to communication and language skills the difference was once again significant in terms of the gains of the study abroad in contrast to the control group (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Both groups had the same number of students taking language courses. The difference may be accounted for because the abroad group of students was immersed in the culture and even those students who were not taking language courses abroad were still forced to confront language issues outside the classroom. Such confrontation may have led to unanticipated language learning.

In the category of global interdependence, there was no significant statistical difference (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Perhaps this finding was because the questions were related to US trade relations and foreign manufacturing, two areas very specific and difficult to understand for students within various majors.

Students were asked to provide comments (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). As expected, the students in the abroad program provided comments in higher numbers, indicating that they had much to discuss about their experiences and what they learned abroad. It is important to note that comments from students in the abroad group focused mostly on experiences outside the classroom. The study conclusion stated, “Based on the data yielded by this first study, it was concluded that short-term programs, even as short as one month, are worthwhile educational

endeavors that have significant self-perceived impacts on students' intellectual and personal lives" (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 174).

These multi-assessment studies clearly indicated that there is an emphasis on the nonacademic outcomes of study abroad, perhaps with the exception of foreign languages. I expect that as study abroad becomes an integral part of US institutions curricula and assessment of course outcomes will become a central concern.

Single Assessment Studies

In 2005 the Education for Global Learning (EGL), a consortium of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, conducted a study to assess intercultural competence as an outcome of study abroad. The purpose of the EGL was "to create, promote, support and facilitate a range of international education learning opportunities and experiences for students, faculty, staff, and administration on the local campus, throughout the state and around the world." (Emert & Pearson, 2007, p. 68). The group sought to use assessment as a tool for improvement of study abroad programs, for validating the importance of study abroad in the experience of college students, and for calling attention to administrators and others about its value. The focus of the assessment was measuring the intercultural competence of students who studied abroad for a semester in Costa Rica and England. A definition of intercultural competence came from Deardorff (2006) and reads, "The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194).

The EGL researchers used the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which measures the intercultural status of students on a continuum from ethnocentric to ethno-relative; students took the IDI both before and after their sojourn. The study sample consisted of 88

students for the Costa Rica cohort and 44 for the England cohort. The results indicated that the students as a group had modest gains toward the ethno relative stage. An analysis of individual results was not possible because pre- and post-IDI results per participant could not be matched as no participant was asked to provide identifying information (Emert & Pearson, 2007).

Although the EGL authors don't discuss in detail what type of enrollment arrangements these students had at the host country, it is indicated that the students were taught by EGL faculty while abroad, and that the program providers were the institutions in the consortium themselves. As such, there is a very important element that they did not investigate or discuss in relation to this situation; the fact that students were not in a direct enrollment situation or in class with students from the host country but rather with students from a home institution in a physical classroom in a foreign country. Additionally, there was no information on the type of living arrangements students had during their stay in either of the host sites. Had they stayed with local families, for example, the study would have one more element to discuss in regards to any improvement in the students' intercultural competence. Because the literature is consistent in emphasizing that interaction with the locals is a crucial part of the learning process while abroad, this study would have benefited from discussing such aspects when reporting data analysis (Emert & Pearson, 2007).

Janes's (2008) investigation of a similar situation, however, was more detailed and provided helpful insights. His study investigated how a group of American students in an island program in London progressed in their understanding of the British culture not only by studying it in the classroom but also by living in the country for the semester. The 23 students involved in the study were from a small, private Roman Catholic University in San Antonio, Texas, enrolled

in an island, study-abroad program in London where they lived and studied together. The teaching methods for the course were based on American pedagogical methods (Janes, 2008).

Janes (2008) sought to evaluate the students' progress in decoding the British culture and development of an intercultural gaze, which "implies that the environment is not just *passively seen* but is filled with meaning by the viewers" (Janes, 2008, p. 23). As such, a tourist gaze may imply a search for pleasurable experiences in the new environment; an academic gaze may imply a search for realities in the new environment and so on. The result of *gazing* will then differ from person to person, as it requires personal input and intent. The author's interest was in determining what type of gaze his students were using during their stay: romantic, environmental, anthropological, or studious types of tourist gaze. These types of gaze were classified by Urry (Janes, 2008). Questionnaires were distributed to students at various times during the term and questions were used to discern the students' initial perceptions of Britain as well as testing the material presented in class.

The Janes (2008) results indicated that students learned both inside and outside the classroom. The students' descriptions of the British culture changed significantly throughout the term and moved from a traditional tourist view of the country (monarchy, high tea, rain, umbrellas, stuck up behavior) to a more mature gaze of discussing parliamentary issues, mentioning diversity as a core value of the British culture, and making observations as to the cultural role of beer in British life. Learning occurred both inside and outside the classroom, a statement that clearly supports the idea that study abroad is indeed a holistic experience (Janes, 2008).

Single assessment studies provide evidence that student gains from study abroad experiences are significant. Perhaps by focusing on a single element for the study, they are easier to manage.

Site of Program and its Impact on Study Abroad Outcomes

I failed to find references in the literature regarding comparative studies on study abroad experiences in developed and developing countries. I did find, however, several suggestions for study on how location and duration of the sojourn and how the degree of difference between the home and host countries cultures may impact what and how students learn. The earliest publication found on the subject was from 1983, a NAFSA: Association of International Educators' conference presentation by Blake (1983) supported the idea of sending students to two continents because, "The missiles are poised in Europe, but the battles of the last forty years have been fought in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America" (p. 2).

Carlson et al. (1990) indicated the necessity to study the impact of geographic location on the outcomes of study abroad, which Sutton, Miller, and Rubin (2007) also support by asking, "To what extent do differences in study abroad destinations and program configurations lead to differences in learning outcomes?" (p. 24) and writing, "Researchers have documented limited connection between affective learning gains in study abroad and attributes of the host culture" (p. 42). Sutton et al. (2007) also said,

Intuitively, we might predict that greater cultural distance between the host and home cultures would incline students toward more dramatic affective changes in either positive or negative directions, and that study abroad in a developing nation in Africa might impact students quite differently than study abroad in the developed context of Western Europe. (p. 42)

Meyer-Lee and Evans (2007) add, “One might want to explore the differential impacts (both direct and indirect) of international programs in different host countries, with various program models, length of program, etc.” (p. 69).

Martin, Bradford, and Rohrlich (1995) conducted a longitudinal study on the role that *Expectation Theory* plays in individuals’ views of their experience after the sojourn. Expectation theory suggests that when an individual’s expectations before the departure are either fulfilled or positively violated (a violated expectation is one that has a positive ending for the sojourner), it lead to a positive evaluation of the experience and vice versa. The study included the variables gender, previous travel, and locations that were all in Europe. The study methodology included questionnaires before and after the sojourn that measured expectations and, upon return, the fulfillment of such expectations. There were 248 student participants who completed questionnaires before and after the sojourn. Analysis of the data revealed that overall respondents’ expectations were met or positively violated and that location of the sojourn “contributes to predictions of expectancy violation concerning coursework, climate, and language use” (Martin et al., 1995, p. 100).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals who expect a sojourn in England to be very similar to living in the United States often find these expectations violated. In contrast, individuals expect a sojourn in a more exotic place to be very different and these expectations are more likely upheld. (Martin et al., 1995, p. 92)

The data for this study revealed that students in England reported that their expectations were violated negatively more than those students in France and Italy. The authors suggest that, “It is not just the cultural difference or similarity between the host and home culture that influences how sojourns are experienced, but also corresponding expectations” (Martin et al., 1995, p. 103).

The literature above and that which follows clearly support the need for research on the relevance of the study abroad site characteristics of individuals’ experiences.

Making the Case for Study Abroad in Nontraditional Sites

Wells (2006) discussed whether encouraging more students to go abroad to nontraditional destinations furthers the aims of international education. For the purpose of his article nontraditional sites are those in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East. Wells (2006) presented his approach to the discussion by delineating that study abroad has rationales that fit within three areas – student, society, or government – and that such areas form the framework under which he discusses study abroad in nontraditional sites. Wells (2006) proposed that study at a nontraditional site supports the rationales of “workforce preparedness, transnational competence, global citizenship and personal growth” (p. 124). Study in nontraditional sites has the potential to bring to our students a greater understanding of the global economy, improve nontraditional language skills, and challenge the students to review, reevaluate, and stretch their beliefs, values, and opinions because of the marked differences between home and host country cultures.

For society and government there are many benefits to individuals studying at nontraditional sites including “increased firsthand experience with global issues or problems, broader knowledge of critical regions of the world, increased societal knowledge of critical regions of the world, increased societal knowledge concerning emerging markets and more globally aware and sensitive citizenry” (Wells, 2006, p. 124). He aptly noted some compelling reasons why the United States might want to become more acquainted with the developing areas of the world. Since World War II all the wars the United States has fought have been in developing countries, that most of the population of the world resides in such countries, and US business markets have the potential for exponential growth in the areas. Additionally, by getting to know the rest of the world, we may be able to start discussing the issues that impact everyone,

which can only be solved by pooling everyone's resources. Benefits for sponsoring institutions may include a higher profile by expanding study abroad offerings and the possibility of developing a niche market.

Woolf (2006) wrote about the new charge for the US to send students to nontraditional sites by expounding on his idea stating that this approach is "neither entirely realistic nor wholly desirable" (p. 135). His concerns are various including that institutions are highlighting the exotic nature of nontraditional places or as he calls it, advertising programs in the "language of tourism" (p. 135), which relegates the academic aspect of the program to the background. Additionally, he said that travel to nontraditional countries is in fact travel to developing countries because in the current climate they are frequently synonymous and the "demand is based on the travel agent's attraction to the exotic allied with a quasi-missionary zeal to engage with poverty" (p. 136).

Woolf's (2006) other concerns regard the nontraditional sites and the national security argument, which only considers the US interest in the mobility of students to the areas. Additionally, he was concerned about politicizing international education and the fact that there is not a ready market for study in nontraditional sites because area studies and nontraditional languages have a very low subscription within US Institutions. Woolf (2006) wrote that sending a large number of students to nontraditional sites would place a huge burden on the scarce resources of the host institution. He suggested that the US should provide funding to improve the host country's educational infrastructure. He had a concern about how the different cultural approaches to learning and different philosophies guiding teaching the "liberal" and the "theological" models influence the learner. The US approach is closer to the liberal model where

discussion, skepticism, and a nonunitary notion of culture prevail. In Africa the approach is closer to the theological model that seeks to transmit an irrefutable truth (Woolf, 2006).

Shubert (2008) supported Woolf's (2006) position but adds some insight of his own. For example, he wrote that study abroad in the United States is mostly a purview of for-profit service providers, which feeds the language of tourism to which Woolf (2006) refers in his article, and that such language also applies to traditional sites. Shubert (2008) gave Spain as an example supporting his position,

I have serious doubts that this third most popular study abroad destination is promoted in terms of its being modern, secular European society where gay marriage is legal and which boasts one of the ten largest economies in the world. Carmen, Catholicism and Civil War, not to mention bullfighting, are much more likely to be the terms of engagement. (p. 198)

Shubert (2008) contended that low subscription to area programs and nontraditional languages are not a real deterrent because students in traditional majors such as history and business have much to gain by taking nontraditional languages or going to study at nontraditional sites. He made the case that the low enrollment in nontraditional languages is a question of availability as the majority of institutions in the US only teach traditional languages. The same is true for study abroad programs, as many US institutions only offer programs in traditional sites in Western Europe and, if offering outside those areas increased, the number of participants would also increase. In regards to the burden the increasing number of students would place on nontraditional sites, he wrote that the middle man or the service providers would, by necessity, be cut and that US institutions would need to develop a relationship of mutual benefit with the host institution.

Undoubtedly, there is an interest from the field for studies of how different locations and host countries' cultural characteristics impact how and what students learn in addition to the logistics and programmatic issues. With a new emphasis on supporting placement of students in

nontraditional sites, the need for research should also include discussion of developing countries, which comprise most of what is considered nontraditional study-abroad sites and the impact of developing countries' cultural and economic characteristics on the outcomes of study abroad for all parties involved.

Constructive Disequilibrium

Che et al.'s (2009) article was somewhat of a revelation as it theoretically supported this study's premise that there may be a significant difference in the experiences of students who study abroad in traditional developed Eurocentric countries versus the experiences of students who study abroad in nontraditional developing non-Eurocentric countries. Che et al. (2009) examined how study abroad at nontraditional sites would support universities' missions. They began their study by reviewing and coding mission statements from 81 universities, finding that most of them referred to three domains of purpose: scholarship, teaching, and outreach. They wrote that study abroad fits within the teaching domain. They also noted that the mission statements clearly indicated that institutions were seeking to graduate students who were global-minded and who were culturally aware both of themselves and others. Che et al. (2009) proposed that the universities' goal of educating global minded students would be supported by sending students to study abroad in less developed countries. The experience in such locales would provide students with challenges that would translate into significant learning.

Che et al. (2009) supported their thesis by using Piaget's theory of disequilibrium and disturbance and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined thru problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). According to Vygotsky's theory

learning occurs when individuals are taught above their current level of understanding or the zone of proximal development, while Piaget's theory of learning promotes the concepts of disequilibrium and disturbance as catalysts for learning (Blake & Pope, 2008). Disequilibrium and disturbance is what occurs when learners are maneuvering between their current and proximal zone of development; achieving equilibrium comes by a process of assimilation and accommodation (Christofi & Thompson, 2007). Perhaps in simple terms this is explained by the old adage *no pain, no gain*.

When students arrive at their host country, they are in the zone of proximal development, where their current personal and emotional skills are not yet appropriate to maneuver within the new cultural reality around them. The locals, or some proxy, are more capable than the students regarding the handling of life under the specifics of that culture and thus equipped to help newcomers navigate the new environment and develop the proficiency to deal with it. It takes disturbance or dissonance to learn, but individuals cannot overcome such disturbances or dissonance alone. A support system, formal or informal, must exist for individuals to succeed in this process.

Che et al. (2009) said that, "Study abroad programs to less familiar destinations – because they are distinct but not disjoint from one's prior experiences – abound with opportunities to perturb one's perspective to the point of constructive disequilibrium" (p. 103) and that, "Personal transformation can happen anywhere, but because of the role of novelty in perturbing our perspectives, personal transformation becomes more possible when we encounter and experience that which we have not encountered before" (p. 104). They also said that deeper experiences result from these situations because, "The more rich opportunities to experience struggle and cognitive dissonance while simultaneously interacting with more capable others contributes to a

higher likelihood of the construction of an authentic, deep space or zone for development and transformation” (p. 104).

Engle and Engle (2003) appeared to support Che et al.’s (2009) proposition by saying, “In all forms and at all levels of education, of course, gain only comes at the expense of a certain pain; in education abroad, we find this even more arguably the case” (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 70). Sojourners “grow beyond the psychological parameters of the original culture in spite of, or rather because of, the adversarial nature of the cross-cultural adaptation process” (Kim, 1988, p. 144).

Literature Review Summary and Conclusion

Current studies confirm that study abroad is a worthy endeavor and that participants benefit from the experience both at the cognitive and affective levels. The expected paradigm shift in regards to study abroad placements in nontraditional sites, those outside Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, merits further research as current studies suggest that study at a developing country may have a deeper impact on participants than otherwise.

In creative writing there exists a theory of the character arc or the changing trajectory of the character as the story develops, which may be brought about by disturbances such as death, betrayal, unfulfilled love, etc. It is rare when the arc is not influenced by some dramatic event in the character’s life. The literature on study abroad in nontraditional sites suggests that there is a more accentuated arc that students experience when studying in nontraditional sites that are as a rule developing countries.

