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Innovations in Research and Scholarship Feature

Exploring Gender Through Education Abroad Programs: A Graduate Student Case Study

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This case study explores how graduate students who attended a short-term education abroad program understood gender as a result of participation in the trip. Findings reveal that students' understandings of gender are influenced by in and out of class contexts. Implications for faculty and education abroad practitioners are shared to deepen and contextualize understanding and development of student participants

With an increased emphasis on internationalization of higher education and global preparation of college and university students (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012), education abroad programs have grown in number, becoming a popular educational experience for students. Graduate students, increasingly, have more options for studying abroad through their graduate preparation programs. A cursory review of student affairs e-mail listservs reveals a proliferation of interest in graduate student education abroad opportunities. Higher education/student affairs preparation programs now offer graduate-level education abroad programs to sites such as Spain, India, South Africa, and Ireland.

Given many preparation program faculty address identity development with students in their on-campus courses (Shuh, Jones, & Harper, 2010), graduate faculty should consider the outcomes for students in courses abroad (Twombly et al., 2012). Simply participating in education abroad is not sufficient for moving “students toward deeper levels of intercultural exploration and meaning-making” (Ogden, 2006, p.88). Student identity development is of particular interest because students experience their education abroad through the lens of their past experiences, multiple social identities, and often learn through contrastive methods, such

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as comparing common experiences in their home and host countries (Jessup-Anger, 2008; Root & Ngampornchai, 2012). By understanding how students make meaning of social identity in the education abroad context, educators can adapt their pedagogy to facilitate deeper student understanding and help develop “more complex, interculturally-competent individuals” (Ogden, 2006, p. 100). Student development is of particular interest as ACPA and NASPA (2010) argued for education that expands understandings of diverse populations and a globalizing, internationalized university.

Because the environment plays a role in how students understand and reconsider identity (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009), including gender identity (Fellabaum, 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013), considering education abroad a part of a locale that informs identity construction can “lead students to reflect on their own self-identities” (Ogden, 2006, p. 106). Considering the social construction and socialization of identity are lifelong processes (Harro, 2013), graduate students participating in education abroad may shift their concepts of gender.

In this case study, we examined U.S. graduate student understandings of gender after participating in a short-term education abroad program. This study expands on a small body of literature at the intersection of graduate education and education abroad around the development and understanding of socially constructed identities of students. We explored how graduate students understood gender prior to and after going abroad, the types of experiences that influenced these understandings while abroad, and how these experiences impacted understandings of gender.

Literature Review

Education abroad experiences can contribute to students’ understanding of socially constructed identities (e.g., gender and race; Jessup-Anger, 2008; Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). Researchers have explored gender and the ways in which gender is understood, but few have used the context of education abroad (Jessup-Anger, 2008; Malewski & Phillion, 2009). Researchers who explored gender in education abroad did so in countries with similar gender understandings as found in the students’ home country (e.g., Australia and the United States; Jessup-Anger, 2008; Malewski & Phillion, 2009). These studies’ findings did not reveal significant differences in the way that students understood gender between the home country and the host country (Jessup-Anger, 2008; Malewski & Phillion, 2009).

In countries with cultural contexts significantly different from one’s home culture, education abroad research reveals out-of-class experiences can contribute to the understanding of gender. These understandings include gender roles and safety (e.g., determining how to react to catcalls; Twombly, 1995) and how students understood gender in relation to their future careers (Phillion, Malewski, Sharma, & Wang, 2009). Everyday activities, such as socializing in a café, underscored the differences in gender norms between the host country and the United States (Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). Anderson (2003) noted women who studied abroad in San José entered Costa Rica assuming that behavior and dress from the United States were easily transferrable to that country. Prior to departure and during the experience, however, female students were advised repeatedly to adjust their dress (e.g., do not wear shorts) and behavior (e.g., do not go out alone) to align with the cultural norms of Costa Rica. The female students often would not abide by the recommendations, expressing the suggestions infringed on their rights. In cultures where gender norms differed significantly from those of students’ home cultures, the salience of gender in the education abroad experience became more pronounced, and in some cases, shaped

the students' perceptions of both their home and host cultures significantly (Phillion et al., 2009; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). Students reported the greatest growth on education abroad outcomes based on the extent to which they integrated their experiences (e.g., taking a related course on home campus) once they returned to their home country (Rowan-Kenyon & Niehaus, 2011).

