

Critical Experiences Abroad: The Development of Self-Authorship in Study Abroad

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents who inspired my desire to learn and explore. Had you not pushed and supported many of my earlier decisions, I wouldn't have experienced many of the wonderful adventures that have led me to this.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to understand how study abroad students identify and make sense of critical experiences they encounter during a study abroad experience. The study specifically sought to better understand how these experiences contribute to the development of self-authorship. Interviews were conducted with students to see how or if these critical experiences contributed to a shift or change in their understanding and values. Students who studied abroad in Australia, Italy, and Kenya were interviewed approximately 4 – 8 weeks after their study abroad programs ended, and participants were asked to identify and reflect upon situations or experiences that took place during their time abroad. The overall aim in this study was to better understand the situations that contribute to learning and development outcomes through a study abroad experience.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In the past several years, the number of U.S. American students studying abroad has increased dramatically – 150% in the past decade alone (Institute for International Education, 2009). No longer an experience for only humanities students, study abroad programs provide diverse academic experiences for students across all disciplines. In addition to academic diversity, these programs have evolved from the traditional junior year abroad to programs that vary in academic leadership, experiential opportunities (involving internships and research, for example), program duration, and geographic location.

Study abroad continues to gain prominence in higher education and some administrations set specific goals to increase the number of students who study abroad. Some colleges have also established study abroad as a graduation requirement for their student body. In addition, parents are much more encouraging and supportive of their children participating in such experiences and first-year students are now entering college with study abroad already on their minds (Lewin, 2009).

Students who participate in study abroad experiences are often introduced to new and diverse beliefs, ideas, and practices within the environment of their program. Experiencing such differences can contribute to learning and development outcomes beyond knowledge and language acquisition. Similar outcomes are becoming an increasingly important factor in the accountability of higher education (e.g. Gurin, 1999; Meszaros, 2007) and society expects graduates who are effective citizens, critical thinkers, mature decision-makers, appreciative of difference, and who can develop

interdependent relationships with others (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Global competitiveness is one factor contributing to the increased focus on such outcomes (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Lewin, 2009; Meszaros, 2007). Also influencing this focus is the importance of preparing graduates for diverse societies and work environments in the United States. Study abroad experiences can facilitate the development of these outcomes.

Students often begin their college experiences having “learned how to follow formulas for success, lacking exposure to diverse perspectives, and unclear about their own beliefs, identities, and values” (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 69). In order for graduates to develop the desired outcomes through higher education, it is important for students to develop towards self-authorship, or the internal capacity to define one’s belief system, identity, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1982). Self-authorship provides a holistic approach for understanding how students develop and requires complex ways of creating meaning in one’s life (Kegan, 1994). Self-authorship is connected through the dimensions of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development.

Study abroad research has traditionally focused on the development of second language acquisition and the development of intercultural competency (Hoff, 2008; Vande Berg, Balkcum, Scheid, & Whalen, 2004). As accountability for student learning and development in higher education continues to increase, it is necessary for study abroad administrators and educators to understand and utilize holistic student development frameworks, like self-authorship, to create and facilitate experiences that promote student development and learning in diverse and unfamiliar environments.

## **Purpose, Rationale, and Research Questions**

The increased focus on learning and development outcomes in higher education and the increased number of students who are studying abroad illustrate the need for study abroad administrators and educators to understand and utilize holistic learning and development theories. Using holistic theories like self-authorship can provide an increased understanding of how study abroad students change or develop as a result of their experience and how such outcomes may be better facilitated through curriculum or program structure and support.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of students who studied abroad in Australia, Italy, and Kenya during the fall semester of 2010, to discover what situations the participants experienced abroad and how those contributed to their personal growth and development of epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills within the framework of self-authorship. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do study abroad students identify and make sense of critical experiences during their time abroad?
2. How do those experiences contribute to the students' development of self-authorship?

In order to provide holistic learning environments for study abroad students, it is important for administrators and educators to understand what students identify as critical and influential to their learning experiences and personal growth. This increased understanding can help improve study abroad experiences by creating environments for students that promote holistic student development or self-authorship.

## **Methodology**

To discover the factors that influence and contribute to the development of meaning making during a study abroad experience, unstructured interviews were conducted with seven study abroad students approximately four to eight weeks after their return to the United States. The study was guided by questions that addressed moments of reflected autonomy, important decision-making situations, relationship experiences, identity challenges, and problem solving situations the students encountered abroad; how they identified those moments; and how they described critical experiences from their time abroad. The study sought to find themes in the types of experiences students developed while abroad and how these contributed to the development of self-authorship.

The students' ability to identify critical experiences and construct meaning from their experiences abroad served as the focal point of this study. Additionally, personal characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences of the participants were also examined to ascertain their contribution to participants' ability to construct meaning from experiences abroad.

## **Assumptions and Biases**

It was my assumption in the beginning of this study that the participants would identify moments from their time abroad that were influential to their personal development. I assumed there would be programmatic factors, such as geographic location, housing arrangements, or curricular focus that were influential to how students developed epistemologically, interpersonally, and intrapersonally. I was interested in learning which experiences and situations students acknowledged and how they reflected upon their own growth and transformation as a result of their study abroad experience.

The study is limited as participants were only given one opportunity for this type of reflection. The participants acknowledged that they were still in the process of understanding their experiences and the impact they had on their personal growth and development. The outcomes and reflections of a study abroad experience can often change depending on the amount of time a participant has to reflect on their experience and the amount of time they have to readjust to their home culture. However, the themes generated through this research are still useful for study abroad educators and administrators in better understanding the qualitative information provided through the students' reflections.

### **Outline**

Following this introduction the second chapter will review literature related to the current context of study abroad, student learning and development outcomes, and self-authorship. The research methodology will be explained in detail in the third chapter. The fourth chapter will discuss the research findings. The fifth chapter will close with conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

This study will address issues of student development and learning in the context of a study abroad experience using the framework of self-authorship development. The following definitions will provide a general understanding of these concepts within the framework of a study abroad experience.

**Critical Experiences:** Experiences that challenge one's way of knowing and one's conception of self, as derived from Pizzolato's definition of a provocative moment (2003).

**Learning outcomes:** Knowledge and skills a student should possess and demonstrate upon completion of an educational experience.

**Meaning making:** The interpretation of experiences to create understanding

**Self-authorship:** The internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations (Baxter Magolda, 2008)

**Study abroad:** Education in another country that results in progress towards an academic degree at a student's home institution (Forum for Education Abroad, 2011)

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Current Context of Study Abroad in the United States

The experience of study abroad is becoming increasingly prevalent in undergraduate higher education. In the past two decades the number of U.S. students studying abroad has increased by 400%. While fewer than 50,000 students studied abroad in the 1985 – 1986 academic year, the number of students studying abroad for academic credit increased to 260,327 in the 2008 – 2009 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2010).

In 2005, the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (Lincoln Commission) published the groundbreaking policy recommendation, *Global Competence & National Needs: One Million Americans Studying Abroad*. In the report, the Lincoln Commission proposed a national vision for the United States to send more than one million higher education students abroad by the year 2017. Highlighting the importance of promoting and democratizing undergraduate study abroad, the commission stated the experience of study abroad should be a “norm and not an exception among college students. Increasing these experiences will position and prepare future generations of Americans for success” (Lincoln Commission, 2005, p. v). In addition to preparing Americans for success in the world, the Lincoln Commission also emphasized the need for global competence among college graduates stating, “What nations don’t know can hurt them. The stakes involved in study abroad are that simple, that straightforward, and that important. For their own future and that of the nation,

college graduates today must be internationally competent” (Lincoln Commission, 2005, p. ii).

Study abroad programs have expanded beyond the traditional junior year abroad and these programmatic adaptations have met the needs of an increased and ever-changing student population. Gilroy (2006) pointed out that short-term study abroad programs – programs lasting eight weeks or less – have become the most popular program experience, enrolling the majority (about 56%) of study abroad students. These concentrated programs have played an important role in increasing the popularity of study abroad, offering international opportunities to students who might otherwise not have been able to participate in a study abroad program. In addition, many study abroad programs now integrate internships, research, and other experiential opportunities that allow students to maximize their academic experience while abroad. Increased variety in program duration, and academic variety, contributes to the increased types of students who are studying abroad.

As the number of study abroad students continues to grow, it is important for study abroad administrators and educators to be aware of the increased attention being placed on student learning and development outcomes in higher education. Study abroad experiences often create inspiring and challenging environments for students. These conditions promote student learning and development and prepare students for the challenges they may face in diverse societies after graduation.