Chapter Summary

The literature indicates that research in international education, especially regarding study abroad, has been scant but that it has been growing steadily in the last 10 years.

Additionally, a number of emerging issues in the area such as the impact of technology on study abroad, the flattening of the world and its impact on homogeneity of cultures, and a change of philosophy related to study abroad from seeking culture to a more pragmatic approach of preparing students to live and work in a global society have been appearing in the literature more recently. Research in the field has concentrated on affective level outcomes such as personal growth, intercultural development, and global mindedness, with the exception of foreign language where assessments are mostly related to language acquisition. All studies reviewed in this chapter indicate that study abroad impacts students significantly. There have been calls for research that examines the impact of location on the outcome of study abroad. No significant research has been identified that addresses this study's proposal to compare the experiences of students in developed versus developing countries. A study by Che et al. (2009) provided a theoretical support for the idea of this study, although the study was conceived before I read about their study.

Constructive disequilibrium and zone of proximal development are the two theoretical frameworks for this study. Such theories propose that deeper learning occurs when one is faced with a situation that is above one's current level of skills or knowledge (both cognitive and affective) and that our zone of proximal development is just above our current level of skills and knowledge. Such a situation causes disequilibrium that requires accommodation and assimilation to be resolved and a consequent gain in knowledge and skills (Blake & Pope, 2008). The proposal from some institutions and the US government to significantly increase the number of students in nontraditional sites has detractors who say that an increase in the number of students has not been considered in a consistent and rational manner and that there is no evidence that such an increase in numbers will be beneficial to all parties involved.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The Qualitative Method of Research and Phenomenology

While the quantitative method of research seeks to understand reality that exists independently of individuals, the qualitative research method seeks to understand reality as it is perceived in the consciousness of individuals and, consequently, may differ from one person to another. Some researchers doubt that an objective stand-alone reality can exist. Moustakas (1994) asserted that, “What was said to possess objective reality existed only through representation in the mind; thus Descartes (1912/1988) reasoned that objective reality is in truth subjective reality” (p. 44).

Constructivism and phenomenology are the main supporting theories of qualitative research with phenomenology being both a school of philosophy and one of the types of qualitative research. Phenomenology as a philosophy seeks to understand “the nature of perception, remembrance and other human experiences” (Farber, 1966, p. 49). Phenomenology as a type of qualitative research seeks to understand how individuals perceive their *lived* experiences and the phenomenological researcher should endeavor to identify the essence of such experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

Moustakas (1994) wrote that, “Phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge” (p. 26) and that, “Phenomenology is the *first* method of knowledge because it begins with ‘things themselves’” (p. 41). In order to succeed in using this research approach, I must discard any prejudgment and presuppositions before analyzing the data. Additionally, I must pursue the absolute truth of the experience as it is presented; a tall order when considering the judgmental nature of human beings.

Merriam (2009) asserted that phenomenology is suitable mostly to situations where intense human experiences are being observed, which suits this study well. This study focused on events that happened at a time of extreme intensity in the lives of students – that time of transition between cultures that throws cognition and emotion into disarray. What happens in this type of transition has been studied extensively and named *Culture Shock*, a theoretical concept that espouses that individuals experience a series of emotional stages from excitement to depression and eventually back to the baseline of emotions from before their experience when transitioning cultures (Furnham, 1993). I have worked with students studying abroad who experienced culture shock at various degrees of severity from almost none to a few who had to return to the United States within days of arriving in the host country because they were unable to handle the abrupt transition. The phenomenological research design is composed of three distinct steps (Moustakas, 1994),

1. *The problem and question formulation.* The initial step where the researcher defines the phenomenon as well as the questions that will help participants describe it in detail.
2. *The data gathering process.* The gathering of the descriptive data collected from interviews, review of the documents, and observations.
3. *The data analysis process.* The detailed review of the data collected in search of meanings.

Intuition and Phenomenology

Descartes, one of the philosophers associated with the phenomenology school of philosophy, said that intuition was an elemental concept in phenomenology. He wrote that it was through intuition that individuals produced judgments on things observed and that intuition, being a true state of being, is consequently the true representation of an individual's beliefs

(Moustakas, 1994). Intuition produces a raw, uncensored, unfiltered view of the world as experienced by an individual. Intuition is ubiquitous in life and sometimes referred to as a *gut reaction*. It is important to note that intuition would have no place in quantitative research as it is too subjective and personal. I believe, however, that intuition, the popular *gut feeling*, played an important role in this research project.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions used in this study.

1. What are the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developing country (Ghana) and the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developed country (England)?
2. What are the themes of the students' experiences?
3. What are the similarities and differences among the students' experiences?
4. Is there a relationship between the identified themes and specific country or culture issues?
5. Is there an essence in the experiences that students describe?

Researcher's Role

I was the only data collector for the study and I met with participants for interviews that lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. Unfortunately, I was not able to collect any additional documents from the students as none of them kept a journal, a blog, or wrote papers about their experience proper. Additionally, I was unable to engage any of the students in reviewing the transcript of their interviews and both instances proved problematic regarding research validity.

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research calls for the researcher to practice *epoche* or the refraining from judgment, a very difficult behavior for someone who has had the

same type of experiences as my interviewees. Practicing epoche requires the researcher to bracket the studied phenomenon and isolate it from bias derived from similar personal experiences. I come to this practice with personal experience in the area of studying abroad and practicing epoche required discipline, focus, frequent self-questioning, and as Merriam (2009) and Moustakas (1994) suggested, a concerted effort to look at each experience with new eyes.

Sampling Criteria

The research design used two purposeful, convenience sample groups of three and four students each; one group of three undergraduate students studied at least a semester in a developed country, England, and another group of four students studied at least a semester in a developing country, Ghana. Initially the proposal was to interview students who studied in Norway, a developed country, but I was unable to recruit enough participants who fit this profile so I had to substitute it for students going to England, which is the most popular site for US students abroad. In 2008/2009 there were 31,342 US students who studied in the United Kingdom, 12% of the entire population of US students abroad (IIE, 2010).

Initially participants were recruited both from ETSU and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK) (see Appendix A), but the majority of the interviewees were from UTK, which has a large study abroad program. With the help of study abroad advisors at UTK, several students who had just returned from Ghana were contacted by email (see Appendix B); four of the students agreed to participate in the study. The first interviews took place in Knoxville during April of 2011. I returned to Knoxville for interviews one additional time. The initial research plan was to interview students who had similar characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, majors, travel experience, etc., which proved impossible because I had so few students

willing to participate in the project and did not have the luxury of selection. It is important to note, however, that the groups had similarities and those are outlined in Chapter 4.

Students with at least a semester of study experience in England are plentiful. Unfortunately, despite my extensive recruitment efforts at ETSU, UTK, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA) (see Appendix C), only three students responded to my email request for help with the project (see Appendix D). After consulting with my committee chair regarding the sample size, I was given permission to start reviewing the data collected even without a fourth participant in the England group.

Participants were emailed a consent form to review. If the participant agreed with its terms, I asked him or her to sign it when we met for the first time. No student had an issue regarding consent, but I still briefly reviewed the terms of the consent with each student before beginning the interview, noting the issue of confidentiality of the study, his or her ability to leave the study at will, and that the data collected would be available to them.

My proposal required the engagement of students who had studied at least a semester abroad because the literature data indicated that the longer the sojourn the more significant their experience. Kehl and Morris (2007) compared the differences in global mindedness between short-term and semester-long study abroad participants and found that students in semester-long programs scored higher on the global mindedness scale than students who participated in short-term study abroad programs or those who were at the home campus preparing to depart for their study abroad experience. Dwyer (2004) found that, “The age old premise that ‘more is better’ holds true when it comes to the duration of a study abroad experience” (p. 162).

The following students were interviewed (names are pseudonyms):

Dana – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Political Science and Mass Communication, African-American, female, middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall semester 2010, direct enrollment.

Seth – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Political Science and History, White, male, upper middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall term 2010, direct enrollment.

Kelly – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Social Work, White, female, middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall term 2010, direct enrollment.

John – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Global Studies with a Pre-Med concentration, White, male, middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall term 2010, direct enrollment.

Mary – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Psychology, White, female, middle class, studied in England in the spring term 2011, exchange program.

Nancy – a senior undergraduate, nontraditional college age student, majoring in Environmental Policy and Economics, White, female, middle class, studied in England in the spring term 2010, exchange program.

Kevin – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Biology, White, male, middle class, studied in England in the spring term 2011, exchange program.

The Countries

For the purpose of this study, my reference to the host countries, Ghana as developing and England as developed, was influenced by the former World Bank classification system. Until recently, The World Bank (2012) classified a developed country as one that had a high income

and the people experienced a high standard of living. Countries in this classification included Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US). The World Bank (2012) classification of a country as developing had been based on a low or mid-level per capita income. Some developing countries included Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, India, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. It is important to note that England is one of the countries in the United Kingdom (UK) and UK data are referenced throughout this study.

Although communication technologies did not play a central role in this study, I took into consideration the availability of communication technologies in the host countries as another mark for developing versus developed status. For example, Nwagwu (2009) when discussing building open access in Africa stated that, “Internet connectivity in tertiary education institutions in Africa is in general *too expensive, poorly managed and inadequate to meet even the basic requirements*” (p. 85) and that, “The average African university has bandwidth capacity equivalent to a broadband residential connection available in Europe” (p. 85). Ghana, for example, is a country with a population of approximately 24 million people, 650 thousand of whom have Internet access (2.6% of the population) according to Internet use data from the Internet Telecommunications Union (ITU) (2009). In contrast, according to the Internet World Stats Usage and Population Statistics (2011) website, 82.5% of individuals in the United Kingdom with a population of approximately 63 million people have access to the Internet and other technologies.

Data Collection Methods

I collected qualitative data, which is defined as “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge, obtained thru interviews; detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behavior and actions, recorded in observations, and excerpts, quotations, or

entire passages, extracted from various types of documents”(Patton, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 85). Whenever possible I met with students at their convenience for an in-depth, face-to-face interview, which was recorded and transcribed for coding. The interview questions began with demographic information followed by those related to the study abroad experience proper. Demographic information collected was age, gender, major, minor, student classification, and socioeconomic status. I also inquired about any previous study and travel experience abroad, its length, and purpose.

Merriam (2009) stated that phenomenological interview technique requires the researcher to seek the deep meanings of the lived experiences of the interviewee; my interview questions were designed to elicit such meanings. Although some questions were not asked while others were added, depending on the interviewee responses and the rhythm of the interview, generally, the interview questions (see Appendix E) were:

1. Why did you decide to go to England or Ghana?
2. Can you talk about the experience you had initially at the country?
 - a. Concentrate on the experiences you had during your first 3 weeks in the country.
 - b. What do you remember the most about this time?
 - c. How do you feel about it now that you have had a chance to relive it?
3. Did you have specific expectations as to your country of study?
 - a. Did you expect the experience to be an easy or difficult one?
 - b. Can you give examples of an easy and a difficult situation you encountered?
4. Looking back, can you describe an event that made a great impact on you?

5. How would you summarize your feelings about your experience in Ghana or England?

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. I found that working on the transcription myself was very helpful as it allowed me not only to get more acquainted with the data but also to note voice tone and emphasis and identify details that may have been missed otherwise.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data analysis differs from quantitative data analysis in that the qualitative method recommends analysis simultaneous with data collection. “Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). As I transcribed the interviews, I analyzed both my behavior and the flow of the interview, which facilitated improvement in my interviewing technique. For example, when I listened to the first interviews, I realized that I had spoken too much in trying to fill up students’ silence and sometimes finished students’ sentences. As a result, in subsequent interviews I consciously sought to hold myself back from saying anything when the students were silent or was tempted to finish their sentences.

The study used data coding as a tool to organize, manage, and analyze collected data. This process was initiated by my reviewing the raw data and assigning labels or tags to the relevant bits of data. Such labels included reversal of racial status, racism, standard of living, personal change, etc. Such bits of data consisted of a sentence, a few sentences, or a paragraph, and I strived to follow Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) and Merriam’s (2009) guidance in that for a certain amount of text to be coded its information must stand on its own when looked at outside

its context. In other words, it must communicate an idea without having to refer to the transcribed context. Some researchers approach the data coding at this stage without having a pre-established set of questions or theoretical framework but Merriam (2009) wrote that having a framework gives structure to your data searching and, thus, increases productivity. This study used phenomenology, Piaget's constructive disequilibrium, and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theories as its theoretical framework. Those principles and the review of interview transcripts were guided by the five research questions.

Merriam (2009) suggested that at this stage of coding researchers should code repeated statements from participants (in concept rather than in form) as well as statements that go against such patterns. Although some discrepancy in data is expected, much of the credibility of the research will rest on how discrepant and negative data is handled. In my instance I was seeking differences, so different statements regarding the same questions were not considered discrepant data although I paid attention to such data from students in each group. Once the data units were coded into descriptive themes, I started to compare them among the groups. For example, I looked to see if the racial status reversal theme for the students in Ghana and the racism theme for the students in England could be discussed in comparison. At this stage of the data analysis I used inductive reasoning concepts (from small to large) and also sought to follow Merriam's (2009) guide that data categories should follow a set of organizational and logical criteria that are "responsive to the purpose of the research, ...exhaustive, ...mutually exclusive..., sensitizing... and conceptually congruent" (p. 186).

Once data themes were identified and compared, patterns between and among themes were considered before the analysis began. At this stage I sought to shift from inductive to deductive reasoning as I discovered particular findings based on the general information

classified under themes. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) wrote that data coding was both a process of data reduction and complication. Data complication is in essence viewing and questioning the reduced data in search of different approaches for analysis. Reduction is data deconstruction while complication is constructing the reduced data in different ways seeking alternative hidden meanings. In this study data reduction and complication included questioning whether I should remove Dana, the African-American student who went to Ghana, from the discussion because her experience, related to her background, was different from the White students who went to Ghana. I decided to keep her in the study and discuss the issue in view of future research and implications for practice.

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research Designs

The concepts of validity and reliability have been defined traditionally under the quantitative research approach and such definitions do not necessarily apply to the theoretical guideposts of qualitative research. Merriam (2009) indicated that new interpretations regarding validity and reliability in qualitative research have been proposed and may give better guidance to qualitative researchers.

Internal Validity or Credibility

Internal validity is how closely the data being analyzed or described match reality. Is the researcher describing what he or she is really seeing? Internal validity in qualitative research differs from internal validity in quantitative research because of the assumptions of reality and participants' influence on it. Among other considerations are the role of the researcher as a data collection agent (there is no research instrument between the researcher and participant), the concept of emergent design or how reality may dictate ongoing design changes, the use of inductive as opposed to deductive reasoning, and the thick descriptive nature of the data analysis.

These concepts deeply impact how we define internal validity in qualitative research. Merriam (2009) wrote that validity in qualitative research is a goal rather than a product and she calls internal validity credibility in qualitative research.

Another issue that bears on internal validity is the researcher previous experience and how he or she reflects and documents it. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006), “Reflexivity is an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process” (para. 1). Documenting researcher reflexivity is especially important if the researcher has had experiences similar to the subjects; this concept applies to me as I had similar experiences to the students interviewed. In my mid 20s I came from Brazil to the United States as an international student. I credit this transforming experience as one of the most significant of my life to date. I was very careful in how I approached the issue because of the possibility that my personal views would color the interview process and the data analysis loomed at all times. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) suggested procedures like the following as tools to improve validity in qualitative research.