Long-term education abroad programs (i.e., 10-week sessions or longer) prove to be settings more capable of facilitating student learning. Dwyer (2004) noted that, "the longer students study abroad the more significant the academic, cultural development and personal growth benefits accrue" (p. 151). Dwyer (2004) acknowledged little research exists on the impact of short-term study abroad on student outcomes, therefore it cannot be assumed short-term programs do not contribute to students' personal development. This study aims to understand how, if at all, a short-term education abroad program influences students' knowing and making meaning of gender.

To ensure positive outcomes of education abroad, scholars suggested students experience the host country's culture through frequent interaction with residents and meaningful experiences that teach students about customs (DeLoach, Saliba, Smith, & Tiemann, 2003; Donnelly-Smith, 2009). The frequent interaction required of students studying abroad is supplemental and integrates classroom learning with out-of-class experiences (Henthorne, Miller, & Hudson, 2001). From these experiences, students challenged themselves through cultural engagements not possible in their native country. Intentional learning opportunities in the host country and home country, including collaborations between student and academic affairs, also supported increased outcomes upon return home (Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Ireland, Niehaus, & Skendall, 2012; Salisbury, An, & Pascarella, 2013). Faculty development and training also provided support for improved education abroad outcomes (Brewer, 2011). To date, participants in these studies included undergraduate students (Jessup-Anger, 2008). In this study, the authors expand the discourse on learning by focusing on graduate students' education abroad coursework.

Theoretical Framework

The questions for this study center on how graduate students understand gender and what types of experiences influence these understandings. To analyze and interpret the gender-centric findings, the researchers employed Bussey and Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory of gender as the study's theoretical framework. The theory states gender is constructed socially, with people learning through interactions with society and enacting behavior based on societal expectations. Environmental, affective, and motivational factors are important contributors to an individual's construction of gender. Once individuals learn gender, they self-sanction their behaviors based on observations and assumptions of whether they will gain or lose power or capital in a relationship.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) explained their social cognitive theory of gender through the triadic reciprocal causation model, which stated people learn gender through continuous bidirectional interactions between personal, behavioral, and environmental domains. Time, settings, and activities vary the impact and strength of these domains in constructing gender. Modeled behaviors, enactive and interactive experiences that solicit reactions and emotions, and direct tuition (i.e. being directly taught how to behave by social influencers, such as family, peers, and institutions) provides guidance for what gender means and how to enact it in various environments. Use of symbolization (understanding through symbolic meaning), observational learning (understanding by observing models), and self-regulatory capacity (regulating learning and determining whether or not to adopt it) helps to construct gender concepts.

Three environmental structures (*imposed*, *selected*, and *constructed*) facilitate gender understanding. Individuals are forced into *imposed* environments but can control how they interact with those environments, while *selected* settings are those in which people choose to interact. *Constructed* environments are where individuals have agency and might construct the environment. In this study, the imposed environment is Rome; the selected environment is the course in which a student enrolls; the constructed environment is created by students as they are familiarized with Rome and the campus context.

Various components of the social cognitive theory of gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) provide a useful structure through which to interpret participants' stories and to identify how the students understand gender. Using the theory's tenet that gender is socially constructed, the authors recognize interactions with a different culture and society could shift with students' currently held understandings of gender. By situating the study within this framework, the authors were able to identify and examine how various contexts and relationships might have shaped student understandings of gender. The activities (along with their time and setting) that students were either required to attend or in which they chose to take part willingly are the various environments examined.

Method

The authors used a constructivist epistemological approach and case study methodology (Yin, 1993), given their focus on participants' understanding of gender during education abroad. Case study methodology is appropriate when "investigators desire to (a) define topics broadly and not narrowly, (b) cover contextual conditions and not just the phenomenon of study, and (c) rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence" (Yin, 1993, p. xi). In this study, the bounded case is a two-week graduate education abroad program that took place in Rome during July 2013. Rome was selected because a marked contrast exists between the gender norms embedded in Italian culture and U.S. culture (Gannon, 2001), which previous studies noted increased the salience of gender in the education abroad experience (Phillion et al., 2009; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995).