### **Learning and Development Outcomes in Higher Education and Study Abroad**

Student affairs and academic organizations promote a holistic approach to 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education in order to better prepare students to face major societal

challenges. In their 1994 report, the American College and Personnel Association (ACPA) acknowledged this societal transformation. Stressing the importance of creating motivating conditions that inspire students, the report called for higher education to focus on creating engaging environments that encourage students to commit time and energy to their educational activities.

The purpose of the ACPA report was to stress the necessary characteristics a college graduate should have upon completion of their degree. These characteristics are identified as holistic characteristics, which refer to a student's development of "character, personal and social responsibility, and moral and ethical development" (Braskamp, Elliot, Rybalkina, Shea, & Songco, 2010, p. 2). The ACPA report identified these characteristics as:

(a) complex cognitive skills such as reflection and critical thinking; (b) an ability to apply knowledge to practical problems encountered in one's vocation, family, or other areas of life; an understanding and appreciation of human differences; (c) practical competence skills (e.g., decision making, conflict resolution); and (d) a coherent integrated sense of identity, self-esteem, confidence, integrity, aesthetic sensibilities, and civic responsibility (ACPA, 1996).

It is important for study abroad professionals to recognize these characteristics and seek to develop them in their students. With increased attention being placed on international experiences, study abroad has developed beyond an experience for only privileged students. And while the experience is becoming more familiar for students from various academic backgrounds, social classes, and ethnicities (Cressey, 2011), continued focus is needed to increase the number of students from diverse backgrounds who participate. Study abroad participation continues to gain support on college

campuses as institutions commit to preparing students for diverse societies and helping them develop complex cognitive skills.

Intercultural development or learning through exposure to another (Savicki, Adams, Wilde, & Binder, 2008), has been widely researched in the field of study abroad and continues to be a focal point in measuring what students learn from their international experiences (e.g. Deardorff, 2008; Otten, 2003; Savicki et al., 2008). Deardorff defined intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (2008, p. 33). Numerous studies have examined the variances of intercultural competency development as a result of geographic location, language study, and program structure. However, the frequency of language acquisition and intercultural competence in study abroad research has been acknowledged and the need for a shift has been observed in assessing other important outcomes of study abroad (Engle & Engle, 2003; Savicki, 2008).

The Georgetown Consortium Project (Vande Berg, M., Conner-Linton, J., Paige, R.M. (2009); Vande Berg, Balkcum, Scheid, & Whalen, 2004) is an example of a recent study designed to measure the outcomes of study abroad. The study sought to discover what types of international experiences foster knowledge acquisition and skill development (Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2004). The primary goal for the study was to use the findings to improve study abroad programming at U.S. institutions (Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2004). Researchers of the study focused on the fundamental identification of what students are learning abroad and on the development of language acquisition, intercultural sensitivity, and knowledge/academic

acquisition. The researchers expected these to be the main areas faculty engaged with through study abroad (Vande Berg et al., 2004). The study found that study abroad participants progressed further in language acquisition and intercultural competency development than a control group of students on U.S. campuses. In addition, they found intervention strategies – intercultural learning activities during pre-departure orientations and cultural mentors while abroad – were influential to students' learning.

Learning and development outcomes beyond intercultural competency and language acquisition have infrequently been the focus in study abroad research. As mentioned previously, knowledge, skill, and personal development have been common outcomes researched in study abroad (Fry, G., Paige, R.M., Jon, J., Dillow, J., Nam, K. (2009); Sutton, Miller, & Rubin, 2007). Yet, knowledge and skill development are often measured in terms of language learning and personal development are often measured as cognitive development. Personal development has often been generalized to mean intercultural competency development (Deardorff, 2008; Sutton et al., 2007).

As study abroad participation continues to increase and as the call for accountability of learning and development increases in higher education, it is important for study abroad professionals to utilize additional student development theories to discover what and how students learn from their experiences abroad. Several college student development theories have attributed the experience of study abroad to the development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001) and intellectual development, and the experience has been identified as a high impact learning experience (See Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Yet, traditional research on study abroad learning and development outcomes has focused primarily on language acquisition and the

development of intercultural competency (Deardoff, 2008; Hoff, 2008; Vande Berg, et al., 2004). In addition, instruments like the *Intercultural Development Inventory* (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) have been created to measure these developments. While the development of intercultural competency integrates components of identity and intellectual development, it is important that outcomes beyond intercultural competency and language acquisition are identified in the field of study abroad and its scholarship.

As accountability continues to increase in higher education, it is important for study abroad practitioners and educators to understand student development methods and theories that are being used on college campuses. Understanding college student development in the context of study abroad can create what Weinberg calls the “high road study abroad program”; programs that are designed to engage students along a genuine cultural and linguistic experience (Weinberg, 2007). If created and facilitated with holistic learning and development outcomes in mind, study abroad programs can be experiences that promote the development of self-authorship in students.

### **Self-Authorship**

The theory of self-authorship provides higher education and study abroad educators and administrators with a holistic framework to promote and measure students’ developmental outcomes. The holistic framework of self-authorship focuses not only on knowledge acquisition, but also on personal development skills like interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. This section will introduce the concept of self-authorship and its development through Robert Kegan’s and Marcia Baxter Magolda’s scholarship and research.

### **Kegan's Orders of Consciousness.**

In his 1982 work, *The Evolving Self*, psychologist Robert Kegan identified the activity of meaning making as “a physical activity, a social activity, and a survival activity” (1982, p. 19). Meaning, as the primary human motion, cannot be separated from one's body, from social experiences, or from one's survival (Kegan, 1982). Incorporating theories of intellectual, identity, and moral development, Kegan's orders of consciousness provide an outline for the development of meaning making and the evolution of consciousness that begins during childhood and continues through adulthood.

Crucial to understanding Kegan's theory is realizing the subject – object relationship deeply rooted in one's mental organization. This relationship can be simply understood as: we *have* object; we *are* subject (original italics, Kegan, 1994). Kegan provides the following definitions:

“Object” refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon.  
“Subject” refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in. (1994, p. 32).

An example of this relationship will be illustrated in Chapter 4 with Ann. Ann is a college student who, after returning from a semester abroad in Sydney, Australia, gained new independence from her parents and now advocates forcefully for her own needs and desires. What was once *subject* for Ann has become *object*; she no longer completely identifies with, or is embedded in, the values and beliefs of her parents.

Kegan's theory refers to a person's meaning-constructive capacities and refers to the “selective, interpretive, executive, construing capacities that psychologists have

historically associated with the ‘self’” (1994, p. 29). His five “orders of consciousness” (see table 1) are fundamental to how an individual constructs and organizes meaning. These orders affect thinking, feeling, and relating and each order has “*intrapersonal* (self-concept) and *interpersonal* relationship dimensions” (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 67).

|   | <b>Subject</b>  | <b>Object</b>                                    | <b>Focus</b>                     | <b>Thinking</b>            |
|---|---|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>First Order</b><br>(birth to age 7 or 8)                               | <b>Fantasy, impulse, perception</b>                                   | Movement & sensation                             | Particulars                      | Concrete                   |
| <b>Second Order</b><br>(late childhood to adolescence or early adulthood) | Self-concept, needs, preferences                                      | <b>Fantasy, impulse, perception</b>              | Structures, Categories           | Relating concrete concepts |
| <b>Third Order</b><br>(adolescence to early adulthood)                    | <b>Abstractions, mutuality, subjectivity</b>                          | Self-concept, needs, preferences                 | Abstract thinking, relationships | Abstract                   |
| <b>Fourth Order</b><br>(late adolescence to adulthood)                    | Ideology, multiple roles, <b>self-authorship</b>                      | <b>Abstraction, mutuality, subjectivity</b>      | Constructing, self-authoring     | Relating abstract concepts |
| <b>Fifth Order</b><br>(40’s to death)                                     | Oppositeness, interpenetration of self and others, interindividuation | Ideology, multiple roles, <b>self-authorship</b> | Multipleness                     | Systems                    |

Table 1 Kegan’s Orders of Consciousness  
(Love, Guthrie, 1999, p. 68)

Kegan’s orders indicate independent levels rather than stages (Love & Guthrie, 1999) and three underlying assumptions are important to understand these orders. First, Kegan’s orders not only refer to how an individual thinks but also to how an individual constructs her or his experience. In addition, Kegan’s orders focus more on how one organizes thoughts, feelings, and social relations rather than the content of one’s thoughts, feelings, and social relations (Love & Guthrie, 1999). And finally, each order is represented by a different subject – object relationship.

The most powerful transitions for traditionally college-aged students occur from the second to the third order and the third to the fourth order. The second to the third order transition can likely take place when a student enters college and represents the beginning stages of abstract thinking (Kegan, 1994; Love & Guthrie, 1999). Kegan

identified the third to fourth order transition as the primary time for transforming into adulthood (Love & Guthrie, 1999). The transition to the fourth order begins the process of attaining self-authorship or the ability to write one's own life.