- Prolonged field work: The more time the researcher spends in the field in contact with participants in their environment, the more insight he or she can gain, which will aid in interpretation.

Unfortunately, this activity did not apply to this study as I interviewed students after the fact. I find, however, that such field work should be considered in future studies as it will not only provide another avenue for study validation but another incredibly rich data source.

- Use of multiple methods: The use of multiple methods of data collection (interview, observation, and document analysis) for researchers and using theoretical frameworks is another avenue to improve validity.

Merriam (2009) cites four types of triangulation: of methods, of data sources (data that are collected at different times or at different sites), multiple researchers, and multiple theoretical frameworks. Again, this study did not use this method for lack of availability.

- Participant checks: Once the researcher has reviewed the data collected, it is important to take the information back to each participant to see if the researcher's interpretation of the data matches the participants' meaning.

I emailed the seven students a transcription of their interview but did not receive a response. I suspect that because they had all graduated a few weeks after our interview they were preoccupied with other issues in life and did not have time to review a 19- to 20-page transcript document.

- Verbatim data: Transcription of interviews with subjects.

This method was used as my main research analysis tool.

- Audit trail: An audit trail is a diary or log the research keeps regarding data collection and data analysis decisions, problems and solutions, and ideas that surfaced that had not been considered before.

As the data collection began for this study, I started an audit trail but did not meticulously follow up with using it.

- Negative or discrepant data: Paying attention to discrepant or negative data is a challenge to the data pattern and must be considered rigorously. This concept is of extreme importance.

As noted previously, I considered such concepts in regards to the data from Dana, the African-American student who went to Ghana.

Reliability or Dependability

Another concept that impacts the quality and rigor of qualitative research is reliability or whether the results of a particular study can be replicated. According to Merriam (2009) reliability is particularly problematic with qualitative research because of its subjective approach to reality and its belief that reality is ever changing. Merriam (2009) wrote that reliability in qualitative research relies on whether another researcher working on a similar project accepts the interpretations of the previous researcher and not whether he or she can replicate the findings. Wolcott (1994) further opined that addressing reliability in qualitative research requires merely a statement indicating that the concept is inappropriate for the research design as it is expected that replication of a qualitative research design may not yield the same results. The issue at hand is whether the results presented are at all in tandem with the data collected and, if so, the study may be said to be dependable and credible. Dependability in qualitative research can be enhanced by some of the same tools used for internal validity such as triangulation; Merriam (2009) emphasized the role of the audit trail in relation to such concept.

External Validity or Transferability

The concept of external validity or transferability deals with how the findings of one study may be applicable to another situation (Merriam, 2009). External validity is problematic in qualitative research. The very premise of the qualitative research design is that of seeking to understand individuals' particular positions on issues and not expecting such positions to be generalized to a larger group or other situations, although such generalization may occur.

Incompatibility between concepts does not mean that external validity or transferability may not be applicable to qualitative research. A study could be reviewed, for example, by another researcher who may determine that there is transferability to a situation he or she is

studying. The burden of proving transferability then rests with the subsequent researcher rather than with the original researcher, as required by quantitative research design guidelines (Merriam, 2009). I further discuss validity and reliability of my study in Chapter 4.

Triangulation or Crystallization

Triangulation is the tool used in qualitative and quantitative research to enhance both validity and reliability. The concept of triangulation was borrowed from geography: One can find a specific geographical location on a map by taking measurements from varied locations. The location is confirmed or found where the measurements intersect. In research triangulation comes from the use of different methods, different data sources, different researchers, and different theoretical frameworks. What one hopes to find is a point where data coming from the various sources converge and crystallize.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) also mentioned the use of mixed research methods, qualitative and quantitative, as a form of triangulation. Results from a quantitative instrument may be compared to interviews, observations, and documents related to the same subjects in order to gain more information that could substantiate initial findings.

Various data sources refer to the collection of data with the same subjects but at different times of the day or in different physical locations. This way researchers may pinpoint subtle differences when observations are made of the same subject but in different venues and times. For example, this study calls for interviewing several students who are returning from their study abroad trip, and I must consider whether having a tape and video recorder during the interview may impact their level of “emotional” comfort and how a low level of comfort may impact their disclosures. Perhaps a sans-recording meeting at a coffee shop for a follow-up interview would provide me with different insight on their experiences. Different researchers collect and compare

data. This is a great opportunity to pinpoint negative or discrepant data and map a strategy to deal with them. I was unable to make use of triangulation due to unavailability of additional data sources.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations or the rigor with which a researcher conducts the study is central to the credibility of any research project. And such credibility is anchored on the researcher or on his or her “training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self” (Merriam, 2009, p. 228). The qualitative research design is quite personal for both researcher and participant and may bring about ethical considerations for which researchers may be required and prepared to respond immediately. This study involved interviews about a time of much turbulence and discovery in the lives of seven young men and women and may bring about several ethical issues. Participants reliving painful moments of their experience and disclosing personal information such as the use of drugs and alcohol, unprotected sex, and other activities engaged in while abroad were some of the ethical issues I was prepared to handle. During my contact with students, however, no ethical issues surfaced but I review here my preparation approach regarding ethical problems.

Patton (as cited in Merriam, 2009) provides the following “ethical issues checklist,” which I reviewed and will comment on as it applied to this study.

1. Explaining the purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used.

I used interviews as the study method of data collection and participants were given information in advance regarding the objective of the study and, when requested, the list of questions they were to be asked.

2. Promises and reciprocity.

I did not promise the participants anything but noted that they would have access to the study results if they were interested.

3. Risk assessment.

I was prepared to refer students to a counselor if they identified emotional issues arising from their reliving their experience abroad. Although no such issue was encountered in this regard, one of the students noted that talking about the experience was cathartic. All students were told that they could stop their study participation anytime.

4. Confidentiality.

Participants were informed in writing that everything disclosed to me in the interview would be confidential and that whatever quotes I used in this dissertation would be anonymous and that no full interview transcription would be posted anywhere public. I assigned each participant a pseudonym and removed all personal information from the data that would be analyzed and presented to the committee. The document with personal information will be kept in a secure location and only available to me.

5. Informed consent.

I provided the participants a detailed informed consent form and briefly reviewed it with each participant when we met for the interview. We both signed the forms and students were given a copy.

6. Data access and ownership.

One member of my committee and I were the only persons with access to the data, which is owned by me. Individual participants have access to the transcript of their interviews and this dissertation document.

7. Interviewer mental health.

I am not aware of any mental health issues that may have impacted the study.

8. Ethical consultant.

Dr. Glascock, the chair of my dissertation committee, served as my consultant in matters of ethical issues related to this study.

9. Data collection boundaries.

I collected data that were within the parameters of the research questions only, although students did talk about unrelated issues during the interviews.

10. Ethical versus legal conduct.

There could have been problematic ethical issues in this study as participants may have disclosed their engagement in illegal actions while abroad. However, nothing in this regard was mentioned by the students. If it had, I would have consulted with Dr. Glascock immediately.

Chapter Summary

Qualitative research is bound by a constructivist perception of reality as opposed to the positivism construct that guides quantitative research methods. This research project used phenomenology, a type of qualitative research, as its research method.

The study examined whether there is a difference between the experiences of American undergraduate students who study abroad at least a semester in a developing versus developed country (Ghana and England). Interviews were conducted with seven students, four who studied in Ghana and three who studied in England. Participants were recruited from East Tennessee State University, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville. A description of the participants is provided.

This chapter also addresses validity and reliability concepts, which have been problematic concepts when applied to qualitative research, especially if one uses their definition

under the theories of quantitative research. Merriam (2009) suggests the terms credibility and transferability instead of validity and reliability when discussing qualitative research; it is under this definition of validity and reliability that I approached this study. I also provided a brief overview of the validity drawback affecting this study, which was my inability to use data triangulation. Data analysis and study ethical considerations are described under the guidelines of qualitative research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I used the five research questions and the proposed theoretical framework as my guide to develop interview questions (see Appendix E) that I believed would elicit information pertinent to the research goals. The questions elicited pertinent information, although in some instances the conversations diverged to areas outside the study realm. Participants' interviews were recorded and transcribed by me, which was not the initial plan but it worked well because it allowed me to develop a relationship with the data by hearing and reading the transcripts multiple times. Additionally, I was able to note voice inflexion and tone in the participants' responses. A pseudonym was used for each participant.

Dana – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Political Science and Mass Communication, African-American, female, middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall semester 2010, direct enrollment.

Seth – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Political Science and History, White, male upper middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall term 2010, direct enrollment.

Kelly – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Social Work, White, female, middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall term 2010, direct enrollment.

John – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Global Studies with a Pre-Med concentration, White, male, middle class, studied in Ghana in the fall term 2010, direct enrollment.

Mary – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Psychology, White, female, middle class, studied in England in the spring term 2011, exchange program.

Nancy – a senior undergraduate, nontraditional college age student, majoring in Environmental Policy and Economics, White, female, middle class, studied in England in the spring term 2010, exchange program.

Kevin – a senior undergraduate, traditional college age student, majoring in Biology, White, male, middle class, studied in England in the spring term 2011, exchange program.

Dana's Ghana Experience

Dana's decision to study in Ghana was mainly financial as she was expected to fund her study abroad experience herself. Her home school offered an affordable exchange placement at the University of Ghana and she welcomed the opportunity to do something "out of the beaten path." She is the daughter of immigrant parents who has travelled abroad only to her parents' home country to visit family. Our interview lasted about one hour, and I did not know that she was an African-American until we met for the interview.

Dana's expectations regarding Ghana were not well defined but she indicated she was a bit nervous because the information she received before departure from her home school and the encounters she had with students who had returned from Ghana predicted a rough experience.

I was a little nervous because the package that they gave us, they said if you have to have hot water when you shower, you should consider bringing a kettle to heat water up and I was like, oh my gosh...

She stated, however, that since she had some experience with a similar situation in her parents' home country, she said she was prepared to be uncomfortable.

As an African-American woman, Dana was part of the racial majority in Ghana and, although she had experienced something similar while visiting family abroad, this was under a different context as this time she had no family members as a supporting network. Her racial majority in Ghana, however, was something short lived as everything changed when she spoke

and was identified as an American. Consequently she became an outsider, an identification that superseded that of being Black. She stated that she had enjoyed her racial majority status.

I just thought that I really needed, like, to show that I was not like the African-American women portrayed on television, and um, that I was not super opinionated, I wasn't, you know, rude and loud and that kind of thing and um, um, also though, it was nice to be, because people were like, welcome, welcome back home, that was really cool, really neat.

In the context of a minority in the United States, Dana spoke about the subtle racism she encountered at home and how she was valued, or not, by her skin color. She hoped that in Ghana she would not be defined by the same visual value. She mentioned being uncomfortable being sized up in a store in a predominantly White affluent area of her hometown and appreciated the idea of having a bit of breathing room in Ghana to be herself.

Here a lot of times I find you are stamped immediately based upon what group they believe you fit into, and so I like having my first introduction in Ghana, to find out who I am whenever I want, not kind of defined, you know, like in American trying to assert that oh, I am this way because of X, Y, and Z.

The experience in Ghana appears to have given Dana a platform to question her view on the role that success and wealth plays in the American culture and on the pressure that she felt to gain wealth and achieve success. As she talked to a pair of young Ghanaian men who worked shelling palm nuts for a living, for example, she mentioned thinking about the expectations for success she is exposed to at home and the impact of those expectations on her future.

We were mountain biking and our tour guide stopped to chit chat with some of his friends who are picking palm seeds for palm nut soup and these guys are like 22, they are our age and that was their job, they are picking the palm nuts for palm nut soup and they would sell them in the market and that was fine, it was sufficient, it was making ends meet, they were not enjoying themselves, you know...it just made me see that I don't have to be going on the path that, like, that you believe that you have to be going along, like, when I was there, I remember just noticing how everything slowed down and noticing how things that I thought were important before were not necessarily important. I remember thinking one day, like an epiphany that I had, I was like, one day I will base my success based upon on how exciting I am when I wake up, not based upon whether I have an awesome job or a really sweet car, a nice house or something. It was like, I am so happy right now...

Of all the students interviewed Dana proved to have had the most complex experience because of her background as an African-American woman who grew up in a multicultural family. Her interaction with one African-American student in Ghana brought up some interesting comments about her views about African-Americans.

People just, like, have seen this horrible view of African-American women and I guess we perpetuated that stereotype to some degree, there was a real ghetto girl that came from California who just, I mean, come on, please don't act ghetto in front of everybody, you know, so she, you know, there were a couple of times that she, like, flew off the handle, was, you know, loud...

Although her standard of living, applicable to the material things, went down in Ghana, she indicated that the lifestyle she found there, a diet of fresh foods, lots of walking, and a slower pace of life made her healthier. When preparing for the trip she was advised to bring very little, which she did not heed. She stated that she was not travelling without her personal essentials. She talked about not having electricity or hot water but, unlike her colleagues, did not wash clothes by hand and paid someone local to do her laundry.

A lot of people did (wash clothes by hand) but I wasn't one of those. I realized that the woman that washed those clothes by hand, someone's job just like anything else, you know. I have a job here and I am not embarrassed to ask them to wash my clothes if that is the job they like to do.

As we discussed her preparation to return home, she indicated being ready to return and that she had ambivalent feelings about how she was treated in Ghana.

I love Ghana but some things are really obnoxious for sure but you can get around those things and I would rather be having that than the obnoxious in here you know, just, I mean I guess, like things, what am I trying to say? Um, it was frustrating to be treated like an outsider and to have to maybe sometimes pay extra fee, to be charged extra, or treated like I am really rich, treat me or whatever, that was frustrating to take on but on the other side, here at home, people just assume that I am a foot long, that I don't have any class or this or that or you know, there is a hierarchy, like sorority people and fraternity people and you are not in and you are not, you know, this is the same thing, it is just different.

Dana's return, however, brought about some symptoms of reverse culture shock, especially at the stressful elements of life in these United States,

It was kind of sad to be back into the normal grind and to be rushing all the time, and be so connected and just so stressed and angry for nothing. That was kind of disappointing and , it is disappointing to see how trapped I feel again, you know, and I can't all the time, I don't think I can meet with you Maria, of course I can meet with you, everything is, just so like, I don't know, oh no, I can't go see you... Yeah, you do. When you are there you take time for life.

Seth's Ghana Experience

Seth's decision to study in Ghana was due to a friend's recommendation and because he wanted to study somewhere outside the Western world. Seth had travelled extensively before going to Ghana but never as a student and mainly in Western Europe. Our interview lasted about one hour.

Seth had some expectations regarding his stay in Ghana but did find that there was a significant gap between preparing for the experience and living it,

There is really no way you can really prepare for anything like that. Um, my buddy had told me a couple of things, you know, what the food is like and stuff like that but until you get there and actually experience it is just really hard to really comprehend what it is like. So different from everything we know, I know.

Seth, who is White and grew up in an upper middle class environment, discussed his racial status reversal as an experience that was mind opening and a reminder of what many minorities experience in the United States.

It is mind opening I guess you can say, I had, the classes there were really big and they were all open auditorium lectures and, um, I had one class, it was the Method of Political Research where there were 500 Ghanaians and then me. Me. Um, so it kind of helps you walk in someone else's shoes, when you come back and realize that some situations are not necessarily comfortable for everybody and Ghanaians more than went out of the way to make you feel welcome and at home and after a while you kind of really don't even notice it other than when they when somebody comes up that is American or something, they everyone wants to meet you.