Students participating in the education abroad program stayed on a U.S.-based, comprehensive university campus in a suburb of Rome. The campus included residence hall accommodations, dining facilities, classrooms, and study rooms, as well as a library, computing lab, chapel, and common spaces. Instructors held courses both on and off campus. Instructors used historic, religious, and cultural landmarks as a backdrop to course instruction. Students had time to explore the city on their own, and many students used the weekend break at the end of the first week to visit other cities in Italy. In case studies, students need to exist in natural settings where "there is little control over behavior, organization, or events" (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007, p. 4). The data collection tools used allowed the authors to inquire about student interactions with all of the environments they encountered while abroad.

Students were enrolled in one of three graduate education courses. One course focused on cross-cultural leadership, another on K-12 instructional leadership, and the third on models of education abroad. Gender was not central to any of the courses, but it was included as a topic of discussion in the cross-cultural leadership course. Although the courses largely operated independently, instructors planned common outings to selected sites, such as the Roman Forum, the Coliseum, and the Jewish ghetto. All students participated in three pre-program orientations in the United States and in Italy, a welcome picnic, and a farewell dinner. The academic program director led the pre-departure orientation in the United States and one of the two arrival orientations in Rome. Campus student affairs staff led the second orientation held in Rome.

Students received logistical, safety, and limited cultural information at these orientations. During each week of classes, students attended courses that started early each morning on campus but then, using public transportation, moved beyond the campus. Students were in direct contact with Italian culture and the Roman citizens daily. Although curricula differed, all courses required small groups to design and conduct a teaching session that aided in the understanding of Italian culture and provided insight into the everyday life Romans.

Participants

Of the 44 graduate students enrolled across the three courses, 36 were eligible to participate in the research study; 12 volunteered to participate. Students came from all three courses. Although graduate students from universities across the United States enrolled in the program, the authors limited participation to students from one university due to its focus on in-depth explorations of social identity and justice issues across all graduate programs in its School of Education. Because these students live within the same metropolitan area, the authors assumed the societal norms around gender, to which they had most recently been exposed, would remain relatively consistent across participants.

Nine participants identified as cisgender women, and three identified as cisgender men. Two participants identified as Latina/o, four identified as African American/Black, and six identified as White. Ten participants identified as heterosexual, one as gay or lesbian, and one as bisexual. The average age of participants was 30.5 years. For 2 of the 12 participants, the education abroad program in Rome was their first experience traveling outside the United States. Among 10 participants who traveled abroad previously, seven did so through a study abroad program.

Data Collection Procedures

The authors employed multiple procedures for collecting data, including participant-researcher observation, focus group and individual interviews, and artifact elicitation. The research team consisted of six graduate students and one faculty member. Three student researchers participated in one of the Rome courses along with the faculty member who taught the course. These members engaged fully in participant observation.

Participant Observation. Each participant-observer researcher carried a notebook and took notes regarding gendered interactions, language, and behaviors of students and the people with whom they interacted. Observation notes allowed the researchers attending the trip to build context for those researchers who were not in Rome and to reflect on interactions between students and Roman culture (Baker, 2006). Participant observers were able to describe the presenters' language used during the orientations and to note differences in clothing and occupational role between Roman men and women.

Focus Groups. Because gender is a social construct, focus groups were a logical data collection tool, as data are "socially constructed within the interaction of the group" (Merriam, 2009, p. 94). The authors conducted two focus groups in early September 2013, approximately six-to-seven weeks following completion of the education abroad program. Three students participated in the first focus group and five in the second, with each session lasting approximately 90 minutes.

The focus groups began with questions exploring students' reasons for wanting to study abroad in Rome, their overall impression of the experience, and their interactions with and perceptions of Italian culture. The authors invited participants to prepare a written definition of gender prior to the focus group and provided the opportunity to share and expand on their definition during the focus group. The authors asked participants to identify and reflect on gender

norms or behavior they observed or experienced during the program and to share if and how those observations challenged and/or supported their understanding of gender. These reflections helped to frame the larger contexts that influenced students' understanding of gender.

Interviews. The authors conducted four individual semi-structured interviews in September 2013 with students who were unable to attend or did not feel comfortable attending a focus group. The interviews lasted 45–60 minutes. There were one or two interviewers in each interview. Through the interviews, the authors explored the topic of gender more in-depth. The authors used questions similar to those of the focus group as a launching point for conversation.