Kegan laid the foundation for self-authorship by articulating the new internal identity as a “*self-authorship* that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states. It is no longer *authored by* them, it *authors them* and thereby achieves a personal authority” (Kegan, 1994, p. 185). The third order of consciousness highlights an individual's new ability to construct generalizations across abstractions and when one constructs values, orders, and beliefs. Kegan identifies the transition to the fourth order as the transformation of consciousness adulthood (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 71). In the fourth order, self-authorship occurs and individuals are able to step outside of their values to form a cross-categorical set of values that regulate their behavior (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

### **Baxter Magolda's Research on Self-Authorship.**

Expanding from Kegan's fourth order of consciousness is Baxter Magolda's (2001) theoretical framework of self-authorship. The objectives to develop an internal identity were identified in a 21-year qualitative study, which followed participants through their college experience and into their adult lives. The first phase of the study was created to better understand the learning and intellectual development that occurred during college. Recognizing the narrow focus, Baxter Magolda proceeded with the post-college phase, which incorporated the participants' sense of identity and relationships

with others (Baxter Magolda, 2004). These interviews resulted in a more holistic representation of the development of self-authorship.

Self-authorship is a developmental journey comprised of four phases: *Following Formulas*, *The Crossroads*, *Becoming the Author of One's Life*, and *Internal Foundations*. Within these phases, the dimensions of epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development are identified and addressed through the following questions:

- (a) How do I know? (Epistemological Development)
  - (b) Who am I? (Intrapersonal Development)
  - (c) What relationships do I want with others? (Interpersonal Development)
- (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p.40).

The capacity for an individual to construct her or his own meaning has emerged as the developmental capacity that can help individuals face diverse challenges in their adult life (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Baxter Magolda's longitudinal study supports this by sharing the necessity for complex epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. This complex development is necessary for adults to construct their own belief system, to establish a solid sense of identity, and to develop trustworthy relationships with people from diverse backgrounds (Baxter Magolda, 2001). The developmental journey of self-authorship is transitional and individuals fluidly move through the phases as they are presented with challenges that encourage internal meaning making (Baxter Magolda, 2008). By using a holistic perspective, self-authorship integrates numerous concepts related to student learning and student development. Promoting the development of the whole<sup>1</sup> student requires one to look at the intersections

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<sup>1</sup> Whole student is defined as the intellectual, interpersonal, and intrapersonal traits of an individual.

of learning and development of an individual. These intersections illustrate the complexity of self-authorship and emphasize the cyclical nature of the development that occurs in an individual. (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Table 2 illustrates the four phases and the three dimensions of self-authorship and demonstrates how “self-authorship of identity, relationships, and knowledge are necessary for mature adult decision making, interdependent relationships, and effective citizenship” (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 72).

|   | <b>Following Formulas</b>                  | <b>Crossroads</b>   | <b>Becoming the Author of One’s Life</b>  | <b>Internal Foundation</b>                  |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Epistemological Dimension:<br/>How do I know?</b>                          | Believing authority’s plan; how “you” know | Question plans; see need for own vision   | Choose own beliefs; how “I” know in context of external knowledge of claims     | Grounded in internal belief system          |
| <b>Intrapersonal Dimension:<br/>Who am I?</b>                                 | Define self through external others        | Realize dilemma of external definition; see need for internal identity                    | Choose own values, identity in context of external forces                       | Grounded in internal coherent sense of self |
| <b>Interpersonal Dimension:<br/>What relationships do I want with others?</b> | Act in relationships to acquire approval   | Realized dilemma of focusing on external approval; see need to bring self to relationship | Act in relationships to be true to self, mutually negotiating how needs are met | Grounded in mutuality                       |

Table 2 Baxter Magolda’s Self-Authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 40)

Students may be in various phases when they enter and continue through college. Being exposed to and integrated into new environments, whether on their college campuses or in a different country on a study abroad program, may facilitate young adults’ development into *The Crossroads*. In addition to experiencing new environments, developing new relationships and acquiring new skills and knowledge are also factors that may influence *The Crossroads* dimension. *The Crossroads* is an important catalyst in the development of self-authorship because it is when one first begins to seek their own defined beliefs, goals, values, and ideas and “might integrate internal and external perspectives and expectations” (Pizzolato, 2005, p. 625). Baxter Magolda described *The Crossroads* as a time when one realizes that “external sources of belief and definition are

insufficient for happiness” (2001, p. 93) and becomes aware of the necessity for internal sources and belief.

An example of *The Crossroads* can be seen with Will in Chapter 4. Will has been focused on becoming a veterinarian since he was a child. Until his time in Sydney, Will was following authority’s (his parents and advisers, for example) one path to reach his goal. It was in Sydney that he realized there were other paths he could follow to attain the same outcome, and he has since changed his major to broaden and support his own interests while continuing his effort to attend vet school.

### **Pizzolato’s Research on Provocative Moments in the Development of Self-Authorship.**

Study abroad students are engaged in new environments and are challenged with new relationships and knowledge during their time abroad. For many students, simply being away from their regular relationships and comfortable surroundings can provoke moments of dissonance. Pizzolato (2003) suggested that *The Crossroads* may be a compilation of experiences that result in a provocative moment. She defines a provocative moment as one represented by an experience or situation that results from a moment of dissonance on one’s ways of knowing. Pizzolato (2005) expresses the need for further investigation into *The Crossroads* and the provocative moment. Her research illustrated the importance of understanding the various components that can lead to a provocative moment, which can contribute to students’ development of self-authorship. Because my research sought to ascertain what elements from their experiences abroad contributed to self-authorship development, interview questions were constructed to elicit responses that allow for a better understanding of what kind of provocative moments

students were experiencing abroad. The terminology was changed for this study and the term “critical experiences” was used in place of provocative moments in order to ensure the participants’ understanding of interview questions.

In order to assess self-authorship, one must look at the three dimensions that comprise the theoretical framework. The three dimensions of epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development can be investigated independently of one another through existing measures (Pizzolato, 2007). However, Pizzolato argued that investigating development with these existing measures would not holistically represent the nature of self-authorship. The Self-Authorship Survey, the Experience Survey, and Pizzolato’s study of the provocative moment were all examined for the development of this study’s research questions as well as the interview protocol.

The Self-Authorship Survey (SAS) was created by deconstructing the three dimensions of self-authorship into skill sets, which include problem-solving skills, relationships with authorities, volitional competence, and autonomy (Pizzolato, 2007). Through theoretical analysis and discussions with scholars, the factor analysis of the items were determined as: “Capacity for Autonomous Action, Problem Solving Orientation, Perceptions of Volitional Competence, and Self-Regulation in Challenging Situations” (p. 34).

In addition to the SAS, the Experience Survey (ES) was developed to illustrate how participants constructed knowledge and decisions. The survey asked participants to write narratives about important decisions they had made. This method allowed students to choose an experience they identified as important as well as one that required them to

make a decision where they were not the actor but they were affected by the actions of others (Pizzolato, 2007).

Pizzolato (2005) investigated provocative moments, moments of distress or disequilibrium, during *The Crossroads* phase of self-authorship. Her research aimed to identify student and situational characteristics that were associated with provocation. Because her study did not include pre- or post- assessment of self-authorship, her examination focused on the characteristics and processing styles associated with provocation rather than the development of self-authorship among her participants.

Assessing critical incidents and measuring the development of self-authorship is necessary in the increasingly accountable environment of higher education. Personal development has anecdotally been known to be an outcome of study abroad experiences, but examining the dimensions of personal development at a deeper level, within a holistic theoretical framework, is critical if the value of study abroad programs as significant educational experiences is to be fully understood.

## **Conclusion**

Baxter Magolda and Pizzolato's research were influential in the development of this research. I sought to better understand the influence study abroad experiences had on personal development, especially within the holistic framework of self-authorship. Pizzolato's research on provocative moments was especially influential in trying to determine what factors or situations students identified as critical during their study abroad experiences. The following section will introduce the methodology used in this study and will illustrate how the concept of self-authorship can be influential to better

understand the experiences and learning and development outcomes of students who study abroad.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Using a framework like self-authorship can provide study abroad and higher education administrators and educators with a holistic framework in identifying the growth and transformation that can occur from study abroad. In this study I utilized the model of self-authorship development proposed by Baxter Magolda (2001) in the context of study abroad experiences through the analysis of student narratives. Patterns and themes were identified from the interview transcriptions and were comparatively analyzed with codes and themes established in previous research (Pizzolato, 2005) and in pre-existing measurement tools such as the Self-Authorship Survey (SAS) and the Experience Survey (ES) (Pizzolato, 2005).