Seth talked about living in a dorm that was similar in size to that of an American campus dormitory but that had sparse furniture and no air conditioning. He also mentioned having to wash his clothes by hand – something he had never done before – as well as having limited access to the Internet and writing class papers in longhand – a first for him since elementary school. He spoke about having to deal with the lack of electricity, hot water, and sometimes running water.

But it was the first time, and this is kind of a cultural thing, first time I turned in a hand written paper since elementary school, um, just small things like that you don't think about until you get there and then it is just oh!

And I will tell you I learned that I much rather have running water than electricity because you can deal without lights but no running water is not fun...

Seth noticed, as did others, the clear religious divide between the Christians in the south of the country and Muslims to the north. He mentioned that the version of Christianity practiced in Ghana is extremely evangelical and permeates the culture to an extreme. He cites as an example of how ingrained Christianity is into the culture, a business sign that he saw in Accra that read, *In Jesus' Blood Auto Parts Store*.

Seth related that in the rural areas of the country people still practice traditional animistic religions, a belief in the magical or something akin to what we identify as voodoo. Seth observed the status of women to be that of subjugation and second citizenry but also noticed that elderly women are the matriarchs of the family and the elderly as a class with power in the community.

But one thing that they do culturally is that elderly women are the matriarchs of the family and there is this, we lost as a culture, a community, and so if you were to go into a village and some swindler or some guy was trying to hassle you, a lot of the times the village elder would come and say, leave these people alone, go away, don't talk to them. They would look out for you in a very communal way... so that was very interesting to see and very, kind of wish you had it here, almost, because you felt safe...

Seth did not use the Internet much, especially during the first month there as there was no viable campus access to it and he found it an important part of the experience,

It took getting used to and once you got used to it, it is very liberating because you have way less to even think about, to worry about, more freedom just to live and so it is very nice.

Back in the United States for a while now, Seth continues to process his experience in Ghana and said that he sometimes feels at odds with his feelings about Ghana and the United States.

I long for Ghana I guess it is the best way to say it and what it was. Um, it is nice to be back because people, it is not that Ghanaians don't by any means but here if you have a deadline, you meet your deadline which is nice but it makes everyone miserable, kind of. Um, so I just long for that way of life, even if I may not think I can live in it long, I long for it, I don't know, it is just a catch 22. Ghana changed who I am; it is the best way to say it. Um, I mean, in my daily life I refer everything to Ghana and how can I do this or what I would be doing there or especially, I mean, I am fortunate to be in the US and to have a family and to have an education and health care, and a car, you appreciate everything so much more and I worry that the further my trip gets away, the further it fades from my memory and you know, I forget to be thankful everyday for what I have.

Interviewer asked, "When you say that way of life, what do you mean? Seth responded, "

It is kind of everything, everyone nice, everyone smooth, like you said their own pace. Um I just, I miss it a lot (laughter)."

Kelly's Ghana Experience

Kelly's decision to study abroad was a practical one. She was contemplating working as a social worker abroad and wanted to test her plan. She chose Ghana because she wanted an experience in a non-Western country; she considered South Africa but decided that it was not removed enough from the Western concepts to suit her needs. She had never travelled outside of the North American continent. Our interview lasted about 45 minutes.

Kelly had no idea what to expect from her experience in Ghana and received information from students who had returned from Ghana recently. She asserted, however, that although she

had information about Ghana before her departure, “it does not really make sense until you are there.... I tried not to go with too many expectations...”

Kelly, a White American, had to confront being a racial minority immediately upon arrival in Ghana – something that she indicated shocked her but also made her review some of her impressions about minorities in the United States. For example, by being the only White person in class and being afraid to speak up she understood better the issue of minority kids in classrooms who may not participate in class or have problems succeeding in school.

That was something I was not, you know, really expecting. I mean, I knew I was going to be a minority but I did not know how it would feel. I was very shocked... and in my classes, there were a couple of classes where I was the only White person in class and it would be a class of 300 people... I, um, was terrified to raise my hands and answer any questions, not because I thought people would be mean or anything but, you know, have these thoughts, ok, the White girl is gonna answer a question, like, what is she gonna say, the American. I was trying to be a good example. One thing that got stuck with me, we talked about minorities in the US, like, maybe struggling in school, like kids in school, I really did not understand all that, you know, it was like I don't understand minorities would, you know, like grades, would be worse or better, whatever, but then being in a situation like in a classroom situation where I am a minority, I kind of understand that a bit better now, like I didn't, you know, wanted to raise my hand a lot, you know, stuck to the back, so I kind of understand that a little bit.

Kelly also mentioned several times that she was pressured to do well because she was representing both her country and to a certain extent her race.

There was kind of a lot of pressure, you know... I don't know, to try to be a good example... I did kind of feel that I did not want to mess up and say the wrong thing because I did not want them to think a certain way of Americans or anything...

While out on the street of Accra, she was frequently called “White lady,” which she did not consider derogatory but asserted it was strange to be so identified in public because in the United States the same statement would not be considered politically correct.

Well, in the market, people kind of trying to get your attention and trying to get you to buy something, hey, White lady, come buy this, come look at this and I knew they did not mean it in any derogatory way, it was kind of kind of just like, I was fine with that but it was kind of strange to hear someone calling me White lady, you know?

Kelly grew up in east Tennessee, in a place where the majority population is White. She had never been exposed to diversity of races and said that experiencing being a racial minority was good for her.

I just have not been exposed to that much diversity and I think it was definitely good for me. Being a Social Worker because you have to deal with minorities and I need to, you know, at least have an inkling of maybe what they are going through, I think what would be helpful.

Kelly mentions her travelling to a Ghanaian professor's hometown to take part in a drumming festival (she took a drumming class) as one of the memorable parts of her stay. His family practiced traditional religious rituals such as that of greeting the house spirits with a drink of the local alcoholic beverage – one sip for you and another poured for the spirit, a ritual in which Kelly participated. Another event of consequence was her travelling to the northern part of the country where the majority of the population is Muslim during the last days of Ramadan, the holy month of the Muslim calendar.

I think that one kind of weekend, a period of time stands out to me was when I travelled up north and you know, staying in the Muslim culture, like being in the town during Ramadan really stands out to me and huh, ... I got to stay in the inn, which was run by these two brothers and they just sat and talked with us for a long time and just, um, I really, really enjoyed that, it was my favorite weekend.

When Kelly returned to the United States, she faced reentry issues. Having lived for 5 months with much fewer material things, she got overwhelmed with the available commodities of the US and how the media bombards us all with “buy this, buy that” type of concept. Her parents noticed that she had changed in regards to her consuming habits as she was much more careful with money and was not interested in buying things.

Back in class she said that her professors were asking her to do mostly busy work. In Ghana, the final exam is your final grade and there are no small projects, participation, or homework grading considered toward your semester grade. Another aspect of her change has to

do with her revision of things she did in the past as frivolous and her willingness to go out and experience new things,

When I came back, I think that I had a harder time because I had lived, you know, I had one suitcase for five months and you know, did not carry a lot of stuff with me and was used to spending, you know, fifty cents a day on food and then come back and I just felt like America just bombards you with: buy this commercial and things that you have to have, and clothes, it was overwhelming... It just makes, I guess, having an experience in another country, especially in Ghana, just makes some things seem a little frivolous....

I think that I am a little bit more willing to kind of go out on a limb to experience new things and I was always kind of, kind of that way, definitely, always trying to experience something new but I am even more like that now.

Kelly is no longer sure she wants to work abroad as a social worker, a result of the experience abroad and her better understanding of the impact of foreign aid. She is now planning to work in the United States in the mental health field and said that her experience in Ghana helped her in narrowing her career options.

I volunteered in one organization when I was in Ghana and I feel like they kind of expressed that they really wanted Ghanaians to start helping other Ghanaians and they kind of, it was not that they did not appreciate America's help but they really wanted to do it on their own.

Kelly summarizes the impact of her experience in Ghana by saying,

I think in general it just made me more aware of myself in relation to the world in general, um, sometimes, especially when you are in college, you can kind of get caught in this bubble where you are just a little bit self absorbed and focused on, you know, yourself and what you are doing. I think it was really good if you get outside of that. I think that, I hope that will stay with me, it is easy to get sucked back into this everyday grind and forget about, you know, there is a whole another world out there...

John's Ghana Experience

John had spent a summer in France taking language before studying in Ghana. As a Global Studies major he was compelled to study in the developing world and in West Africa in particular. His home school offered him placement at the University of Ghana and he accepted it.

Upon completion of his studies in Ghana he went directly to India where he studied for a semester. Our interview lasted about 45 minutes.

John arrived in Ghana a week before his program started. Carrying a *Lonely Planet* guide, he took it upon himself to tour the city as much as he could. He mentioned being terrified of the experience beforehand but glad that he did it, even if his first experience upon arrival was getting ripped off by the taxi driver who took him from the airport to the hotel.

John is White and spoke about the experience of becoming a racial minority in Ghana as being enjoyable but problematic in that everyone erroneously assumed that because he was White, he was also rich. John went to various high schools in the US because his parents moved a lot and one of them enrolled predominantly African-American students so he had some experience being in a racial minority. A very self-assured person, John appeared to consider the issue of being a minority as his stay in Ghana progressed.

A lot of time we were traveling around and to get around, because we had the Lonely Planet guide and they would tell us where these weird places that were out of way and to get to these places you had to go thru these very rural areas and a lot of time these people see a White person once a year, if that, you know. As so you would go thru these villages and so everyone is staring at you and everyone is yelling at you, like, obruni, it is never negative and so that was, that was cool. We would just drive thru these towns and they would see you in the bus and they would like wave at you and little babies would be crying and they had never seen a White person before.

When in Accra, John mentioned that he would acknowledge White persons, strangers, whom he passed on the streets, and observed how he had viewed the same behavior from minorities in the United States as somewhat strange,

In the US, if you see a Black guy and a Black guy that don't know each other very well, they like, greet each other and will be nice even though they never met each other, when I know that if I saw a White guy (in the US) I would not greet him on the side of the street but when I was in Ghana, I would, you know? You see a White guy and it is like, hey, it is a White guy and I, I have a kind of appreciation for that now, how there is that kind of brotherhood of the race, where if you are in that minority status, it becomes kind of important.

John mentioned that despite the US having a negative image overseas, such image did not impact him personally as Ghanaians did not show negativity toward individuals.

I feel like I always hear about how people in the developing world and everywhere have a negative image of America but I actually felt that a lot of people did not carry over those ideas into me in that they did not think I was this horrible person, you know, especially in the North, the Muslim north, they, no one ever gave me any trouble.

John used the word divide when describing religious issues in Ghana. The predominantly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south, however, live together in harmony. He also noted that some of the Christian churches in Accra have preachers who hold celebrity status, an observation that complements other students' comments on the role of Christianity in Ghanaian society.

I went to a little school and saw worksheets where they would show like Christians and Muslims holding hands and I think that was precious. And the little kids who would be around would ask what religion are you? I would say I am a Christian and he would say, these guys are Christians, I am a Muslim though and that was cute...

But also, I went to, I thought it was really interesting, these huge mega churches, not really mega churches but like mega preachers who were like huge and they would always have posters like this guy is coming and he is the next prophet and you have this huge preachers who would come. I went to one of these mega churches experiences and it was all night long, from 11:00 to 7 in the morning... I stayed until 3 and you are there and there is this guy on the stage and he is preaching and everyone like breaks out in speaking in tongues, and this is in the Christian south, and there is a lot of like healing people out of wheelchairs and that was kind of an extreme that I saw, this like, these Christian ministers who came to this like, fame, kind of propagating this, this saving movement...

John's return to the US has been difficult in that he is going thru a severe case of reverse culture shock. He stated that he is now less materialistic more minimalistic and that he is having issues dealing with the materialistic culture in the US.

I have a lot of, I have been dealing with a lot of aggression towards, um, people who are very materialistic and that is something that I am trying to work on...

He is also noticing changes in other areas of his life in the US. For example, his friends have noticed his lack of interest in partying like he did before studying abroad. He said that part of that is the knowledge that he acquired abroad.

I definitely know a lot more than I did before I left because I feel when I visited all these places I learned twice as much as I did going to classes here.

John made a very interesting observation about poverty and how he thinks it is easier to understand in the Ghanaian than the United States context. He has been very interested in studying the subject since returning to the United States.

I got very interested in American poverty when I got back this summer and I looked into it a lot. I think it is different and it is, this is a strange way to say it, but I feel like, um, Ghana poverty and developing world poverty is easier to understand and wrap your head around. Like you have these people and they, they don't have food because, maybe because you know, the crop season was bad or something like that, or they are not close to a hospital or something like that. And these are things that I can really wrap my head around it but with American poverty is more like, there is not like these big steps of like, there was a bad season and now I am in poverty. In America there are little steps, like, oh, like a woman in American would be like, oh, I need some money, oh, this boyfriend has some money, oh, he does drugs I guess I would do some drugs, oh, now I am addicted to drugs and now I am in poverty... I think it is more complex in the US.

John volunteered with an eye health organization and shadowed a couple of English medical students who were doing rotations in Ghana. The experience helped him make a decision about pursuing his medical degree without delay.

I knew I wanted to go to medical school but I was not sure when and I was, I was juggling with the idea of like doing something like the Peace Corps or something like that and when I was there and when I was in India I realized that, that the most I could do was, I could do most if I was a doctor... they don't need social workers, they have people who can do these jobs, they don't need public health workers, they have people who are being trained in Accra to do that and those people need those jobs and what they really, actually do need that won't take a job away from somebody else is being a doctor so I decided that I would go straight or try to go straight into medical school after I graduate.

He also mentioned his discovery of books about Dr. Paul Farmer (Kidder, 2003), a doctor-anthropologist, as someone whose work he would like to emulate. John said that Dr. Farmer

really makes a difference in the lives of people in the developing world and that is something he would hope to do as well.

John misses Ghana, its minimalist, slow pace of life, and the freedom that comes with having little material possessions.

I like the people, I thought that everyone was so happy, I liked the, I liked the minimalism, it makes life easy not having, I mean, I come back and everyone you now have these fads, this pop culture that you have to keep up with in you want to be entertaining, known to anyone. And when I was in Ghana tough... everything is kind of slow and you don't have to keep up with these things and you can read whatever books I want, so it was really nice.

Mary's England Experience

Mary decided to study abroad in an English speaking country because she did not want to deal with the foreign language issue. She had England as her first choice for placement but would have been happy with placement anywhere in the UK or Australia. The choice of the University of Chester was also influenced by its having a program in equestrian studies, a passion of hers. She had travelled abroad before to Guatemala with a group doing a service project.

Mary is, by self-designation, a super organized person who prepares for everything with fervor, an approach she used when planning this study abroad. Unfortunately for her, the approach did not match the other side's response and as a consequence, her culture shock began even before she left for England.

I had lots of expectations just because that is natural but I really didn't know anything which frustrated me a lot. I really want to, like, see where I am going to live and all that sort of things but really they just had one picture and I heard rumors that the building had fallen down a couple of years ago... So I was a little unsure as they went, and so for some reason the University of Chester would not pin anything down, I didn't even know for sure if I was going to get the classes I had requested until I was going and so everything was a little bit up in the air for the whole time and so it was kind of dramatic...

Although Mary had travelled abroad before, this was the first time that she was travelling solo. She expressed happiness at having met other international students going to the University of Chester at the London airport because it allowed for personal connections to start building, and she thrives on relationships. She indicated suffering from a bit of culture shock but not until later on when the novelty of the arrival activities and getting to know the city subsided.