Artifact Elicitation. Participants brought an item from their experience in Rome to the focus group or interview that exemplified their understanding of or experience with gender in the Rome program. Harper (2002) noted, “photographs [in particular] may lead an individual to a new view of their [sic] social existence” (p. 21). The artifacts enhanced the discussions and elicited insight into participants' understandings of gender. The authors present some of the artifacts in this section; however, they asked students to use these artifacts to begin thinking about their understandings of gender. If students brought up their artifacts during the discussion as integral to their learning, it is noted in the discussion section. One student brought a parasol and mentioned that it made her feel “feminine” while in Rome and thought it was an item that other women in Rome might use; the parasol was an item this student would not use in the United States. A male student brought a rosary and mentioned how it reminded him of the patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church and how women are not allowed to hold leadership roles in the Church.

Trustworthiness. Multiple procedures strengthened trustworthiness, a process for ensuring congruence, consistency, and confidence in the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The authors transcribed all focus groups and interviews verbatim, and several statements representing participant voices (e.g., thick description) illuminated key findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They triangulated the focus group and interview data analyses, participant researcher observation, and artifact analyses (Lather, 2003). They presented preliminary data analyses at a regional student affairs conference and incorporated valuable feedback both from peers and education abroad practitioners into the study's conclusions and implications (Van Manen, 1997).

Data Analyses

The authors used a thematic coding rubric created by analyzing the observation notes. The initial coding rubric included four codes. Research team members then open-coded the transcripts to identify additional codes. Iterative coding methods ensured reliability of coding (Patton, 2002). The authors read the transcripts to identify major themes and discussed those themes as a team to remove any discrepancies. Codes were then created from those themes, and the transcripts were reread using these *a priori* codes. The research team then cross-compared the coded transcripts from the focus groups and interviews, and between participants across the three classes. The authors used observation notes to build context for those researchers not able to be in Rome. They also took photos of the artifacts students shared in the focus groups and interviews and detailed them in the transcripts.

Findings

Five major experiences influenced students' understanding of gender during their two weeks abroad. The experiences exist within the contexts of in-class (i.e., those related to the curriculum, or *selected environments*) and out-of-class experiences (i.e., those related to living on campus, or

imposed environments), with the two contexts blending at times (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The experiences challenged and helped students to broaden and/or solidify their understandings of gender. The following sections describe these findings in relation to the various experiences of participants during the short-term education abroad trip.

In-Class Experiences

The planned curriculum challenged, reaffirmed, and/or modified students' understandings of gender. Pedagogical opportunities included observation assignments, visits to selected Italian universities and historical sites, and planned discussions around gender and power. Each experience did not occur within each course equally. The authors are therefore clear about which course pedagogies provided the greatest evidence of effected gender understandings.

Observation Assignments. In the study abroad course and the leadership course, students completed a "sanctioned people watching" activity to observe their surroundings, including the people in the area and how they interacted with each other and the environment. One of these activities took place in a *piazza*, or plaza, by the Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps, major landmarks in Rome. The other observation took place inside St. Peter's Basilica. Both of these activities took place at the beginning of the two-week period to hone student observation and reflection skills while immersed in a new culture. During this time, students noticed gender-based patterns in different occupations. Men were more likely to be bus drivers, police, or restaurant wait staff and cooks. Women were more likely to staff cash registers or serve as hostesses. One student noted, "Something that I remember is that all the waiters were men. There was very rarely a time you'd see a woman waiting on a table." Another remembered, "seeing mostly women working at the campus. . . especially in the administrative roles. But they were also the majority of the people doing the cleaning."

Students also noticed that men were more physical with each other, often kissing each other on both cheeks, hugging each other to say hello or goodbye, or sharing a scooter seat. One female student mentioned that this behavior "defied what I considered gender norms." Another female student noted:

The whole thing was just really observing the culture and how they interacted, especially in terms of power and authority which seemed to be around patriarchal lines. . . We noticed a lot of things, like the guys seeming more emotive. . . waiters and the hosts were sharing the same water bottle which never happens in America, especially when it's all men.

Students rarely mentioned the sexuality of the men showing affection. Two of the participant-observer researchers reflected on their notes and found it hard to determine if men were friends or more intimately involved with each other. When asked if the students considered the sexuality of the men, they expressed that they were unable to tell the difference, particularly because of a perceived high-fashion culture. A student reflected, ". . . fashion culture is very amplified there. . . I was really struck by the way the men dress. Very put together. . . That's a very, very different expression of gender." Students believed that they could not tell the difference because many men dressed well, which differed from the students' U.S.-based perception that heterosexual men do not dress as well as gay men.