The study was guided by questions that addressed moments of reflected autonomy, important decision making situations, relationship experiences, identity challenges, and problem solving experiences the students encountered abroad. The study attempted to understand how participants identified those moments and how they described critical incidents from their time abroad. The analysis of the students' reflections sought to find themes that addressed change in how the students understood and valued certain aspects of their experience abroad.

#### **Research Questions**

To discover the factors that influenced and contributed to the development of meaning making in a study abroad program, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do study abroad students identify and make sense of critical experiences they experienced during their time abroad?
2. How do those critical experiences contribute to the students' development of self-authorship?

### **Qualitative Methodology**

A qualitative approach was used to examine the experiences of study abroad students. Creswell (2010) defines qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). A qualitative design was appropriate for this study because the research sought to explore and understand how the participants reflected upon their study abroad experience.

A social constructivist paradigm was used to guide my research. Social constructivists “hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2010, p. 8). Key assumptions of constructivism, as identified by Crotty (1998, as cited by Creswell, 2010), include: constructing meaning through worldly engagement and interpretation thus leading to open-ended interview questions; understanding the context or setting of participants through gathering information directly from them; and generating meaning through human interaction.

Interviews were selected as the preferred measurement tool in this study due to the intent to engage and interpret the participants' experiences. Investigating their personal emotions, experiences, and feelings were matters that “needed to be explored rather than reported through a questionnaire” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 165). Standardized open-ended questions were created to understand the grounded phenomenological credentials described by Denscombe (2003, p. 96) as “perceptions or meanings, attitudes

and beliefs, and feelings and emotions,” in illuminating what and how the student experienced situations during their time abroad.

Student enrollment records were obtained with permission by the administrating study abroad office for the selected study abroad programs. Program participants who resided near campus were contacted and invited to participate in an interview. Students who participated in the selected programs, but who lived outside of the institution’s area were not contacted, as it would not have been possible to interview those students in person.

### **Study Abroad Programs**

Prior to selecting the students to be interviewed, several semester-length study abroad programs were considered for this study. Using Engle and Engle’s program classification (2003), the following criteria were examined when selecting the study center-based programs.

1. Language pre-requisites
2. Language used in course work
3. Context of academic work
4. Types of student housing
5. Provisions for guided/cultural interaction and experiential learning
6. Guided reflection on cultural experience

(Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 8)

All three programs were study abroad center programs and none of the programs required students to be proficient in another language.

Study abroad center programs were selected due to the components of program and curricular control administered by the U.S. university and the structured support facilitated by the staff in the host country. Study abroad center programs are developed on a model in which the study format “consists of classroom-based courses designed for non-host country students” (Forum for Education Abroad, 2011, p. 13). These programs are often sponsored by a college or university and may have permanent staff and facilities. Integrated university study programs were not selected due to the more independent and autonomous nature of the programs. These programs are defined as a model in which the “predominant study format is participation in regular courses alongside degree-seeking students from the host university” (Forum for Education – Abroad, 2011, p. 13). I was interested to learn whether the curriculum and/or structure of the study abroad center programs influenced any of the students’ critical experiences.

Programs in Australia and Italy were selected due to the large number of study abroad participants every year in those destinations. In the 2010 IIE Open Doors Report, Australia was the sixth leading study abroad destination with more than 11,000 students studying abroad there in the 2008/2009 academic. Italy hosted more than 30,000 study abroad students and was the second most popular study abroad destination (Institute for International Education, 2010).

In addition to the large number of participants, the selected programs in Australia and Italy were identified for their programmatic components. All of the students in the Australia program participate in an internship experience and most of the students live with other U.S. study abroad students. A majority of the students in the Italy program do not participate in any volunteer or internship experiences and approximately two thirds of

the students live with other U.S. study abroad students. The curriculum offered on both of these programs varies across the disciplines of art, communication, history, and psychology within the context of the host culture. Italian language is a required course of all students who participate in the program in Italy, however previous knowledge of the language is not required.

To increase the variance in program type and participant response, a service learning and internship program in Kenya was included in the study. The greater degree of cultural difference and geographic location were two determining factors for the Kenya program. In addition, the curriculum is different than that of the programs in Australia and Italy and focuses on international development. All students on the Kenya program are required to participate in a service-learning type internship experience and are required to live with Kenyan host families.

### **Participants**

Invitations were sent out via email to 22 students representing the three study abroad programs. After receiving a 32% response rate, seven students were interviewed for the study. Data collection was approved by IRB<sup>2</sup> study number 1012P94232. To preserve confidentiality, all participants were offered the opportunity to choose a pseudonym that would be used in association with their interview data. Interviews were scheduled and conducted according to the participants' schedules and ranged in length from one to two hours. Table 3 shows the demographics of the participants as well as the level of challenge or change the participants were seeking abroad. This provides context to how much the participants were seeking personal growth or change from their

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for IRB approval letter

experiences. Furthermore, their reasons for studying abroad on the program and in the location of their choosing provide more background into the expectations each of the participants had for their experience abroad.

| <b>Participant</b>   | <b>Study Abroad Location</b> | <b>Program Type &amp; Living Arrangement</b>   | <b>Previous International Experience</b>                            | <b>Reason for choosing to study abroad in the specific location/program</b>   |
|--|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Alexa:<br>Junior sociology major<br>(White female)                             | Nairobi, Kenya*              | Internship/study: interned with a microfinance organization; lived with two host families                                    | Traveled to Greece for a week long volunteer program in high school | <i>"I just wanted something that would kind of challenge me and make me reevaluate everything here. And, also just to get some direction, I guess, and decide if I would ultimately want to stay in the Twin Cities or be somewhere else and what I might want to do. And that it would be a good growth experience to be pushed like that. That's really valuable... I felt that Kenya would push me a little more outside of my comfort zone, and that is what I wanted. The subject matter was really intriguing to me. I've been interested in microfinance, women's rights, gender equality, for years. So this felt like the perfect opportunity to pursue that."</i> |
| Ann:<br>Senior child psychology and education major<br>(Asian American female) | Sydney, Australia            | Internship/study: interned in an education childcare facility; lived in an apartment with other female study abroad students | Traveled to Vietnam to visit family                                 | <i>"I always knew that I wanted to go to Australia... I would get experience living on my own, since I've always lived at home ... I had the freedom to do whatever I want. I actually applied first and then told [my parents]. So I actually didn't get permission. It was kind of like, 'with or without your support I'm gonna go'."</i>  |
| Ellen:<br>Junior biology/pre-med major<br>(White female)                       | Nairobi, Kenya               | Internship/study: interned in a rural hospital; lived with two host families   | First time abroad   | <i>"I wanted to experience something so different, like as different as you can get from living in America. And I knew Europe wouldn't give me that ... I wanted to stand out, feel different... I mean I've always lived under my parents' protection and, going to school here, even though you feel as you're out in the world, you're really not. The university's kind of a bubble and even I knew when I graduated I'd still be in a bubble, and I wanted to experience outside of that bubble."</i>  |

Table 3 Participants

\* The three Kenya participants spent 6 weeks in Nairobi and 7 weeks living and interning in a rural community. None of the participants shared the specific name of their community but instead described the location based on geographic landmarks or a nearby urban city.

|   |                      |   |   |  |
|---|----------------------|---|---|--|
| Lacey:<br>Junior<br>business/non-profit<br>management major<br>(White female) | Nairobi,<br>Kenya    | Internship/study:<br>interned with a<br>microfinance<br>organization; lived with<br>two host families                         | First time abroad   | <i>"I'm required to study abroad... I had a few things that I was looking for: homestay to get really immersed in the culture was one of the things I wanted out of my experience; a semester program... Kenya just jumped out at me, and I wanted to experience Africa, and I think it was the romanticized idea but, I, it just jumped out at me."</i>   |
| Rachel:<br>Senior film studies<br>major<br>(White female)                     | Florence,<br>Italy   | Study: lived in an<br>apartment with other<br>female study abroad<br>students   | Traveled to<br>France in junior<br>high and high<br>school and to<br>Israel between<br>high school and<br>college | <i>"I like learning about new cultures, and I think that the people that I've met internationally, they seem to be a lot more interesting ... I think I just picked Italy because I knew it was a beautiful place and I really liked pasta. I don't know if that sounds like weird answer but, I just, I was always intrigued by it so that's why I picked it."</i>  |
| Stacey:<br>Senior<br>communication<br>studies major<br>(White female)         | Florence,<br>Italy   | Internship/study:<br>interned with an<br>international media<br>organization; lived with<br>a host family                     | Traveled to Italy<br>in college with her<br>family  | <i>"I always knew that I wanted to go to Italy... I love traveling; I've always loved traveling. I just thought it would be a cool experience to have and something that would help develop me, not just as a person but my interviewing skills, something to talk about during interviews; to build my language skills, meet new people, see new cultures, and all that."</i>   |
| Will:<br>Sophomore animal<br>science major<br>(White male)                    | Sydney,<br>Australia | Internship/study:<br>interned in a veterinary<br>clinic; lived in an<br>apartment with other<br>male study abroad<br>students | First time abroad   | <i>"Australia was always a place I wanted to go to... I saw it, and I found out that it was sort of interesting to study something like animal science or animal veterinary in this sort of closed environment. This big island with sort of all these strange things, and it just kind of makes it totally different. ... I'm speaking more on the instances of like different diseases and regulations. ... Like they're number one for pharmaceutical research in the veterinary field and things like that."</i> |

## **Data Collection**

Students who studied abroad during fall semester 2010 were contacted via email in January 2011 and were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview at a place and time of their convenience. Interviews were described to students as an opportunity to reflect and share significant experiences during their time abroad and were indicated to last approximately one hour. Students were given sample questions in the email invitation. All participants were compensated with a \$5 coffee shop gift card and were put in a drawing to win a \$50 Visa gift card. In addition, each participant received a typed transcription and audio file of their interview.