The first episode of culture shock is like, this is so cool and new, and it is not until like half way through that you get the real culture shock. Man, they don't have this, it is five o'clock and everything is closed!

Another area where culture shock manifested itself was in the classroom, which by her assertion was like having to learn a new language.

It was the culture shock you expect but the classroom changes was like learning a new whole language, so like their terms are different, you know, they have three terms, and you get 3 weeks off for Easter and some of your classes ended at Easter and some started after Easter and so it was like everything is completely different and so you just have to learn a whole new language, and the classes met once a week, and you are expected to read on your own time and you have one exam and that is your grade for the entire class.

As a tall, blonde, White woman, Mary blended in well in Chester until she spoke and was then identified as an American. She talked about facing situations where Americans and America were portrayed in an erroneous manner in her view and at times questioned herself on how to respond to it.

I had a couple of classes, especially with psychology that they would talk, America is big, people talk about America in the classes and sometimes things would be just straight up wrong and so I would be like, ok, what do I do with this? Um, I was always in a dilemma and I handled it some ways this way, some ways that way, but. I was really expecting a lot of conflict, um, I, you know, I did lots of research, this is how I am and so, so I was like reading about these people who got attacked on a bus during the Bush administration and that sort of thing in England.... I was really, I mean you know you get some negative stuff sometimes but people were never, I think it was way better for me because I was going during the time of Obama and Europe likes Obama better... So most of the time, people would be like, well, we have American foreign policy and that sort of thing but Americans are pretty cool...

I asked Mary about her observations on how religions are practiced in England and she had the following comments,

Here is just like, people will ask you what church you go to, and it is not are you a Christian? It is what church you go to? And so that does not really happen in England. There are people who would go out and sit on the street and sing or have a sign or whatever, that same sort of thing happens. I went to a couple of ministry things because my friend joined the gospel choir and I went to a couple of them and they were almost exactly the same as Americans, just with British accents. Same type of music, same everything, but they are just less in the culture.

Mary said that overt racism is “kind of normal” in England and based on a culture of stereotypes about diverse groups of people. She had African-American peers who experienced a lot of racism in Chester.

The thing that I kind of learned in Europe was that racism is kind of normal and it is not necessarily bad to them and they would not call is racist. But from an American point of view, what they do or say sometimes is straight up racist, but to them, they are so diverse, you got Hungary over here and Germany way up there and you got Russian right next to it and they got all this tension and even where Chester is, next to the Welsh border... they just live in a constant state of tension and had all sorts of horrible jokes about everybody but it is not, it is just normal, it is not like if they met that person they would treat them horribly, it is just that having that concept in your head of this type of person is this way, that type of person is that way, that is more ok there...

Mary enjoyed the slower pace of life she encountered in Chester and counts that as one of the important experiences of her stay in England.

A lot of things that I learned from was, for starters just the style of living: a) being in England and, b) being an international student because both of those, you are experiencing both of those. So you know when you are studying in a new place and learning that and they take things a bit slower and just when you are studying you are reading you are teaching yourself, so you go at your own pace whereas here it is like, here is an exam, here is an exam, here is an exam, so it is a different pace and you really learn from that pace so I feel like I learned kind of a different rhythm to my life...

Mary’s family does not say that she changed as a result of this experience, but she says she sees herself differently, even if in subtle ways. She was, however, concerned about returning to the US and how she would feel, especially when reflecting on how much reverse culture shock she had when returning from a previous trip to Guatemala.

I had been fretting from the time I left about coming home and how I was going to deal with it but I think because when I came home from Guatemala it was really traumatic to me... I had just come from a third world country which I had never experienced before and I was like in the third world part of a third world country. So then you come back to America and it is like all these people walking on their fancy clothes and I am like, I hate you...but so, I was, that is why I was so worried about it. But it was actually really good but it was scary to snap back into the old Mary because I had changed when I was over there, I had learned to think like a British person, you know. Their concepts of society and how things are supposed to work, you just learn to notice that and work with it. And so then you are coming from that back to your old thing and you expect this huge transition but you have lived in America your whole life and you snap right back to it and that was scary because I was like what if I have, I lose everything that I had over there but then now I have been back for a month or two, there are things that stuck with me, like the rhythm I was talking about... It is not a noticeable change; it is sort of just in your rhythm type of thing.

Before leaving Mary had a 10-year career and education plan, which she says she tore up when she returned. She discovered that she was not yet ready to make a decision about her future and needed time to think about it. As a consequence she is planning to take a year off after graduation to try some new things; now, she refers to her 50-year plan, instead.

I am a very driven person and so I had the 10 year plan and then I went abroad and started thinking about my 10 year plan and just like, you know, I have this plan but I am not even 100% sure that this is what I want. And so being there taught me to kind live in the moment because no matter what kind of relationship you built, no matter, you know, anything that you built there you are leaving so you have to live in that moment. It is just like, ok, this is just an experience and I just need to live an experience and remember it. And so, being that way kind of taught me to be like, ok, I can take my 10 year plan and rip it up and go with the flow. I planned to go straight to grad school and now I am planning to take a chill pill, work for a year, make sure that I know what I am doing and then, if I am lucky, save a bit of my money and travel for a bit as well and then go back to grad school. I am really interested in group and activity type therapies and I am the equestrian girl so there are a lot of things that I am really interested in but I need to work in to know if I believe in them, if that makes sense. I really like the idea of wilderness therapy and equestrian therapy... and I feel like I need to work and watch and really be sure before I commit my life to it. But that is what I want to do, ideally, and that is my 50 year plan.

Mary's experience helped her realize her American cultural identity, something she knew in theory but had never vocalized it in the terms she did below.

Before I went there, I kind of did not consider myself to be, I knew I was an American because I am from here but did not consider myself American and then when I went over

there I was like, ok, I am very American it is not just like, I mean, of course I am American, I talk American you know but what I mean is that my ideology is really American and how I choose to just approach different problems by problem solving is very American and so learning that and not only learning it but learning to accept it and see it thru my friend's eyes from all over the world is, was really, really a great experience, to really learn to understand yourself.

Nancy's England Experience

Nancy is a nontraditional student who returned for her undergraduate studies after a 10-year hiatus. She is 27 years old and chose to go to England because of her and her siblings' interests in all things British. She was also interested in England's more liberal environmental policies and how grass roots organizations play a role in such policies.

Nancy had travelled abroad before in Western Europe but had never studied abroad and had never travelled alone. She expected England to be a bit different from the US but upon arrival found that the differences that existed were more significant than she expected. One of the issues that caught her by surprise was what she referred to as the youth culture in the university,

What I found to be fairly startling and fairly scary was that the youth culture, in England you know they drink at an earlier age, they are far more blatantly promiscuous than the American culture, I was surprised to find out. And they did not take school seriously... I know it was a bit of a drinking town, there were a lot of pubs, but the youth culture was appalling to me. I was a little older, quite a bit older than the rest of the students, actually, I was 26, 27 now, and they were all 18, you know... so it was just a bit shocking to see how that played out...

Fortunately, when Nancy met people her own age outside the university, she said her experience was more positive,

When I got into older circles, like, a lot of my peers over there were individuals who were older than I am and I loved hanging out with them. Their culture was really what I anticipated, super friendly, really welcoming, really warm, um, they want to share everything, they want to cook for you, they want to have tea with you, they want to take you out to their favorite national places and show you the beauty and so I really loved that. That held true to my expectations but the youth culture was startling to me.

Like Mary, Nancy was surprised to find the culture of blatant racism and how the English appear to disdain anyone who is not English,

...also, there was a lot of racism. I was surprised by that, blatant racism... Anything not, an even like the individuals in England were prejudiced against the Welsh, you know, and that is pretty much, you know, for all purposes they were part of the whole England area or the Scottish, there is like a hatred it is blatant and especially with the French or the Spanish, just really anyone who is not English.

Nancy observed that the English are not particularly religious and they talk about the American religious right dynamics and philosophies to be incredible and almost a joke. She has similar opinions about the subject and was more comfortable talking about such issues in England than in the US.

It is bizarre, it is almost comical, it is like a farce, it does not make a lot of sense to me but they were the same way and I really loved that because it is really touchy here in the States, it is touchy how you talk about it, you never know who you are going to upset with your political views, but, but over there they are a lot more open about it...

She had an opportunity to meet with a group of women of the Baha'i faith and developed a connection with them although they had some positions, like being anti-gay, she did not support. Despite their differences, she stated that she respected them and their beliefs.

As much as I am not religious I respect a lot the Baha'i faith, it was kind of a beautiful thinking in a lot of ways except that they were sort of anti-gay, they had certain things that did not jive with my spiritual beliefs but I spent a lot of time with those groups...their pastime did not involve promiscuity... they involved more enriching social experiences where there was a lot of thoughtful meditation and discussion, intelligent discussions. I got involved with a gardening project for the Baha'i group where I helped to design and install this garden for the group for everyone to kind of know more about the Baha'i faith and I made some great friends even though we did not see eye to eye, there were some of the best people I ever met.

The English pace of life contrasts heavily with that in the US where we are all in a hurry all the time. Nancy had to learn, as she was called by the locals, to slow down.

They take their time with meal preparation or with tea... like they have tea like 8 times a day and I am like how do you have time to have tea 8 times a day, I am like, aren't you in a hurry to do things? ...They are like do you want some tea and I am like no, I have this to do and they are like, this can wait and I am like, ok, I guess I can.... I think it is so

refreshing, you are in a restaurant and they are not rushing the bill to you, you can sit for hours, you are not bothered and I waited tables in the US and people are just I need the check I have been here for 15 minutes...

Nancy returned to North Carolina immediately after completing the semester and mentions suffering from a mild case of reverse culture shock,

Asheville is pretty liberal but there is still conservative mind thinking going on and having to watch what I talked about and who I said it around the way I said it. Also, I guess the humor is just different here and I enjoyed the humor over there a lot more, it is dry and witty and silly. They don't really take a whole lot seriously for their stiff upper lip, you know.... And so they are not in a hurry and I miss that, I miss tea in the afternoon and walking to the village to get what I needed and I loved that.

Nancy has a very close family and a steady boyfriend. She said that her experience of going to England by herself was a challenge that made her more independent, which she said she needed.

I have always been, because I have a twin and a really close family and you know a boyfriend, I always have been with people and relying on other people's schedule and not really tending to myself as much as maybe I should but that experience taught me like travel by myself and to rely on myself and be comfortable with myself a little more... It was a big sort of turning point for me, like a rite of passage, you know? To just go and be by myself, feel alone, I really never been alone, I don't understand loneliness and part of this excursion was to understand and boy, do you ever get to understand loneliness when you travel by yourself.

Nancy is about to graduate and is still trying to decide what to do next. She is considering either taking a job or continuing her studies before she has to decide on a narrower path within her chosen area of study. The experience in England did not impact her career goals in any significant way but did give her an opportunity to ponder on the differences between the United States and English environmental policies; she has an interest in working abroad.

I guess I should have a little bit more faith in trying to get a job right now but I really want to learn more. I would like to specialize and my problem right now is choosing sort of which direction I am going to take with environmental policy. Do I want to take it more the scientific route and do, you know, field research or policy implementation or do I want to take the social and economic route with policy management.... I was supposed to take a trip to Ghana last summer but my family flipped out, you know? They worried about my safety and I was, you guys, this is the sort of think that I want to do, I want to

go find out what is going on so I can figure out how to fix it. I know that is a broad sort of thing but I just want to take all the information I possibly can, social information... comprehensive analysis of the situation I feel that it requires living in it for a while and working beside the people and find out what their priorities are, finding out what it takes to shift a problem and the only way you can do this is to really dig in deep and I absolutely love it and would love to incorporate it into my career.

Nancy cites a few experiences while abroad that made a deep impact on her, including, a trip to Morocco where, “Everything that could have gone wrong did but everything that could have been amazing and education that could happen, did.” Back in England, she was impressed with an afternoon out in the country with a couple of older women, experiencing the beauty of the English countryside, participation in a festival called the Dark Mountains or the Un-civilization, and meeting a famous author of works in the area of economics policy.

What appeals to me it is just those moments, it just was great. Like I said, I thought that I was at the right place at the right time even if I was scared or even something bad happened or something got stolen or I lost something or I was lost, always I am like, I felt that there were these little angels everywhere, you know what I am saying? And I feel like anytime I travel, no matter what, no matter how afraid or broke or lost I feel I know someone is going to show up and inevitably they do, always, and I just love that... It is those moments then that is the most important thing and I believe in the goodness of people and traveling has both emphasized and degraded that in some ways but for most part it emphasized it.

Kevin’s England Experience

Kevin’s paternal grandparents were immigrants from England and his decision to study abroad there was based on his interest in pursuing a connection with his ancestry. A science major, Kevin only took humanities classes at the University of London and found the experience a welcome break from his science courses at UNCA. Kevin, who grew up in rural North Carolina, described his feelings of living in London as that of being at the *center of the world*.

Kevin had travelled before but never outside the American continent and did not admit to suffering from culture shock upon arrival in England but mentioned issues related to the jet lag and information overload. His expectations about the experience were not fulfilled to his

satisfaction as he found himself enrolled in an island study abroad program where he attended classes with other American students, and the professors used the American method of teaching and grading.

I actually had some very big expectations going in and they turned out to be very much the opposite of what I encountered when I got there. When I signed up for study abroad, my feelings were, ok, study abroad to experience something different, you go to Europe to meet and hang out with Europeans but I got there and discovered that most of the students on the program were supposed to be American students... I would not hang out with other American students I would try to go out, you know, to the pubs, to the student union at the university, joining clubs, tried to mingle with some of the Europeans, I think I was fairly successful but as for the students, the American students I found they were... spend the semester in Europe drinking with other Americans... It felt like sort of a fish bowl experience.

Noting that one in three Londoners is an immigrant, Kevin said that people from diverse backgrounds lived together well even if it is under what he calls cultural segregation.

Well, I was there before the riots broke out and they seemed to be getting along very peaceably, they sort of passed each other on the streets and they sort of lived together and often worked together, you know, shopping, each of these stores were very close together, very culture specific establishments like there was a great deal of sort of cultural segregation but not in the sort of ghettoization sense that exist in the US. In the US... various neighborhoods tend to be dominated by one ethnicity like there is you know, Chinatown and Jewish areas... and I didn't encounter too much of that in London and I heard from people who live there that, oh no, we don't have ghettos like that...

Unlike Mary and Nancy who encountered blatant racism in England, Kevin found that there was very subtle racism coming from White Englishmen.

I encountered a lot of very subtle racism from a lot of White Englishmen and that at first I thought that part of it was because what is considered politically correct in the United States is the very opposed from the UK... It might be considered questionable to say you know, Black people do this, in the US but it just goes in the UK.

He said his English peers were multicultural, politically aware, and easy to engage in conversations about their views about the US. He noted, like Nancy did, that American liberals are similar in positions to the British conservatives but the English and the English media view some aspects of the US culture as a bit odd.

I think that most of them that were asking about the US were intelligent and informed enough to know that, there is the very, very big sense in the UK that America is a big place with tons of people and you know, for instance if they were asking me something about George Bush, they would have asked me before if I was left wing by American standards which is often thought of right wing by British standards they would assume that I was, had voted for Bush....

I can say that the BBC is my main news source and it does seem to portray the United States in a very different manner than a lot of the US news sources. The BBC is very dry, it is very impartial and also pretty tongue in cheek and people tend to view America as this slightly zany place where Americans views their own country, I would say most people view their own country as very mundane, and a lot of the British press services appear to see the US as somewhere where there is a lot of eccentricity, a lot of weird things happens and there are lots of unintelligent people, a lot of crazy stuff is permitted to happen.