Site Visits to Italian Universities. One course focused on the intersection of education abroad program models and learning outcomes for U.S. students in Italy. As part of the curriculum, students visited universities, language schools, and third-party providers of education abroad across the city. Students met with campus administrators, faculty, and students at each site. Participant-

observer researchers noted that the site administrators were predominantly women. At one university, however, the Italian professor in charge of the education abroad programs was a man who aggressively minimized the statements made by mainly female undergraduate students. This experience reinforced Martha's understanding of Italy as a patriarchal society. Martha also noted that in her course, students discussed how U.S. women are more likely to study abroad than men, which may have some effect on how she perceived the relationship between this professor and the students. The visit to this university challenged Martha's understandings of gender because she did not experience this type of behavior as typical in Rome up to that point. Martha felt that it was:

weird... seeing how authoritative he was with the [female] students... he invited the students to speak, but they didn't introduce their names, we hardly found out anything about them, they weren't invited to and they didn't do it on their own. And they seemed to perk up a lot when he left.

Of particular interest to Rebecca was a panel of Italian "host moms" who hosted foreign students in their home for the duration of a study abroad program. Rebecca stated, "Rome women kind of take that similar role in the household of the... typical housewife notion... they're the ones, you know, putting the food on the table, cleaning, fitting that stereotype." The host mom culture was an example of confirming patriarchal gender roles for this student. She felt that women held similar expected roles in the United States as they did in Rome.

Historical Site Visits. Students in all classes visited the Roman Forum, the Coliseum, and the Jewish ghetto as part of the formal curriculum. These landmarks were places where students could learn about historical sites but also contextualize ancient beliefs as they relate to modern day understandings of gender. The visit to the Roman Forum in particular triggered discussion around gender. The story of the Vestal Virgins, priestesses held in the highest regard in Rome but also held in bondage and required to be chaste for 30 years, emerged as a lesson students labeled as gendered.

A student who is a K-12 administrator noted that learning about the Vestal Virgins helped her to realize how students learned about Roman culture in the past and related it to how U.S. culture is taught through schools. This experience modified the way she looked at gender. After this experience, she believed that gender was not a person's singular identity but rather part of an intersectional identity that interacted with racial and cultural identity. This student commented:

The way that things were then, the fact that Romans learned how to be Romans, a lot of Americans come through American schools to learn how to be Americans. And then your race and your culture, this, that, and the other don't matter as much because now you are here to be an American. I think that that opened my eyes... It would be nice to be able to incorporate cultures into my classroom... So just like a way to like, I don't know, think about "this is what happens." But is that what we are doing in our classroom?

She noted teaching in the United States is difficult because there are more gender identities to be cognizant of than only men and women. She wants to be understanding of multiple identities and to integrate culture into her classroom.

Planned Discussions on Gender and Power. Students mentioned how planned discussions around gender and power helped them to understand gender. The Vestal Virgins served a self-contradictory role in ancient Rome for being both heralded as royal priestesses while also being held in chaste bondage for 30 years. Other planned discussions occurred through check-ins of the students' experiences and the observation assignments described previously.

One student from the cross-cultural leadership course noted discussions around gender and power infused her curriculum. She recalled exploring

the ways power and authority manifest in gender. So I think it definitely played a part in just observing culture and observing others and the way that they... who has the power in a society, and that's why I leaned toward saying Italy is more of a patriarchal society because it was very clear that when I was walking the streets alone, their view was that I had no power to make purchases if I was alone. I had no power to eat in a restaurant by myself or buy anything... So I became a lot more conscious to the power and authority dynamics that go along with gender.

This student's course allowed her to observe Roman culture through an additional lens that she might not have if faculty had not asked her to do so as part of the curriculum. This student later recollected how she spent four days taking her spouse around Italy after the education abroad program. She recounted:

By myself no street vendors bothered me... when I walked by restaurants no one tried to get me to sit down. Basically, they didn't even acknowledge that I was there. And then, with the group and when I was with my husband... all of a sudden I basically took shape in the society. So as a single, or a loathed woman, I pretty much didn't exist, which was fascinating to me.