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) sought to address the three developmental components of self-authorship: epistemological development, interpersonal development, and intrapersonal development. Because this study sought to identify critical incidents the students may have experienced abroad, questions were also created using research that identified critical incidents experienced among high-risk students (Pizzolato, 2005). All of the questions in the interview protocol were asked to the participants. However, the order of questions varied according the responses of the participants.

Interviews were conducted over a four week time period and occurred in public campus spaces, coffee shops, and private offices near the participants' home campus. Interviews ranged in length from one to two hours. Codes and themes from measurement instruments like the SAS and ES were influential in developing the interview protocol. I recorded and transcribed all the interviews and the data was saved securely on my personal computer.

## **Data Analysis**

During the transcription process, themes started to emerge within the three concepts of self-authorship. During the interviews and while transcribing, I took note when the participants reflected upon a critical experience or reflected upon personal growth within one of the three concepts of self-authorship. Upon completion of the transcriptions, data was analyzed and common themes were identified across the seven interviews.

## **Limitations**

The small number of participants, from a generally homogenous group, prevented me from making generalizations of what study abroad factors contribute to the development of self-authorship. In addition, self-authorship is a longitudinal, developmental process, and the one-time meeting and data collection with participants cannot fully explore the influence study abroad had on students' personal development. However, because several of the participants across the three programs shared similar thoughts and reflections on contributing factors of their experience and their development, the findings are still valuable in the field of international education and illustrate important factors and considerations for program development and facilitation.

My employment as a study abroad adviser in the study abroad office that administers the three programs is an additional limitation. I had prior contact with three of the participants and served as their study abroad adviser prior to their experiences and prior to this study's creation. That relationship may have influenced students' reflections and responses to the interview questions.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

This section presents the data analysis and results of this study's research questions and is organized by each participant's story. Information is provided to contextualize the critical experiences students identified as significant to their experience abroad. Using the participants' narratives, critical experiences are identified to illustrate how they influenced the participants' development toward self-authorship. Each section first discusses the students' critical experiences and then is organized according to the three developmental concepts and reflective questions of self-authorship, which include:

1. Who am I? (Intrapersonal Development)
2. How do I know? (Epistemological Development)
3. What relationships do I want with others? (Interpersonal Development)  
(Baxter Magolda 2001)

A cross-case analysis and the common themes found through all seven interviews will be presented at the end of this chapter.

#### Alexa

##### **Critical Experiences.**

On the first day of her internship in rural Kenya, Alexa encountered a critical experience that challenged her to reevaluate values and practices in her life. While driving to a community with her supervisor, she was struck by the value of education she found the Kenyan community to embrace.

We're in the middle of nowhere, and it's beautiful because there is so little out here. And I got to sit in on, or just watch them, take part in the training and just seeing how eager they were to learn. They had their little loan and savings books, and this was like gold to them basically. Just the way they look at, the way they were listening to the field officers, and they were so engaged and they wanted it so badly, to know this, and to make a better life for themselves. They knew this was the key to that.

In addition to the value of education, Alexa also reflected upon the community's lifestyle and shared,

It was so striking; everything was so simplistic. They functioned just fine that way. And then it was, as soon as I come back to America, I look in my room and think... This is all my stuff? What is this? So that is a little harder to swallow. I just really admired how simply and naturally they lived and, many of the women are bald and they are incredibly gorgeous and they don't care what they look like, and that doesn't matter.

Alexa reflected several times upon this experience and the changes she identified in herself were often a result of what she observed and learned from that afternoon.

### **Who am I?**

Alexa acknowledged personal growth as a result of her study abroad experience in Kenya, something she was seeking prior to studying abroad. She wanted new perspectives and wanted to experience more challenging situations. She wanted to "become more confident and not really care as much about societal expectations."

Alexa did find herself more confident and changed upon her return from Kenya. She spent several weeks traveling independently after her study abroad experience and had only returned home two weeks prior to our interview. She was still processing the changes she was noticing in herself and did not yet know how to articulate them.

I know that I'm different and I know that I've grown and I've started to identify the ways that has taken place. I know it happened, and I'm just trying to figure out how. And it's starting to become clearer as the days go by.

Alexa had noticed changes in herself and discovered she was able to "just [have] confidence in any venue" and shared how these changes were also affecting the way she prioritized her future goals.

It's more important for me to find something that makes me happy, that contributes to something of a greater good here or somewhere in the world, than making a lot of money and retiring somewhere like the Bahamas. It's harder to

stomach that stuff. I don't bring it up a lot because I don't want to come across as condescending or patronizing at all. And I still try to respect where my friends are ... so I end up suppressing that.

In addition to increased confidence, Alexa also noted changes in her personal values. Her experience in Kenya forced her to shift some of her priorities and concerns:

I think just really having a greater sense of where my values come from and what they mean and [what] that means for my life and for other people around the world. There were so many times I would be with my friends and I'd be like, "all I know is that I don't know anything." And I still feel like that, and I still have a lot of unanswered questions. There is still a lot I can pursue based on what we learned in Kenya. I feel like I have a greater feeling for myself as a person and who I am, which I'm grateful for. I think part of that is, like when I say I don't care about things as much, it's kind of like I just don't value certain things as much as I did anymore.

Alexa's increased confidence and shift in values were reflected through the stories and memories she shared of her experiences in Kenya. In addition to these changes, she discovered a stronger sense of her internal identity and felt better prepared to remove herself from external approval.

### **How do I know?**

Alexa felt prepared to deal with the challenges she confronted while in Kenya. She appreciated the academic support provided by the program that allowed her and her peers to discuss what they were learning and experiencing during their time abroad. This opportunity to reflect gave her the chance to understand the different situations she was experiencing and witnessing on a daily basis.

What I loved about Kenya was that you are confronted with a lot of issues on a daily basis, and you grapple with a lot of things, both internally and external to you, every single day. It just felt like this ongoing process of processing what was happening.

Alexa mentioned several times that she was struggling with ideas and practices that were once a daily, normal part of her life in the United States. She acknowledged this

struggle as rooted in not only the experience of living in Kenya, but also the academic, historic, and cultural context of the differences she noticed and learned during her time abroad.

Just knowing that there are people out there that live with so much less and that they get by with so much less, it's kind of like "Why do I really have this stuff? Why do I have it?" And there are so many grander systems. We talked a lot about the colonial legacy and just how colonialism in general... helped to establish the hierarchy, the world order, whatnot... And so it also kind of feels like just because we're in the west we benefit from their lack of development and their exploitation of resources and labor... It's not really guilt so much [that I feel]; it's an awareness that it's not really necessary and that there's another way. Like this "our" way of life is not the only way of life. It doesn't mean that everyone needs to or should live like we live.

The awareness that Alexa refers to demonstrates her ability to question society's plans and expectations. The differences she noticed in Kenya and the historical knowledge she learned while abroad were influential to her questioning and discovering her own internal beliefs.

In addition to noticing the difference in particular contexts in Kenya, Alexa was also able to critically reflect on her own identity, nationality, and education and how that affected her expectations of working with developing communities.

A lot of what we learned in class is this idea of development from within; that it isn't necessarily the place of people in the west to go in and tell them how to develop or what to do. We don't necessarily know best. We're not from there. We haven't lived it.

Alexa's experience expanded her knowledge of microfinance and influenced her career goals. She was questioning her future career plans and she felt "exceedingly grateful to experience [the internship], if only for 6 weeks." Prior to her internship experience, she was questioning her future plans and the pressure she felt to succeed

financially and professionally. Alexa's time abroad allowed her to develop a stronger sense of her own beliefs as they related to her career goals and lifestyle choices.