Kevin was able to meet with several extended family members and talked fondly about meeting a great aunt who provided him new insights into his family.

I met one of my great aunts in London who I had met once in my life, when I was 8 so I was essentially meeting her for the first time, you know, in the West, and talking to her was excellent. They are enriching experience and it taught me a lot of things about my family. The way I look at my family is very different after meeting her.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this experience was Kevin's return to the US and having to deal with reverse culture shock.

When I got back the first place I went since I did not have an apartment here in Asheville, was, you know, to go the house I grew up in outside Boone for the summer and you know, it is very remote, very rural, ...I always thought about it that way but it never had it seemed so isolated and after coming back from central London it seemed so isolated and sort of underdeveloped....

I coped with it by, sort of hanging, by, um, um, that was a good question. It was hard to cope. I tried, I, I guess that the Internet is a great connection to the outside world when you are geographically isolated so lots of that and trying to... that is really a good question. It is tricky to cope, you know? I am sure you know this in your experience.

Kevin says that he changed in small ways as a result of this experience. He is now drinking tea at a certain time each day, having more patience in the urban setting, and his mother noticed that he is now wearing hats and gloves more frequently after returning from England. Aside from these, however, he does not see any significant personal changes.

Kevin graduated in December 2011 and at the time of our meeting was applying to several Ph.D. programs in Zoology. He indicated that his experience in England did not impact his career plans although he did consider applying to a university in the UK for his postgraduate studies, which proved financially impossible. He said that he hopes to go back to England for conferences or work as a post doc. Meanwhile, he continues to miss living in England and the people he met there.

I remember being sort of in the middle of everything, of being in the *center of the world*, of having everything at your fingertips the cosmopolitan aspect of it.... The experience I had in the Camden Markets where you can find the entire world in one square block... the experience I had like in the British Empire class and encountering the intercession between the British and the American view of the world and their impacts on world view and whether or not they should feel bad about it...

Summary of Findings

This research was guided by five questions. The findings are reported here for each question.

Research Question 1

What are the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developing country (Ghana) and the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developed country (England)?

The study abroad experience of both groups was impacted by the cultural characteristics of the host culture and the personal characteristics of each student. At different levels students realized their cultural identity and how it shapes their values and behavior. By living as a racial minority or a majority, by becoming the face of the United States of America in the host country, by having to decide what to do when encountering openly racist speech at the host country, by having to live in conditions that were less than ideal by US standards, by meeting people of

different faiths, and by understanding that not everyone sees the world in the same way, students were forced to contemplate their cultural values and behavior. At the time of our interviews some of the students were still processing the experience.

To Kevin, for example, the interview itself proved to be a tool for such processing. Some of the students were still processing their experience when we met for the interview.

Dana experienced being a racial majority, gained self-confidence, reviewed her approach to success and wealth, developed an interest in working in Africa, and is eager to travel again.

Seth said the experience changed who he is and that living as a racial minority gave him a different perspective on the lives of minorities in the US. He wants to include Ghana in his professional life and hopes that his experience never fades from his life.

Kelly is more aware of her place in the world, has a different perspective on the lives of minorities, and no longer thinks about working as a social worker abroad, as she now agrees with Ghanaians that help should come from within the country rather than from foreigners; she is very aware of the materialist lifestyle in the US.

John became a minimalist in his approach to life and is having problems accepting his friends' consumerist approach to life. The experience also helped him finalize his decision to practice medicine in a developing country and to attend medical school without delay.

Mary acknowledged that the experience was intense but that her changes were not noticeable and sort of "just the rhythm (of daily life) type of thing." At the same time, however, she acknowledged that the experience made her rethink her 10-year plan, which is now a 50-year plan and to fully realize her American cultural identity.

Nancy mentioned that the experience changed her into a more independent person, which was something she needed because she was somewhat sheltered by being part of a very close-knit family.

Kevin faced reverse culture shock when returning home to rural North Carolina at a higher level than the other participants. Rural North Carolina appeared to him as “remote, very rural, isolated, and sort of underdeveloped.” He counted among his changes taking tea every day at 4:00 pm, being more patient in urban settings, and, as noted by his mother, wearing gloves and hats more frequently.

Research Question 2

What are the themes of the students’ experiences?

There were nine themes gathered from the data analysis. The five themes for the Ghana students were,

1. reversal of racial status – the effect of having your racial status suddenly reversed;
2. questioning materialism – the effect of having to do without things that are considered essential in the US such as Internet connectivity, electricity, running water, etc.;
3. reverse culture shock – the effect of living and studying for a semester in a very different culture and then returning home;
4. impact of experience on career – the effect of being inspired by the experience abroad to the point of considering a change in career; and
5. personal changes – the effect of redefining values, lifestyle, and beliefs.

The four themes for the England students were,

1. racism – the effect of witnessing openly racist remarks that appeared socially accepted;
2. reverse culture shock – the effect of living and studying for a semester in a very different culture and then returning home;
3. personal changes – the effect of redefining values, lifestyle, and beliefs; and
4. Subordinate Themes– the effect of important issues that were not common to all participants such as loneliness, learning about family history, and cultural identity.

Research Question 3

What are the similarities and differences among the students' experiences?

The sample of student participants was small. The interviews lasted just under one hour for each student, and I did not know the students beforehand. So while it is possible to pinpoint the similarities and differences in the students' experiences, it is not possible to establish the level and significance of the differences without having the opportunity to examine more data related to their study abroad experiences.

In Ghana, I considered the issue of race status reversal and at its impact on the students. The experiences of the White students versus the African-American student in this regard were different. In Ghana, the White students became part of the minority while the African-American student became part of the majority. Once the racial issue, which was the very visible part of the iceberg, was addressed, their identity as Americans became the next matter at hand. I did not, however, have enough data to analyze these issues in-depth.

Another visible difference in the Ghana participant group's behavior was the students' decision to either do their own manual chores or pay someone else to do them. Seth, for instance,

washed his clothes by hand because he wanted the experience and certainly had it. He not only washed his clothes but he also developed in the process, a relationship with the university custodial staff, mostly women, who taught him how to wash his clothes. Dana, on the other hand, chose to pay someone to wash her clothes and stated that she felt that if someone's job was that of a laundress, then she had no problem paying her to do it. More time with the students may have provided insight as to why the White students chose to do their own laundry while Dana did otherwise.

In comparison the students in England did not have to deal with the issue of racial status reversal and like the students in Ghana were impacted by their American identity. The participants in England found that their American identity had different definitions and elicited different responses on the part of the locals. The American identity as seen by foreigners is defined in generic terms while the American students had a very personal definition of being American. The English students were very aware of this distinction.

John, a participant in Ghana, mentioned that all Ghanaians thought Americans were rich but he is not. Kevin, who studied in England, mentioned how he considers himself a political liberal, but was seen as conservative by English standards. The overt racist speech that the Americans witnessed in England is fertile ground for discussion because race relations in the United States are a very current and complex issue. More data would be required to examine these issues.

Again, the analysis of interview transcripts clearly indicates that there were differences among the students' experiences and identification of the areas was a fairly easy task. The issue of level or depth of those differences, however, was a bit more difficult. My short interview with

each student and the lack of other data sources such as journals, blogs, etc. made it impossible for me to closely examine the differences.

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between the identified themes and specific country or culture issues?

The data analysis indicated that students had different experiences in Ghana, a developing country, and England, a developed country, and such differences might be attributed to the particular cultural characteristics of the host site as well as the students' personal characteristics and background.

When placing their experiences in a metaphorical setting, we could parallel these students' experiences as a theatrical play in which the students were placed on a host culture stage unfamiliar to them and forced to perform. Immediately, they confront the physical aspects of this stage, which may be very different from where they come: First, the majority of the population is Black or it is a very large city; second, they meet the local actors and are required to perform with them in a play that is already in motion and for which they have no script. Depending on the language spoken by the locals and their willingness or lack of willingness to help the newcomers, this could potentially be a chaotic and frustrating experience or vice versa.

Students on the Ghana stage had to deal immediately with issues of daily life comforts different from those they were accustomed to in the United States – new foods, unreliable delivery of electricity, no running water, no hot water for showers, no Internet access, no personal transportation, etc. In addition, these students had to confront reversal of their racial status, a major change for which they could not have prepared fully. They mentioned thinking about the discomforts and the reversal of racial status situations beforehand but acknowledged

that they did not fully perceive the impact until arriving in Ghana where they were immediately confronted by the emotional and physical discomforts.

The students in England, on the other hand, were placed on a stage where physical characteristics were similar to those at home and the script had some familiar aspects. They did not have to worry about learning to live where communication was an issue, without running water, electricity, hot water, crowded and unsafe public transport, a trash strewn city, and the actors on the stage were, in its majority, like them in appearance. Students did not have a script for the play but were able to catch on easier than those in Ghana as they used a similar script at home. There were difficulties at first but mostly related to unfulfilled expectations and jet lag.

Research Question 5

Is there an essence in the experiences that students describe?

Analysis of the data indicated that the central phenomenon of these students' experiences was the realization, in various degrees, of their cultural identity. Questioning materialism, race status reversal, and reverse culture shock allowed the students to experience and compare values of the host with their home culture and begin to understand why they are who they are. Mary was the one student who best described the phenomenon:

I am very American [*laughter*] and it is not just like, I mean, of course I am American, I talk American you know, um, but what I mean is that my ideology is really American and how I choose to just approach different problems by problem solving is very American and so learning that and not only learning it but learning to accept it and see it thru my friends' eyes from all over the world it was really a, really a great experience... to really learn to understand yourself.

Phenomenology

The use of the phenomenological approach to qualitative research guided this study. As such, I was required to isolate the central experience or phenomenon of the participants

interviewed. This required analysis of the students' statements with no previous assumptions on the subject, which was very challenging for me because I had experiences similar to the participants. I studied abroad in my mid 20s and had an emotional investment in the experiences of my interviewees. I am from Brazil and studied in the United States in the mid 1980s. I count this experience as transforming my life. As I interviewed the students, I could not avoid tracing parallels to my own experience. I have very definite personal views of the impact of studying abroad and had to exercise much control and caution when analyzing the data.

I was especially touched by Mary's description of her understanding that she was an American and that her actions were a result of the American culture, as I had the same discovery of myself in regards to being Brazilian. I was very conscious of my background as I analyzed the data and strived to keep any personal ideas about the subject out of the equation. I found that the central phenomenon of these students' experiences is that they achieved or were close to achieving a realization of their cultural identify as an American. Mary is the pivotal example of such phenomenon and the only one to fully verbalize it, although the other students did so in other ways.

Validity Issues

This study is weak in regards to validity. The small number of students interviewed (seven), the length of the interviews (no longer than 60 minutes), the unavailability of documents for triangulation, and the lack of similar studies in the literature all contributed to the problematic validity. My findings are, however, important for they suggest that this study is fertile ground for important learning about the impact of study abroad in participants' lives.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the students' experience in their host country as well as the themes gathered from the data analysis. Themes for the Ghana students were reversal of racial status, questioning materialism, reverse culture shock, impact of experience on career, and personal changes. Themes for the England students were racism, reverse culture shock, personal changes, and subordinate themes. I also presented the findings as they applied to the five research questions and identified under the phenomenological theory of qualitative research that a central experience of students in both countries was the discovery, to various degrees, of their cultural identity as Americans.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of American students studying in a developing country (Ghana) and the experiences of American students studying abroad in a developed country (England). I proposed to inquire whether the experiences differed and if so, if such differences could be identified as to areas and levels. The theoretical framework of my research was guided by the phenomenology theory of qualitative research as well as the learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky.

The analysis of the interview transcripts clearly indicated that there were differences between the experiences of the two groups and identification of the areas was a fairly easy task. The issue of level or depth of the differences, however, was a bit more difficult; my short interview with each student and the lack of other data sources such as journals, blogs, etc. made it impossible for me to examine the issue beyond a superficial manner. The study, however, proved to be important in pinpointing the need and relevance of further research, especially as we have seen study abroad in developing countries surface as a new paradigm in the study abroad field in the last decade.

Summary of the Experiences

The composition of the participant groups was by chance because I did not recruit students with a particular profile. Nevertheless, individuals in both groups shared various common personal characteristics. All but one of the participants was White, all but one of the participants was of traditional college age, all participants were from middle class families, and

all but one had never studied abroad, even though they had travelled abroad. All but one of the participants was a Humanities major.

The students who went to Ghana, with the exception of Dana, were interested in studying in a developing country and Ghana was a purposeful choice. John wants to practice medicine in a developing country, Kelly planned to be a social worker abroad and Seth wanted an experience in an African country. Dana, however, had selected a European country as her first choice for study abroad, but finding it too expensive to fund, considered more affordable options and found that option in Ghana.

Upon arrival in Ghana the students had to immediately face the reversal of racial status and its consequences. Dana, an African-American woman, became a member of the racial majority, a status that was overshadowed by her nationality, apparent once she spoke. Seth, Kelly, and John became members of the racial minority and wore the White man or White woman identification as well as that of American throughout their stay. All the students indicated some degree of emotional discomfort at this situation and although they all had thought about it before departing from the United States stated that once in Ghana they understood this was a situation for which they could not have fully prepared beforehand.

The experience in Ghana also helped students reevaluate their professional and academic plans. Kelly is no longer interested in working overseas while Dana is now considering it. Seth wants to include Ghana in projects he may encounter in future jobs and John is now ready to start medical school and has discarded the idea of a year off. Additionally, the students are still evaluating the impact of their experiences regarding personal changes, getting used to the materialistic lifestyle in the United States, and dealing with reverse culture shock.

The students who went to England cited seeking family heritage, interest in British culture, and not wanting to study in a non-English-speaking country as the reasons behind their selection. All the students in England were White and did not have to confront any racial status issues. Rather, their initial issue was that of nationality. Students mentioned suffering emotional discomfort upon arrival when exposed to open racist speech and because of unfulfilled expectations, information overload, and jet lag.

White students in Ghana described the experience of becoming members of the racial minority as expanding their understanding of the minorities' struggles in the US. This gain came as the result of lived experiences and sometimes uncomfortable experiences. Without diminishing any of the students' experiences, when we compare the challenges of Ghana and England, we view those in Ghana as more challenging, although we acknowledge this is a personal value statement.

Kevin experienced severe reverse cultural shock when returning from the *center of the world* to rural North Carolina. Here the degree of difference between the host and the home country impacted the degree of culture shock. Mary, the *type A++* person, who had culture shock before her departure when administrators at the University of Chester did not respond to her need for detailed information, changed her 10-year life plan to a 50-year life plan upon returning.

Ghana Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis was based on the coding of interview transcripts for the seven students. Four participants studied in Ghana and three studied in England. Review of the transcript coding from the Ghana interviews revealed five themes:

1. Reversal of Racial Status

2. Questioning Materialism
3. Reverse Culture Shock
4. Impact of Experience on Career
5. Personal Changes

Reversal of Racial Status

It was inevitable that the issue of racial status was going to be the issue with the most impact on the students who went to Ghana; it would be difficult not to be affected by having one's racial status suddenly reversed. Additionally, race and racial status is a contentious issue in American society and the participating students certainly took that baggage with them in addition to their personal views on the subject.

Dana had experience visiting family in countries where the Black population is the majority population. However, her visits were short and time was spent in family circles. As an African-American woman in Ghana, she had to process the event of not only becoming a racial majority but also that of being an American and being away from a protective familial group. She stated that she was not very concerned about that race status reversal but that it was a "neat idea." She enjoyed the experience of being welcomed back home by the locals who thought she had many Ghanaian physical traits.