Earlier in her trip, a man told her that if she were Italian, she would never be able to travel without her husband. When she was with her husband, she received more attention from vendors and restaurateurs, which ultimately confirmed for her that Italy was a patriarchal society.

Out-of-Class Experiences

One set of out-of-class experiences, the three orientations described earlier, revealed the way graduate students' understandings of gender were challenged and modified.

Orientations. All students attended at least two of the three orientations. Students who could not attend the pre-departure orientation obtained the information from a faculty member prior to departure and to review a video of the orientation online.

Participant-observer researchers took notes during these orientations and recognized safety messages were often targeted to women. During the focus group discussion, Joanne disagreed, as she felt that "cautions were extended" toward all students regardless of sex or gender. Joanne works at a sexual assault survivor hotline in the United States and noted that the perpetrator is always assumed to be a "he" and the survivor a "she," though the story is often more complicated. A deviation from the traditional U.S. script of man-on-woman assault may have triggered a modified understanding of gender for Joanne. She noted that:

One of our orientations was about the safety orientation and I felt that the cautions were extended, regardless of gender. I think that as a female identified person, I feel like I'm the target of people's warnings or the sole target and I felt that the people at [the Rome campus] were speaking to everyone around socializing and gender and sexual violence so I thought that was interesting.

Men and women received reminders about appropriate attire while in Rome. For men, shorts that covered the knees and shirts with sleeves were appropriate when in religious spaces. For women, shoulders and knees had to be covered in certain churches and in the synagogue. One student remembered, "there was definitely an emphasis on the women... But there were plenty of men that were wearing some kind of tank top but they were fine to go through." Women were more likely to comment about the attire reminders. Women felt that the enforcement of the attire policy was generally stricter for them. A participant-observer researcher reinforced this

understanding and noted that the men who “policed” clothing appeared more rigid and restrictive toward women than to men.

Blurred Lines

One student mentioned that the “lines were very blurred” on her gendered experiences in Rome, meaning discussions around gender would sometimes start in class and “bleed” into out-of-class conversations at various sites, at dinner, or in a residence hall room. Most other students shared this sentiment as well. Much of this continuous learning was accredited to each professor’s ability to build community within his course. Students spent much time together during the day and then returned to a residence hall where they shared a room with another student. One student noted, “I think that is what is unique about this type of program: Any space becomes a formal space. Conversations get deep really fast.” This arrangement provided multiple opportunities for students to revisit conversations.

Limitations

The study’s findings were limited because only degree-seeking graduate students from a single U.S. university participated. The authors chose to conduct interviews in addition to focus groups to increase opportunities for participation. The authors recorded similar questions and conversations during both focus groups and interviews. A third limitation was that four researchers, three students and one professor, were also participants in the same education abroad course. Although these four participant-observer researchers could not fully engage with and observe all three classes, multiple cross-course, co-curricular activities and frequent informal engagements over meals allowed researchers to gain valuable insights into both class-based and out-of-class discussions that occurred in the other two courses. The two-week program examined in this study is of slightly shorter duration than found in previous studies (Jessup-Anger, 2008; Malewski & Phillion, 2009). Given the proliferation of short-term education abroad experiences in recent years (Institute for International Education, 2014), the research team thought it important to examine a program that is representative of the current trend in education abroad programs. Lastly, 10 of 12 participants had traveled internationally previously, three for education abroad and seven for personal reasons. Previous travel may have affected participants’ understandings of gender during the program. To address the limitations, the authors triangulated findings by using multiple methods.

Discussion

This study illustrates that a different cultural context, coupled with intentional curricular and co-curricular interventions, can provide or expound upon students’ gendered lenses (Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Talburt & Stewart, 1999). Their imposed environment of Rome and the constructed environment of their course influenced students most. Students first experienced dissonance in their understandings of gender during orientation sessions when told that they were to dress in a particular way. For instance, one student felt “permission” to be more feminine in Rome and therefore carried a parasol around each day, while another wore a dress for the first time because of the normalized nature of wearing dresses in Italian culture. According to Bussey and Bandura (1999), students learned gendered behaviors in Rome through modeled behaviors and direct tuition or being told what to wear. Although women felt pressured to dress a particular way more often than men, they chose not to dress more informally when the opportunity presented

itself; students muted their self-regulatory capacities and deferred to expected norms set forth by the campus administrators and Roman culture broadly.