Alexa's semester in Kenya provided her with academic support to process and understand the cultural and contextual differences she was encountering abroad. In addition, her experiences abroad influenced the vision she saw for herself. After returning home, Alexa was ready to make decisions that were better aligned with her own vision, something she did not feel as strongly about prior to studying abroad.

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

One of the reasons Alexa chose the study abroad program in Kenya was because of the host family living arrangement. She identified living with a host family as the best opportunity to be as integrated into the Kenyan culture as possible. However, she found it difficult to develop relationships with other Kenyans, and she interpreted this difficulty as resulting from the perception Kenyans had of her as a white U.S. American. This affected her ability to interpret relationships with other Kenyans she encountered.

It was really hard to judge people's genuineness and their authenticity. It's like, "Do you really want to get to know me for me? Or do you want to get to know me because you think I can do some things for you. [Do you think] I can give you money or I can help you get a visa?"

Alexa also faced challenges in relationships she had with people back in the United States upon her return. Reflecting upon this Alexa shared the changes she expected to occur with people in her life:

I feel kind of bad. But I feel I have a different set of priorities, and I have a much better idea of how I feel about things and my perspective on them. It's not that I can't maintain [relationships] with people that have different values than I do, but in terms of having close relationships I feel like I'm on a different page. And that's OK. I'm sure I'll find people that do have similar values.

Alexa attributed the difficulty of processing her experience to not having close, quality relationships with people who could understand what she went through. She shared,

It is hard for me to just discuss things... the kind of conversations we're having right now, I haven't had with anyone who wasn't there. You can't just engage in that nonchalantly. Even if you're going through photo albums, like when I sat down with my family, and we went through stuff, it's not the same. You can't get into the depth of any real substance. So it feels much more internal. That's probably been the main challenge since being home.

Her reflections demonstrate the kind of relationships she wants to develop in her future and illustrates how she is becoming more active with bringing herself into future relationships.

### **Summary.**

Alexa's experience in Kenya was a stepping stone for her to pursue new subject matter and gain a new sense of confidence. These outcomes along with her experience in a rural village, forced her to reevaluate her future goals.

I know everything is going to work out in the end. I know there are other people out there with similar hopes and dreams that I have, and I'll find them. I think I was more anal about that kind of stuff. I'm definitely much more relaxed and mellow about the future. I don't know what I'm going to do after I graduate, but I'm perfectly fine with that.

Alexa's semester in Kenya was influential to her development of self-authorship. Her experience in the remote Kenyan village resulted in her questioning her own practices and influenced the values she felt she wanted in her own life. Seeing the lifestyle of the community members altered the expectations she previously felt of herself and gave her the ability to find confidence internally. This newly discovered confidence influenced some of the relationships she had in her life but Alexa felt prepared in how she was going to navigate those changes.

## **Ann**

### **Critical Experiences.**

Ann's first critical experience abroad involved the opportunity to develop her identity and individuality outside of the umbrella of her parents' expectations. She wanted to learn about herself and achieve independence, two goals that were stifled by her parents' protectiveness. She realized that leaving the United States would provide her with an independent environment, an environment where she could learn more about herself.

That was my chance to be away from everything, even my Minnesota self. I could do whatever I want, and that's when I felt like that was the motivation, just [being] stripped of all context and everything. Going there, kind of starting fresh and deciding what I might want to change, or might be able to change.

When Ann arrived in Sydney she felt insecure in her ability to succeed in an unfamiliar setting. The people Ann interacted with in the United States were from similar backgrounds and this made her feel safe and secure. She reflected upon her apprehension to find change in her life and how that affected her confidence:

I wasn't sure what [life] would be like without [similar people] so I didn't even look for [new relationships]. It never occurred to me to find something different. When I grew up, my parents were like, "The world out there is scary. It's a big bad world. And you're helpless, you're a shy little girl and what are you going to do? What are they going to do to you?" That was always the mentality that made me hesitant to do so much...

Ann experienced a situation near the end of her time in Sydney that involved a potential challenge to her personal safety. After she successfully navigated the situation, her confidence was strengthened. The situation took place late at night when Ann was in an unfamiliar part of Sydney. Her cell phone wasn't working and Ann realized she only

had herself to rely on. Even though Ann was panicked and scared in this situation, she was able to use her own judgment to remain calm enough to manage the situation.

Even though I was frightened I was able to think logically. I think what my parents fear is... like someone else's ability [to] take advantage of me or [my] helplessness in times of stress. I felt helpless but my brain was still thinking logically. I was still taking steps to pull myself out of it. I was in panic mode but at the same time, I went through all the mental things. All the things I learned about self-defense, things like that, that was being switched on. I was able to bring in some kind of survival mechanism that I never even knew I had. Because without being put in the situation you don't know what your adrenaline is going to do. It was a capacity I didn't know I had. I'm a little bit more fearless.

This challenging experience of navigating her own safety gave her the opportunity to discover her own identity and was influential to how Ann developed during her time in Sydney.

### **Who Am I?**

Ann spoke extensively about her upbringing and a strong sense of familial commitment and respect. She reflected on the need to break out of her shell and attributed her desire to study abroad to a new sense of independence. Ann recognized her curiosity to learn about herself and to gain independence was stifled by her parents' protectiveness. She had "always been thirsty for independence. Just the fact that I knew I should get it, and I knew I needed it. I knew I could do it but my parents underestimated that."

Ann was prepared to challenge herself in a new environment and overcome her shyness. When asked what her goals were for studying abroad, Ann responded, "I'm really shy. That was going to be one of those icebreaker things. If I get to go there, to a place where no one knows me, I need to let it out. And you know, break some barriers here." Ann was able to develop a stronger sense of self while in Sydney. She discovered a

new independence and recognized how much influence her relationships in the U.S. had on her as an individual.

I just learned that there was parts of myself that I was able to be, without being [in the U.S.], which is crazy because I never realized how much I held back on me. And I actually do that here, and I don't know why. But when I was over there, it was kind of like, ah, there's no wrong, there is no expectations for me, there's no one I'm supposed to be. It took getting out of this mold to be able to find me.

Even though Ann developed her confidence and a stronger identity during her semester in Sydney, when we met for the interview she shared how difficult it was to find a balance between the “new confident Ann” and the Ann her family and friends were expecting when she returned from Sydney.

Being able to go from finding yourself in Australia and you're happy with it, and I came back and I found that it didn't quite fit. I felt like there's a cookie cutter mold that I fit into, and I spill out of now. And you can't do that any more. Everyone kind of expects certain things out of me that I don't want to uphold anymore because it wasn't me. I found out I was someone else.

Ann indicated the difficulty she would continue facing in upholding her new sense of confidence and her stronger sense of identity.

I've heard a lot of, “You've changed.” and I don't think of it as a negative thing, the changing. It's like, maybe I'm grown? I hope it gets easier in time, and I know a lot of my old insecurities from before are kind of coming back. Whatever confidence I found in myself in Australia is kind of decaying as I'm back in the same place, in the same room, in the same life, in the same motions and back at the same school and everything. I'm trying to upkeep what I had in a different place. It's difficult.

Ann was struggling between defining herself internally and externally. Her confidence and internal definition also influenced her behavior back on her home campus. She reflected upon this and how this developed confidence had changed her behavior in classes.

Before [I went to Sydney], nobody wanted to hear what Ann wanted to say, but now, I'm going to raise my hand in class because I don't care if anyone doesn't want to hear it. So, that's changed a lot, in so many positive ways I think.

Ann's experience in Sydney was influential in answering the question *Who am I?* She did not have a strong internal identity before her semester abroad and her experiences in Sydney allowed her to gain confidence in herself and succeed independently in life.

### **How do I know?**

Ann described her semester in Sydney as one of the first times she was surrounded by people who were from different backgrounds and held different opinions. After returning from Sydney, she has been more intentional in developing friendships with people from different backgrounds. She has recognized the need for diverse viewpoints and now holds value in learning from different perspectives.

I was living with people who were so completely different from me. I learned so much. Every time I sought advice, a perspective that I couldn't even imagine was given to me. And that's what I'm seeking now.

When asked if there was anything she noticed upon her return to the US that she found difficult to deal with or understand, Ann commented on the lack of diversity in her community of friends. She reflected upon the relationships and the single perspectives she wanted to broaden.

I went through my Facebook, and it's all the same people that go to my church, all the same people that my parents know. I'm thinking, "Where's the variety in this?" Now I'm starting to try, to seek it, to actually seek more adventures and more variety in the people I'm around. It's a good comfort zone, but I want to break out a bit on my own. I want to seek other dimensions, other perspectives.

Before her study abroad experience, Ann turned to friends and family for advice and did not consider the importance of outside opinions. The situations she encountered in Sydney forced her to turn to a more diverse group of peers, and this experience was

quite valuable to how she wanted to answer, *How do I know?* She still struggled with finding her own vision and her comments about the relationships in her life show she is still very reliant on authority and external plans.