Dana also said that she needed to provide a positive picture of the African-American women to contrast with what she believed was people's negative view of them who are often portrayed in the US media as opinionated, rude, and loud. Her interaction with African-American peers in Ghana did not appear to go very well as she described being upset with a "real ghetto girl from California" whose actions she thought supported stereotypical views of African-Americans.

The White student participants' experiences in this realm were significant at various degrees. Seth declared the racial reversal status to be "mind opening" and an opportunity to walk in someone else's shoes. He seemed the one most comfortable in his new minority situation and took it with a grain of humor. When skipping a class, for example, he knew his absence would be obvious to the professor, "The classes were so big, but being a minority you are easily spotted as missing."

Kelly seemed to be the one most affected by the race status reversal situation. She used the word "shocked" to describe her feelings. Answering my question about how it felt being a minority, she described the discomfort of being the only White person in a class of 300 and at feeling pressure to represent the US well. She said that being in that position made her understand how minorities in the US may feel in similar circumstances, "I kind of understand that a bit better now, like I didn't, you know, wanted to raise my hand a lot, you know, stuck in the back, so I kind of understand that a little bit."

John said that instantly becoming a member of the racial minority was enjoyable but mentioned that the problem was that everyone assumed White Americans were rich, which wasn't his case. As he described his travels throughout Ghana, especially in the rural areas, he noted that his White man status called more and more attention.

Of note is a comment he made on how he came to understand the behavior he labels *brotherhood of race*. When in Ghana, he observed himself acknowledging strangers just because they were White, a behavior he had witnessed in the US by African-Americans and found puzzling. John went directly from Ghana to India for studies and although we did not address his experience in India, the fact that he had a year of experience living as a member of the minority may have impacted his interpretation of the Ghana experience.

Questioning Materialism

The students in Ghana stayed at the International Student Hostel on campus, a facility comparable to an average American university dormitory. They shared a room with another student and bathroom facilities with others on the same floor. The ISH, however, contrasted dramatically with dorms used by the majority of students in Ghana where 6-8 persons live in a room that is in very poor condition. The ISH residents were primarily Ghanaian students from affluent families and international students, mostly from other African countries. The ISH, despite being the best dormitory on campus, did not have air conditioning and, like the rest of the campus, was subject to blackouts, did not have hot water, and had periodic water shut offs. Students reacted to this lack of comfort in different ways.

Dana seemed prepared for the lack of everyday comforts but stated that she disregarded advice from a friend who had returned from Ghana about what to bring with her. She ordinarily travels with her essentials for personal care and was not going to give them up for Ghana. She also was the only one who chose to hire someone to do her laundry, as opposed to the others who did their own laundry. Once in Ghana, however, Dana encountered a life of fewer possessions and comforts, and observing the Ghanaian's laissez-faire approach to life, reconsidered her approach to success,

An epiphany that I had, I was like, one day I will base my success based upon on how exciting I am when I wake up, not based upon whether I have an awesome job or a really sweet car, a nice house or something.

It took Seth a month after arriving in Ghana to be able to connect to the Internet, a tool that someone interested in politics uses every day in the United States. He said it took a bit of time to get used to it but found it was liberating because not having access to information removed worries from his life.

More mundane events also captured his attention, such as turning in a paper written in longhand to a professor – something he had not done since elementary school; washing clothes by hand – a task that took 3-4 hours when he let his laundry accumulate – as long as there was running water that day. The unreliable delivery of electricity and running water in Ghana led Seth to have to ponder on what he would rather have and he chose running water.

Kelly, for example, stated that such lack of minimum comforts contributed to her culture shock. No air conditioning in the dorms, having to shower in cold water, and washing clothes by hand required adjustments even though she was expecting such difficulties. She also stated that her reverse culture shock was more severe than her culture shock. Having lived very modestly for a semester, having taken only one suitcase to Ghana, spending less than \$1 a day on food, and just living with less contrasted with the US culture of consumerism and its in-your-face media presence. Kelley said, “America just bombards you with – buy this, commercials, and things that you have to have, and clothes; it is overwhelming.”

John, on the other hand, seemed the one who took the lack of comfort in stride and was ready to adapt to the situation at hand. He did not have a laptop, did not have a TV, and did not care if he did not have electricity, “Unless it was nighttime and I wanted to read a book, I never really had any use for electricity.”

Reverse Culture Shock

The students returning from Ghana described their reverse culture shock in terms of, among other things, their relationship with the materialistic lifestyle of the United States society. Dana and Seth did not mention reverse culture shock as directly as did Kelly and John but some of their statements suggested that they experienced its impact. Dana, for example, stated that

returning home made her sad, stressed, and “angry for nothing,” although she was questioning these states and aware that she needed to address them.

Seth stated several times how he misses Ghana, although he appreciates the efficiency aspects of the United States culture. Describing his feelings for Ghana as a *Catch 22*, he noted the US efficiency and adherence to deadlines but then stated that it “makes everyone miserable.” He noted being concerned about forgetting the impact of the experience as time goes by, “I worry that the further my trip gets away, the further it fades from my memory and, you know, I forget to be thankful every day for what I have.”

Kelly’s main struggle with reverse culture shock was related to the second theme of this study (Questioning Materialism). Her parents noticed how her spending habits changed upon her return; she said that after her Ghana experience, some things she did before traveling became so frivolous. Like Seth, Kelly also expressed concern about the impact of the experience fading, “I hope that [the experience] will stay with me. It is easy to get sucked back into the everyday grind and forget. You know, there is a whole world out there.”

John recently arrived home from India and said he had been quite angry about the materialistic approach of people around him but acknowledged that he needed to work on it. The experience abroad speeds up change and while friends and family at home change with time, the process is slow and thus almost unnoticeable. It is a challenge for someone in John’s and the others’ position to conciliate the fact that they changed significantly but have to live with people who did not change with them. I think this was the situation that John referred to as having to work on.

Impact of Experience on Career

Dana was inspired by the experience to the point of considering a career abroad. During a trip to the Cote D'Ivoire she met a representative from a US consulting firm with branches worldwide and became interested in getting a job in its Nigerian branch. She understood, however, that she would need experience before being competitive for such placement and was seeking a communications job in the US, the field she expected to work at in Africa.

Seth's future career was impacted by the experience in Ghana and his plans involved inclusion of Ghana in aspects of his future job. At the time of our conversation, Seth was applying for a job with a public relations firm in Nashville and, if hired, plans to work on a project that involves encouraging business investment in Ghana.

Kelly's reason for going to Ghana was to test her idea of working as a social worker overseas. During her stay, she started having doubts about working abroad, especially because she started questioning the role of foreign aid in developing countries. When volunteering in Ghana, Kelly learned that Ghanaians wanted help from other Ghanaians and not from foreigners. She respects their position and realizes that her work would have more impact at home.

John knew that he wanted to work in the medical field in Africa and the experience helped him solidify that decision. He was no longer planning to take a year off before going to graduate school and plans to start medical school, if accepted, immediately after graduation. He said that he can make an impact by practicing medicine in developing countries and sees himself doing work similar to that of Dr. Paul Farmer, a doctor anthropologist and Pulitzer Award winning author who has worked in Haiti and other developing countries.

Personal Changes

Asked whether the experience in Ghana changed them, all indicated that it did; some with more emphasis than others. It is important to note that some of these students were still processing the impact of their experience and an interview at a later time may have revealed other important aspects of the experience.

Dana stated the changes in terms of how she defines success. The experience helped her revise what was important in her life, which meant giving less importance to accumulation of wealth and more to being happy with what she is doing here and now.

Seth stated with emphasis that the experience changed who he is and that Ghana is a daily reference in his life. The experience “completely changed everything” and made him appreciate what he has: family, friends, access to education, a job, the opportunity to travel abroad, and many other things. He stated that he tries to encourage other people to do study abroad and thinks that everyone should do it.

Kelly said that she changed and is now more adventurous and willing “to kind of go out on a limb to experience new things.” She said that she was already adventurous before studying abroad but she is much more so now.

John, who after his time in Ghana, went to study in India, another developing country, was experiencing reentry issues and lifestyle changes such as being less materialistic and a minimalist. He continues to struggle with the material oriented world around him but is aware that he needs to work on conciliating the worlds of his experience and where he now lives.

England Comparative Analysis

The full comparative analysis was based on the coding of interview transcripts for all seven students. It is important to note that similar questions were asked of both groups regarding

career, culture shock, personal changes, and such. Analysis of the transcribed England interviews with Mary, Nancy, and Kevin were coded and four themes surfaced as prominent in their experiences:

1. Racism
2. Reverse Culture Shock
3. Personal Changes
4. Subordinate themes

Racism

The issue of race was mentioned by both groups but by the England students from a different angle, that of witnessing open racist speech. All expressed great surprise that racist speech was openly expressed and socially accepted.

Mary, who studied at the University of Chester, said that racism in Europe “is kind of normal... [and that] they would not call it racist,” although from the American point of view, it is racism. She noted that she did not see anyone being treated in a racist manner and saw racism as related to ingrained stereotypes of people from countries like Poland, Pakistan, India, and others.

Nancy’s experience was similar to Mary’s. She also studied at the University of Chester and described the town as culturally homogeneous. She witnessed open and blatant racism and was shocked. It appeared that in Chester there was a philosophy of isolationism where anyone not English was seen with suspicion and even hatred. Nancy, however, did not experience harassment even when identified as a foreigner.

Kevin said he was at the *center of the world* and in a very diverse city. He commented on the issue of racism as well but saw it in a more subtle form describing it as relating mainly to

immigration issues. He observed that there was a fight going on for lower immigration quotas and “sort of rallying against people immigrating en masse.”

Reverse Culture Shock

Reentry issues were of note when I reviewed the transcripts for this group, although each participant was affected by it at different levels of severity. Mary, for example, who did not say that she changed significantly as a result of the experience described being apprehensive about her reentry from the time she arrived in England. Her previous experience with reentry was coming back from Guatemala, which “was really traumatic to me.” With England she had concerns about being able to snap back into her old self, which she appeared to have done without any problems. However, by the time of our interview, 2 months after her return, she appeared to be still considering the level of her personal changes.

Nancy who was a bit older than the other two England students and who counted the experience as making her more independent, stated that reentry required her to watch what she said, even in the liberal environment of Asheville. In England she experienced pockets of liberalism and thrived in it. She gave an example of her participation in a weekend retreat called *Uncivilization* where she met the author of an environmental policy book she was using in class.

Reentry issues appeared especially important in Kevin’s case because he moved from what he called the *center of the world* to rural North Carolina. When I asked him how he coped with the transition, it gave him pause perhaps because until that moment he had not addressed it openly. He said,

I coped with it by, sort of hanging, by, um, um, that was a good question. It was hard to cope. I tried, I, I guess that the Internet is a great connection to the outside world when you are geographically isolated so lots of that and trying to... that is really a good question. It is tricky to cope, you know, I am sure you know this in your experience...

Personal Changes

I asked both groups the same questions about personal changes and all the students stated that they had changed as a result of their experience, at varying degrees.

Mary, for example, mentioned that she did not at first think she changed as a result of the experience but realized later that she did, although her changes did not appear obvious to her friends. She said, “No, it is not a noticeable change, it is sort of just in your rhythm type of thing.”

Nancy said that the experience helped her come into her own as a person. Being part of a close family and having a steady boyfriend, she thought she needed the experience of being on her own. She became more independent and learned to become more comfortable with herself.

Kevin, who at the time of the interview was still dealing with reverse culture shock, did not think that he changed in significant ways. However, I expect that by talking about his reverse culture shock he may edit that position. At the time of our interview he mentioned changes such as drinking tea every day at 4:00 pm and being more patient in urban settings.

Subordinate Themes

As I reviewed the interview transcripts for the students in England, a few isolated issues were discussed by individual students and are discussed here as subordinate themes. For example, Mary said that she understood her American cultural identity from a different standpoint, that of an outsider looking in. She said,

I am American, I talk American you know, um, but what I mean is that my ideology is really American and how I choose to just approach different problems by problem solving is very American and so learning that and not only learning it but learning to accept it and see it thru my friends' eyes from all over the world it was really a, really a great experience... to really learn to understand yourself.

Nancy talked about being away from a network of very close family and friends and learning to cope with loneliness. She said, “I’ve really never been alone, I don’t understand loneliness and part of this excursion was to understand that and boy, do you get to understand loneliness when you travel by yourself.”

Kevin, on the other hand, who has family in England, had the opportunity to meet with great aunts and other members of his extended family, which made his views of family change. He said, “They were very enriching experiences and it taught me a lot of things about my family. The way I look at my family now is very different after meeting her.” This was an instance of change that perhaps Kevin had not considered before.

Discussion of Findings

The literature on study abroad research indicates that studying abroad impacts students both at the cognitive and affective realms. Research findings list among study abroad participants’ gains an increase in their knowledge of geography, foreign languages, global interdependence, foreign aid, and gains in their personal growth and knowledge of self as a cultural being (Carlson et al., 1990; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Sutton, 2007). Gains for participants of this study held true to the above list, with the exception of foreign language because all participants went to a country where English was either the official or one of the official languages.

Che et al. (2009) suggested that higher education institutions’ mission of graduating students who are culturally aware of themselves and the rest of the world would be better supported by study abroad in non-Eurocentric countries. Theirs was the article most relevant to my study, although I read it after formulating the idea for this research. They argued that learning would come about more effectively if students were subject to constructive disequilibrium, the

Piaget theory that espouses disequilibrium and disturbances as catalysts for deeper learning. Additionally, they suggested that Vygotsky's theory of proximal development, which proposes that learning happens when individuals are challenged to resolve problems that are above their current level of development, as another supporting theory to their position.

While study participant's experiences support current findings in the literature, it is difficult to ascertain if the findings of this study support Che et al.'s (2009) hypothesis, although superficially, they appear to.

Constructive Disequilibrium and Zone of Proximal Development

As part of my data analysis I used Piaget's and Vygotsky's learning theories of constructive disequilibrium and zone of proximal development. Che et al.'s (2009) suggestion that such theories may provide validation that a study abroad experience in a developing country may be more significant in terms of learning than a study abroad experience in a developed country has proven this study to have merit, even though more research should be conducted. I discuss these theories as they apply to each group.

Ghana

The racial status reversal of Seth, John, and Kelly placed them in a zone of disequilibrium and proximal development immediately upon their arrival in Ghana. They became visible minorities by being White in a majority Black population and had to confront daily situations of emotional discomfort such as being called "Hey, White man" or "Hey, White lady." Those are labels that would be considered politically incorrect in the United States today. They would be seldom, if ever, an expression used in public. The White students in Ghana stated that their experience in regards to racial status reversal had a great impact on their understanding of minorities in the United States, which is a fulfillment of Piaget's statement that, "Disequilibrium

alone forces the subject to go beyond his current state and strike out in new directions” (Che et al., 2009, p. 103). These students had liberal views on race relations before going to Ghana but the living experience of becoming part of the minority impacted them significantly more than being an outside observer to the minority cause at home. But was the disequilibrium, disturbance, and the zone of proximal development a result of their being in a developing country or was it a result of the wide differences between the host and the home culture?