Overbearing male administrators, male occupational roles, and the overwhelming Catholic presence in Rome reinforced their experiences with patriarchal understandings of gender. These experiences reinforce the need to supplement in-class activities with out-of-class engagements (Henthorne et al., 2001). These engagements act as symbols and observational models for students to learn about gender. By interacting with a culture that students experienced as both similar and different from their conceptions of U.S. gender and patriarchy, the students were able to deepen their understandings and definitions of gender identity and norms (DeLoach et al., 2003; Donnelly-Smith, 2009). The fact that Italy's culture differs from the United States around issues of gender heightened students' ability to identify moments of learning (Gannon, 2001).

Living and learning together contributed to students' understandings of gender. This blending of experiences allowed students to continue class discussions outside of the classroom (Malewski & Phillion, 2009). Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that in-class contexts are important to learning but that out-of-class contexts can also significantly affect student learning. These moments facilitated the deconstruction and reconstruction of students' understandings of gender (Jones et al., 2012).

Implications

The findings from this study provide two main implications for faculty and education abroad practitioners. Both implications have particular relevance for education abroad trips through student affairs preparation programs and can deepen and contextualize understandings of student development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) and multicultural competence further (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). First, practitioners and faculty planning education abroad programs can aim to create intentional learning opportunities, both curricular and co-curricular. In this study, students who observed and discussed their experiences around gender as part of a formal class assignment appeared to experience change in their understandings of gender (Jessup-Anger, 2008). Language use and detailed reflection about Italian gender norms provided evidence for this suggestion. The authors' findings indicate further that making expectations clear that students view their experiences through social identity lenses is critical; as students explore a host country, they should attempt to better understand how different genders may experience the environment. One way students can better understand gender is to engage with residents in the community and have discussions about gender, gender norms, gendered language, and gender roles (Jessup-Anger, 2008). These discussions can occur through working with community-based organizations that do gender-based work, such as *Differenza Donna* (n.d.) in Rome, to contextualize the learning further (Jones et al., 2012). Instructors can be intentional in how they talk about gender (such as during orientations), who they invite to speak to their classes, and in the types of readings they assign to students. Discussions related to gender constructs may continue through service projects, discussion groups, or research after returning to the home country (Jones et al., 2012; Malewski & Phillion, 2009).

Lastly, instructors can make use of serendipitous events (Jessup-Anger, 2008; Ogden, 2006). Ogden (2006) stated, "unless a student is guided toward pursuing a more accurate interpretation of his [sic] observations and experiences, he [sic] may never learn or consider an alternate point of view" (p. 90). Site visits provided instructors with opportunities to facilitate discussion around gender. As students experience cognitive dissonance, faculty members can engage with them

around this learning. Engagement with gender at site visits occurred explicitly in only one of the three courses. Other instructors could have used the site visits to engage students around topics related to the curricula and other important constructs related to gender, such as race or class (Malewski & Phillion, 2009). Site visits where students noted the gendered remarks or behaviors made by presenters may have provided for additional discussion around the topic of gender (Jessup-Anger, 2008). Instructors can attempt to use the spontaneity of a moment's opportunity to explore pertinent issues related to gender. The use of spontaneous learning exercises necessitates that faculty have the ability to apply (intersectional) gender analysis and to facilitate meaningful dialogue around potentially personal or difficult topics.

Conclusion

In this study, the authors explored how graduate students understand gender as a result of interacting with another culture during a short-term study abroad program. Students' stories revealed their understandings of gender were challenged, refined, and/or confirmed while engaging with the Roman culture, often resulting from intentional learning structures and unplanned moments within and outside of the program. These findings expand the limited scholarship, particularly as it relates to graduate students, on how education abroad can contribute to developing students' understanding of socially constructed identities such as gender. For administrators and educators, this study provides context into how they might use short-term study abroad programs as forums to facilitate student learning. Administrators and educators can apply the findings from this study to myriad educational milieus and topics (e.g., race, sexual orientation). Employing a pedagogical practice that creates a structured environment addressing specific topics through curriculum and capitalizing on unplanned topics illustrates a possible method to encourage student learning. Future research that includes additional graduate programs and study sites could contribute further to the growing knowledge of how short-term study abroad experiences can facilitate an understanding of gender and other social constructs.

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