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

Ann reflected deeply about her community of friends and family in the US, indicating that her relationships prior to living and studying in Australia were restrictive.

I felt like being in a different context was going to give me that [ability to meet new people] for some reason. I think I felt really restricted back here, by peers, parents, and expectations... Over there it was a clean slate.

Even living in an urban area and attending a large university, Ann still felt restricted by her relationships. When comparing the difference in meeting new people and developing new relationships in Sydney, Ann commented on how her relationships in the United States did not challenge her to break free from certain expectations.

I can't tell you I've ever... met a group of people who didn't know of me, know anyone I know or anything like that. And so, you really have to hop, skip, and jump to really get to know someone who doesn't have any preconceptions of you, which is kind of refreshing. And [in Sydney], it was meeting people all in one day. You know, meeting all the new people I was going to live with and then meeting all the work people and just not having a solid base like my parents or friends that I do know; to rely on there. So it took a lot. But I definitely broke out of my shell.

During her semester in Sydney, Ann was able to develop a more critical sense of her ability to have relationships with people who were different than her. She demonstrated this change by sharing,

When I'm [in the U.S.] I choose who I want to hang out with and a lot of times they're just like me. And so, it has been since high school that I've been around people that I don't have much in common with...

Reflecting more critically about the relationships and the lack of diverse perspectives, Ann shared her ambitions to branch out beyond her regular communities after returning to the US to continue opening herself up to new perspectives and relationships.

I felt like my world was so one dimensional, and that's why it's so tightly weaved and structured where there isn't room to divert from what everyone thinks my path is going to be, or what everyone thinks I should do.

Ann returned home ready to break away from the formulas she was following with the relationships she had in her life. She no longer wants to act in relationships based on external approval. Instead she now wants to move forward to develop relationships that are truer to her self.

### **Summary.**

Ann's identity prior to going to Sydney had been defined by others and within the self-authorship construct she was heavily dependent on following formulas. Her experiences in Sydney created moments of *Crossroads* that afforded the opportunity to gain confidence and find independence. Being removed from her community of friends and family afforded her to act and be the person she wanted to be and she can now continue on the path to authoring her own life.

### **Ellen**

#### **Critical Experiences.**

Ellen identified two critical experiences during her semester in Kenya, both occurring during her internship experience. The first involved the arrival of a patient with a broken back to the rural hospital where her internship was based.

A woman came up on a motorbike. She's on the back of it and they took her off of the motorbike and they put her in the outpatient ward. Her back had been broken. Her foot was tucked by the exhaust pipe and she burned her foot, but she couldn't feel it of course. I was in the outpatient ward at the time with the two

medical students and the two staff in the outpatient ward were just not, they wouldn't...they didn't act like anything was an emergency. They were trying to move her legs up and down ... They've had more medical training than I have, and I knew that was not OK. You're supposed to leave someone with a back injury where they are. Don't move them, don't flip them, don't move anything. And so we're trying to convince them not to touch her, and after awhile the two staff members in the outpatient ward just went to have their lunch break, leaving this woman here on the table with a broken back...Up until that point I thought that the medicine [in Kenya] was decent. It worked for where they were, but that just blew my mind. That that could exist. Those people didn't know what to do in an emergency situation like that. And it was very stressful, I just wanted so badly to be able to do something, but I wasn't trained.

It was apparent during the interview that this situation had a powerful impact on Ellen. Even though it was traumatizing and difficult to deal with, the incident served as an affirmation of her career goals and motivation to achieve becoming a doctor.

I'm still not over it, emotionally. I cannot believe that that happened. In the subsequent emergencies that I was present for it kind of desensitized me to it, which is bad. It's the way life is. If I ever want to go into medicine I'm going to have to be able to process these things faster. And, it just gives me more motivation to get my degree and be able to come back and actually help in a situation like that.

The other critical experience Ellen faced during her time stemmed from a relationship she developed with a young woman, Violet, who was a patient at the hospital. Violet had AIDS, was an orphan, and passed away while Ellen was still in Kenya.

You would probably say she was about 10 by looking at her. Her arms were just skinny, you could wrap your hand around her upper arms. But, of course she was HIV positive and her file was just huge. She had been in the hospital so many times. ... She was an orphan and it was some other program that she was affiliated with that would bring her in when she got sick. And so, the second time she came in she was all alone. She was really sick; they had to put her on a ventilator [be]cause she had fluid in her lungs. So, I kind of befriended her when I had some free time, and I would talk to her. I think she just enjoyed having someone with her... She ended up getting released from the hospital and a week later we heard, from the program that would bring her in, that she passed away. That was so tough because this girl was, you know a little younger than me, but her situation was so opposite of what I've lived in my life. I've never had a

chronic disease. I've had both of my parents my entire life. At that point, that was learning for me in all different [areas], like academically, her disease, the dynamics of AIDS and all this stuff. But also, if she wouldn't have been a poor orphan, could she have lived? It makes me question, and it makes me understand more. It taught me so much about life in a third world country.

The relationship Ellen developed with the young girl forced her to reevaluate her own life. Her encounter with Violet led to a greater appreciation of her own opportunities and relationships.

I would sit with her, and we would talk about something, and she would laugh. She could laugh, amidst all that. And I look on my life, and I'm complaining about the weather. It really gave me a lot of perspective on things. I don't know if I was expecting experiences like that. I don't want to say that I'm glad that it happened, but I'm glad I have this new perspective. That girl made a difference in my life. She taught me so much about appreciating life and family. I don't know if that explains exactly what I learned. But, it changed me so that means I learned something. I've learned that I have it in me to have the motivation to help people.

Both of these experiences contributed to the changes that took place in Ellen. She became more confident and also found herself reevaluating her personal values and relationships.

### **Who am I?**

Ellen described herself as extremely shy prior to going abroad and acknowledged the fact that she needed to develop her social skills. She described her personality with the following thought and reflected upon changes she has noticed as a result of her experience abroad:

My mom has been really protective of me, so I've always been kind of shy and I mean for the longest time I couldn't even call the pizza delivery place to order pizza because I was too scared to talk on the phone. I knew signing up for the program would be good in the end, and it would help me grow in myself and in my social skills. I really wanted to get out of my bubble. I've seen a huge change in myself from before I left to now. I'm more outgoing. I can be more comfortable in uncomfortable situations, which is very nice to be able to do.

Ellen's personal drive was strong enough to get over the fear and apprehension of studying in a developing country. She was also able to successfully navigate the difficulty of being removed from familiar relationships during the internship experience.

[The study abroad program] really immersed you into the culture and especially the internship. I was in my town alone, but that's what I was there for in the end. I'm not there to be with my friends, people from the university.

In addition to becoming more independent, Ellen also began to question the common values she held from her U.S. upbringing. The perceived hardships Kenyans endured on a daily basis affected how she interprets those U.S. values.

It still amazes me to turn on the faucet and be able to drink the water. We have so many things in our life that make us comfortable and make our life easier and sometimes I feel like that's not good for us. When I was over there all of my family members, women mostly... never complained about doing anything. Never complained about taking two hours to make dinner. Never complained about scrubbing the floors. Never complained about going to go get a huge thing of water and carry it back on their head. Never complained about anything. And here we just complain about everything. It's much more worth it to look at the good things in life. Like over there, family is everything.

Ellen has been able to reflect upon and process the various experiences she had abroad and how they affected who she is as an individual. Since returning home, she's been able to "Know myself better, and I've gotten to be more confident and more motivated to do what I want to do in life. And that's a big change." Prior to her semester in Kenya, Ellen "would never be able to sit down and have a talk like this before." In addition to the changes that occurred during her semester abroad, the reflection and assessment she was experiencing in the United States was also challenging her to reflect further on her time abroad.

### **How do I know?**

In addition to increasing her confidence and independence, Ellen also wanted to study abroad to test her career and academic path. Knowing the time and financial commitment medical school requires, she felt her study abroad and specifically her internship experience could, “confirm my own career goals and the path I want to do with my life. I’ve felt like this trip would either guide me in a different direction or confirm the direction I was already going.” The time she spent in the clinic and the work that she was able to observe provided her with the answers she was seeking. She was not depending on authority, but she was depending on the experience to solidify her internal vision of becoming a doctor.

It just made me so much want to be able to help these people. Especially when they’d be talking about drugs and procedures and the results of blood tests and all this stuff. I wanted to be able to understand that. I wanted to be able to help out. It really intrigued me. Academically it really motivated me to come back and to learn and to get through it.

While her experience in Kenya reinforced her goal of becoming a doctor, it also introduced the possibility of practicing medicine in other areas of the world, specifically in Kenya. She made several comments about returning to help communities in Kenya. “I want to come back [to Kenya] just to learn more about them, but also to give back because of my experience. They gave so much to me. I learned so much from them.”