Dana’s situation needs to be viewed from a different angle. As an African-American in Ghana her racial status did reverse to that of the majority but only until she spoke and was identified as an American. Then, to a certain extent, she lost her majority status. I think that at the time of our interview she was still processing her experience in Ghana and at a more considerable level than the others, as she would at one point praise it and at another say that she had had enough of Ghana and was, by the end of the semester, very ready to come home. It seems that Dana was faced with disequilibrium and disturbance and placed in a zone of proximal development that was deeper than that of the other students in Ghana, but it is difficult to ascertain whether these states were helpful to her learning because they occurred in a developing country or because they were so far from her home experience.

The Ghana environment fostered learning under the circumstances described above because the students had support from individuals who were proficient in the host culture. Had they not had a supporting environment, the learning may not have occurred at the same level as it did and their experiences may have been described as unsatisfactory. Both Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s theories emphasize that learning under the conditions of disequilibrium and the zone of proximal development must be guided by others who are already proficient in higher knowledge.

England

Nancy and Mary were in Chester a traditional English town where diversity of races and ethnicities was nonexistent; Kevin was in London, which was the very opposite in those terms. All were identified as Americans as soon as they spoke but did not consider that issue to have made them too uncomfortable as the locals considered their dislike of American political positions separate from their relationship with American individuals.

The student participants witnessed blatant racist speech in Chester and subtle racism in London, which they stated was surprising to them and clearly unacceptable by US standards. Their statements regarding these events, however, were not judgmental just factual. They did not indicate that the racism issue was one of emotional discomfort, mostly surprise and shock, perhaps because it stayed at the speech level. Were it demonstrated in racist behavior or directed toward a minority individual, it may have made them uncomfortable. At the behavioral level, the discomfort zone probably would have been more significant than it was at the speech level. They all stated that they thought about it in relation to race relations issues in the United States but their engagement in the issue was not one of depth and did not reflect on their reentry comments.

The findings of this study suggest that the students in England were exposed to disequilibrium and a zone of proximal development but not at the same depth as the students in Ghana. In England the disequilibrium and proximal development zones were shallower because England and the United States share many cultural and physical characteristics; the students' experiences reflected such states. We must, however, acknowledge that the gap between Mary's type A++ personality and the administrative laissez-faire culture of the university, as well as Kevin's return from the *center of the world* to rural North Carolina provided strong

disequilibrium, disturbance, and wide zone of proximal development that may have impacted their learning.

Overlapping Themes

As shown in Table 1, a few themes from each group overlapped and are discussed further.

Table 1.

Themes Grid

<i>Ghana</i> ↓	<i>England</i> →	Racism	Reverse Culture Shock	Personal Changes	Subordinate Themes
Reversal of Racial Status		*			
Questioning Materialism					
Reverse Culture Shock			*		
Influence of Experience on Career					
Personal Changes				*	

Reversal of Racial Status (Ghana) vs. Racism (England)

Upon their arrival, the Ghana students faced an immediate experiential situation, their race status reversal. The students in England mentioned hearing openly racist speech from Englishmen and, although the circumstances are not the same, both involved race relations in a different light from what the students were accustomed to at home and are worthy of comparison. Dana's position was unlike the other Ghana participants, as she had different experiences regarding race relations in the United States that included being a target of racism.

Both situations provided students with emotional disequilibrium but only the reversal of racial status appeared as an issue and a catalyst for personal change. Students in Ghana talked about how they now view US minorities' plight in a different way because they have lived it. Open racist speech in England surprised the students. However, no student discussed it in relation to race relations in the United States. It appears that the environment in Ghana provided a more fertile ground for constructive disequilibrium and disturbance and thus a deeper level of learning. This comparison does not mean that the students in England had a less valuable experience, only a different experience.

Reverse Culture Shock (Ghana) vs. Reverse Culture Shock (England)

Both groups indicated they experienced reverse culture shock but they expressed it differently. Culture shock is a theoretical concept that espouses that individuals experience a series of emotional stages, from excitement, to depression, and eventually back to their experience before the baseline of emotions, when transitioning cultures (Furnham, 1993). Reverse culture shock occurs when participants experience the same stages of culture shock upon returning home.

The Ghana students described their reverse culture shock in terms of their relationship with the materialistic lifestyle of United States society. Dana, Seth, Kelly, and John mentioned having difficulty accepting the backbreaking pace of life in the US, of being angry and disappointed at the consumerism that dominates US society, of being more frugal in their new lifestyle, and in revising their view of success and how it relates to their lives. They were to various degrees uncomfortable being home.

The England students said they experienced reverse culture shock at less severe levels. Mary mentioned reverse culture shock but only in the context of preparing herself for it. As a

very organized, always prepared person, she worried about reverse culture shock from the minute she arrived in England. She found that, in reality, while she faced some reverse culture shock issues, they were not at a severe level. Nancy, meanwhile, described as a reentry problem the fact that she had to be careful talking about some of her experience observations that may have been considered too liberal even for Asheville, which is considered a very liberal city by US standards.

Kevin experienced the most severe case of reverse culture shock because he returned from the cosmopolitan center of London, the *center of the world* as he put it, to rural North Carolina. He was subject to constructive disequilibrium at both ends of the experience but much more upon returning to the United States. There is a huge gap between living in the *center of the world* and rural North Carolina.

Personal Changes (Ghana) vs. Personal Changes (England)

Both groups said the experience impacted them on a personal level and that they were changed but to different degrees. Such differences can, moreover, be accounted for by the cultural and physical characteristics of their host countries, Ghana and England.

The Ghana students described personal changes in strong terms by saying, “It changed who I am.” “It made me more aware of myself in relationship to the world.” “It made me think I can do anything.” “It made me a minimalist.” The England students, meanwhile, described personal changes in more moderate terms such as acquiring the habit of drinking tea daily at 4:00 pm, becoming more independent, learning to pace oneself, and being more patient in urban settings. Mary, however, was the only participant who verbalized the central phenomenon of this experience, cultural identity, in the clearest terms.

Implications for Practice

It is clear that the experiences of students in Ghana and England were very different, although the benefits of participating in study abroad appeared to affect both groups positively. Recognition of such differences should be considered when advisors guide students in the selection of a study abroad site. The objective should be that the experience is compatible with the student's goals, personalities, and even physical characteristics. For example, would Dana, who chose Ghana as her second option, fare better at the European site she had chosen as her first choice? Or did the fact that she went to a place where she was part of the racial majority have a more significant impact than living as a minority in Europe?

Another important implication of this research toward practice is the issue of how to recruit students to do their study abroad in developing countries. When reviewing the reasons given by the students for selecting Ghana, all had a specific reason for going to a developing country with the exception of Dana who went because it was more affordable than a developed country. Should we encourage more students to go to Ghana or another developing country if they come to us without preconceived ideas of where to go?

Implications for Further Research

This study barely scratched the surface of issues related to American students studying in developed versus developing countries. At this time what is known with certainty is that this area of inquiry needs additional research. And, the need is immediate because of the emerging study abroad paradigm of significantly increasing enrollment of US students in developing countries. Here are some questions that issued from this study:

1. Do African-American students benefit from a study abroad placement in an African country?

2. Are island programs in developing countries as effective in providing learning by constructive disequilibrium as semester, direct enrollment programs?
3. How would an African-American student's experience in a country like England be impacted by the openly racist speech of the English people?
4. Would a mixed method research approach provide a richer avenue of inquiry in a similar study? Would a longitudinal study be feasible?
5. Would students in non-African developing countries be exposed to the same degree of disequilibrium as students studying abroad in Ghana?
6. How do we identify and select students who may benefit from a study abroad placement in a developing country?
7. What benefits do students receive when they study in developed countries outside Europe?
8. What is the impact of second language proficiency on study abroad in developing countries?

If a change in the number of students who choose to study abroad in developing countries increases as much as expected, there will be fertile ground for research. This study provides a modest contribution toward the inquiry and will assist some in the profession as they consider student placements in developing countries. We are, after all, working with such students now, the pioneers in a sense.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed the findings of my five research questions:

1. What are the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developing country (Ghana) and the experiences of American undergraduate students who study at least a semester in a developed country (England)?
2. What are the themes of the students' experiences?
3. What are the similarities and differences among the students' experiences?
4. Is there a relationship between the identified themes and specific country or culture issues?
5. Is there an essence in the experiences that students describe?

Results indicate that the groups had different experiences and several pertinent areas were pinpointed. However, I was unable to provide a firm answer regarding the depth of such differences.

I presented a table showing the nine most common themes for the groups and compared those, revealing three similar themes. Reversal of racial status and racism, reverse culture shock, and personal changes were the themes discussed in comparison of the experiences in Ghana vs. those in England.

The theories of phenomenology, constructive disequilibrium, and zone of proximal development, which I proposed as guidelines for this study, framed part of my discussions and proved to be very relevant to the themes.

The students in Ghana experienced deeper forms of disequilibrium and zone of proximal development than did the students in England although both groups reported valuable personal gains after the experience. The differences can be accounted for by the characteristics of the host

country vis-à-vis the home country. England appears closer to the United States in culture and society than Ghana is.

A phenomenon (or essence) common to all the student participants of the study was a realization of their cultural identity although such realizations were at different stages of maturity. Mary, a student who studied in England, presented the clearest understanding of achieving such realization.

The study results may provide help to practitioners in the field regarding placing students in developing countries, especially in Africa, because the findings reveal that there are differences in placements in developing versus developed countries and that a student's background, personality, and race may play a role in the success of the placement. The practitioner, however, should probably pay closer attention to the study's shortcomings than its modest findings as I prize this study more for raising such questions than for answering them. I identified several additional questions that surfaced tangential to this study.

The study provides fertile ground for additional research, even as it may have fallen short on providing answers to the main research questions. There is much to be understood when comparing the experiences of American undergraduate students in developing versus developed countries. As there is a new study abroad paradigm imminent, this study proves that the need for further research is immediate.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Correspondence with the University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK)

The following is an e-mail message sent to the International Office at UTK asking the office to send an e-mail message to students who fit my project profile. Their response follows the original message.

From: Costa, Maria D.
Sent: Wednesday, December 01, 2010 12:30 PM
To: ameador2@utk.edu<<mailto:ameador2@utk.edu>>
Subject: Requesting help for a research project

Dear Alisa:

I trust this email will find you well. I am writing in the role of a doctoral student seeking help recruiting students to participate in my dissertation research which proposes to compare the experiences of American undergraduate students who spent at least a semester in Ghana or Norway; I am looking to interview 4 students in each group.

We have a few students at ETSU who fit the profile but some have returned more than a year ago and I wish to interview students who have returned from their experiences in the last year. Would you be able to help us recruit the students? The recruitment entails sending an email from me to the students who fit the profile. Would it be possible? If so, would UTK accept the IRB approval from ETSU or would I have to submit a separate request to your IRB?

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Best,

Maria

Maria Costa
East Tennessee State University
Office of International Programs
Director
P.O. Box 70,668
Johnson City, TN 37614-1701
voice (423) 439 7737
fax (423) 439 7131

Response:

From: Meador, Alisa Lorraine [ameador2@utk.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, April 05, 2011 10:46 AM

To: Costa, Maria D.
Subject: RE: Requesting help for a research project

Maria-

I sent your email out to ten students this morning. 3 are currently abroad. Only one of the students studied in Norway.
All the best on your dissertation,

Alisa

Alisa L Meador
Assistant Director
Center for International Education
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1620 Melrose Ave
Knoxville, TN 37996
Tel: 865-974-3177
Fax: 865-974-2985
[ameador2@utk.edu<mailto:ameador2@utk.edu>](mailto:ameador2@utk.edu)

APPENDIX B

Recruitment E-mail Message Sent to UTK Students

The following is the e-mail message sent to UTK students who fit my project profile.

Dear Student:

My name is Maria Costa and I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University seeking your help in regards to my dissertation research which will compare the experiences of American undergraduate students who studied at least a semester in Ghana or the UK.

If you are an American undergraduate student who studied at least a semester in Ghana or England, I would like to invite you for an interview to discuss your experience abroad. If you are interested in being interviewed, please send me an email so we can schedule a meeting. I will meet you at a place of your choosing and at a time of your convenience.

I look forward to hearing about your experiences abroad.

Thank you.

Maria Costa
costa@etsu.edu<<mailto:costa@etsu.edu>>
423 439 7737

APPENDIX C

Correspondence with the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA)

The following is an e-mail message sent to UNCA IRB asking for approval to send my recruitment e-mail message so that the International Office could forward it to students who fit my project profile. The approval is shown below the original message.

On Mon, Oct 3, 2011 at 9:46 AM, Costa, Maria D. <COSTA@mail.etsu.edu<<mailto:COSTA@mail.etsu.edu>>> wrote:

Dear Dr. Ruppert,

I would like to ask the UNC-A Study Abroad Office to send an email to students who fit the profile of my study. Would it be possible for you to approve that I send Ms. Gilpin such request? Below is the recruitment email I would ask Ms. Gilpin to send her students.

Thank you.

Maria Costa

Response:

From: IRB Account [<mailto:irb@unca.edu>]
Sent: Wednesday, October 05, 2011 1:53 PM
To: Costa, Maria D.
Subject: Re: recruitment email

Yes. You may send this out as part of your study.

Dr. Ruppert

APPENDIX D

Recruitment E-mail Message Sent to UNCA Students

The following is the e-mail message sent to UNCA students who fit my project profile.

Dear Student:

My name is Maria Costa and I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University seeking your help in regards to my dissertation research which will compare the experiences of American undergraduate students who studied at least a semester in Ghana or England.

If you are an American undergraduate student who studied at least a semester in Ghana or England, I would like to invite you for an interview to discuss your experience abroad. If you are interested in being interviewed, please send me an email so we can schedule a meeting. I will meet you at a place of your choosing and at a time of your convenience.

I look forward to hearing about your experiences abroad.

Thank you.

Maria Costa
costa@etsu.edu<<mailto:costa@etsu.edu>>
423 439 7737

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to go to England or Ghana?
2. Can you talk about the experience you had initially at the country?
 - a. Concentrate on the experiences you had during your first 3 weeks in the country.
 - b. What do you remember the most about this time?
 - c. How do you feel about it now that you have had a chance to relive it?
3. Did you have specific expectations as to your country of study?
 - a. Did you expect the experience to be an easy or difficult one?
 - b. Can you give examples of an easy and a difficult situation you encountered?
4. Looking back, can you describe an event that made a great impact on you?
5. How would you summarize your feelings about your experience in Ghana or England?

VITA

MARIA COSTA

- Personal Data: Born in: Jacarei, São Paulo State, Brazil
Languages: Portuguese, Spanish, English
- Education: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, Ed.D.,
Educational Leadership, December 2012.
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, M.A.T.,
Secondary Education, May 1991.
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, B.A.,
Broadcasting, Minor in Spanish, December 1988.
Universidade de Mogi das Cruzes – Brazil, Licenciatura, Brazilian
and Portuguese Literature, December 1982.
- Professional Experience: East Tennessee State University, Director of International
Programs and Services, February 2005-Present.
East Tennessee State University, Associate Director of
International Programs and Services and International Student
and Study Abroad Advisor, March 1992-February 2005.
São Paulo State Department of Education, Brazil, High School
Teacher, Portuguese and Brazilian Literature, English and
Portuguese Languages, 1982-1985.
- Grants: Key personnel in FIPSE/CAPES grant: Consortium for Promoting
Cross-Linguistic Understanding of Communication Disabilities

in Children (\$250,000). East Tennessee State University,
Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, and Universidade de São
Paulo, Brazil, May 2010.

ETSU Bucs Stimulus Grant: International Student Recruitment and
Merit Scholarship Program (\$128,941), December 2009.

US – Germany Fulbright Seminar for US Administrators in
International Education, May 2001.