In addition to challenging intellectual decisions and academic goals, Ellen experienced several situations during her time abroad that challenged the conception of gender roles and expectations in Kenya.

The family role is a big thing in Kenya. I never saw any of the male family members enter the kitchen. That was something that took me awhile to accept. And in our society nowadays, that is sexist to think that women should only cook and clean all this stuff. But there, I just had to learn to accept it because it’s what

happens. And my mothers did work. They didn't just sit around all day and do housework. So, I think that made me accept their role more. They're strong women and that's what I want to aspire to be, and it's not necessarily bad to be in the kitchen doing that stuff. So that was a difference and that changed my beliefs.

Ellen was able to analyze gender roles within the context of Kenyan culture. The ideas and beliefs she previously held of female roles were challenged in the new cultural context. Ellen was able to construct a new understanding outside of her own culture's practices and expectations.

Throughout the interview Ellen gave additional examples of how she processed new ideas and practices and integrated them into her learning process. She shared the example of an Islamic woman who visited one of her classes. Ellen had a difficult time accepting the information the Islamic woman was sharing, despite being open and accepting to different religions and races. She questioned the values of marriage the woman spoke of and found it hard to “ wrap [my] head around because it's anti-what we've been learning here in our [American] culture.” This experience made Ellen want to better understand the Islamic faith; she didn't feel as though the one classroom visitor provided students with a holistic context of the practices of Islam. Instead of leaving Kenya with an unfavorable view of Islam, Ellen focused more on increasing her understanding by “looking in on the whole [Islamic faith]” after her return home.

This was just one example of new ideas Ellen engaged with during her time in Kenya. In the end, she felt her prior education did very little to prepare her for her future career and she articulated the importance of her experience and how it prepared her for future goals.

I felt like my knowledge did not help me in the global community. It really secluded me to a small portion of academics and researchers. But, what we really learned was how interconnected we are these days. And especially college

students sit at home with our movies and guys play their video games, and we just don't know what's going on out there. But once we get into the workforce, we're going to be interacting with so many different cultures – I feel like I just needed to have more of an idea of what's going on globally, socioeconomically, and potentially politically. Even if I'm going into the medical profession, I need to have that side of it too. It is not just science. Every job you will ever have has a social aspect.

The curriculum offered through the program opened Ellen to new ideas and helped her gain confidence in her ability to be knowledgeable and engage with issues outside of her own academics. She recognized the various contexts, both in Kenya and the U.S., and realized the importance of being prepared across the different contexts. She didn't feel that her coursework prior to study abroad “gave me that liberal education... the classes I took were mostly things that I knew I was interested in instead of things that I thought I might be interested in or I didn't even know.” Not only did the experience abroad give her new confidence in engaging in different issues and ideas it also, “sparked my interest in [international issues] and now I do feel like I can go out there and I can have a conversation with another citizen of the global community, and I'm not going to be not knowing what to do. Not knowing what's going on.”

Ellen's ability to seek knowledge beyond her science curriculum indicates she was ready to start seeking her own vision. She did not question the curriculum or academics, but she did know there was a need to question *how* she was learning about medicine.

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

The confidence Ellen gained from her experience in Kenya gave her the ability to be, “more outgoing, so I've been able to create more friendships with other people, and

it's been really good." She shared one example by describing the change in her relationship with her boyfriend:

When I left he had a few ideas about Africa that I didn't agree with... we aren't together any more because I just couldn't [be with him]. He was convinced that I would come home and have AIDS. And, I was not OK with that idea because it's not true. And even if he might have been joking, that's still not OK to joke about because it's a serious thing. It has almost taught me to look for deeper things in people. I can ask better questions now when I'm having a conversation with somebody. And I'm really looking for, instead of just fun people to be friends, I'm really looking for people who care about things and can have meaningful conversations. And it really made me feel better about my relationships, to have that aspect.

Ellen wanted to mutually construct relationships with people who held similar values. She was becoming more critical of the relationships she had in her life and found herself judging the current relationships she had with friends and ideas she had towards other U.S. Americans.

I'm living with three girls who are white, middle class Americans, coming from families that have always protected them, and it's hard for me not to judge them – judge Americans in general for being wealthy and ignorant and all this stuff. But, that's something that I'm trying to teach myself to be able to do so I can be a better person.

The experience of living with two host families in Kenya pushed Ellen to understand the close relationships and dependency the family members had on one another. She spoke more about this understanding and how she interacted with her family.

People will go so far to help a family member, and I think part of that has translated to my life. I mean, I just feel like the little things are not worth it to get upset over, to complain over. I don't even feel like going to the mall to buy a new pair of shoes because I don't need to. It's not going to make me feel better to have a new pair. It will make me feel better to go visit my grandma and have dinner. Like, it's different things that are starting to be meaningful to me and that's wonderful.

The people and situations Ellen met and navigated in Kenya motivated her to re-evaluate the priorities she had with her relationship. Her values influenced her internal approval of relationships and she found herself seeking relationships that held more substantial meaning to her emerging sense of self.

### **Summary.**

Ellen's semester in Kenya created several moments of *The Crossroads*, where she was forced to question her own beliefs, ideas, and plans. Ellen did not rely on external formulas prior to her study abroad experience and she also did not feel confident or comfortable in unknown or new situations. The experiences she navigated abroad impacted her ability to choose her own beliefs and values and allowed her build her personal confidence. Her reflections indicate that her study abroad experience was a powerful factor towards becoming the author of her own life.

### **Lacey**

#### **Critical Experiences.**

Lacey related a critical experience that occurred during her internship experience that contributed to increased personal confidence as well as academic confidence. Lacey was abroad and working at her internship during *World AIDS Day*. Even though the event was unrelated to her internship placement, her supervisor asked her to prepare a short presentation on the importance of getting tested for AIDS. Lacey was expecting to present for approximately 15 minutes to a group of 20 people. When she arrived at the location, she was confronted with a group of more than 100 people and learned she had the floor for two full hours. Not being a medical student, Lacey felt apprehensive of this assignment from the beginning, but she was able to successfully manage the situation by

facilitating discussions between the community members. She was also able to think of impromptu activities to engage the audience. Lacey shared the value in what she learned from it. “To just get up there and say, Wow, we’re going to talk about AIDS. I’ve never done that...That whole day I walked out, just thinking, how did we do that? Wow, I still don’t know.”

This experience illustrates how Lacey was seeking external control during *World AIDS Day*, but instead the experience situated Lacey to rely entirely on herself. She found the internal capacity to meet the expectations of her internship and the community and was able only rely on herself during moments of dissonance in Kenya. Her semester continued to afford her opportunities to develop towards self-authorship.

### **Who am I?**

Lacey expected to “grow personally, to learn, to be totally out of my comfort zone” during her time in Kenya. She wanted to “[become more] confident in totally new situations, not having any of my safety barriers, not having my family and friends and trusting myself to make decisions.” Lacey felt overwhelmed by the various expectations she had on her own campus and was looking forward to what she could “find out about myself when I’m not influenced by the every day distractions of technology and friends, when I was just learning about myself.”

Various experiences in Kenya contributed to Lacey succeeding with her goal. Managing situations with strangers; speaking to and teaching groups of hundreds of people during her internship; and being removed from the expectations she was familiar with resulted in her gaining more confidence in herself. She identified this confidence as

sustaining and empowering and was “ something that I did not really recognize before as being something important.”

Lacey’s time in Kenya led her to question the expectations she had in her academics. She felt her U.S courses “put so much pressure on [resumes and interviews] and just making sure that you’re just perfect or else.” During her semester in Kenya, Lacey found balance between her academics and her personal life. Upon returning home, she now was trying to integrate that balance into her life.

I’ve been working on [finding] balance. Personality wise, I’ll try to go, go, go and when I don’t have stuff to do I feel bad. So, I’ve been working on that for a while. Just trying to say, “You can read a book. It’s OK.” And having that time to really think, sleep, and take care of myself. I realized that that’s really important too.

Spending a semester in Kenya allowed Lacey to take the time to reflect upon the pressures and expectations she had removed herself from. Her ability to navigate challenging situations resulted in an increased confidence and she returned home with the ability to handle and succeed in new situations.

### **How do I know?**

Lacey felt challenged by her academics in the U.S. However, her college experience did not afford her the freedom to critically think about who she was or what she wanted out of life. She recognized the context of her college career and was aware of how it stifled her ability to find her own beliefs and ideas. She was seeking an internal vision to define her identity and values.

The routine of college is just painful sometimes. It’s just school, you know. We don’t really get a chance to truly evaluate what’s important and truly evaluate your life – my life – and values.

Lacey was cognizant of the importance of finding her own values and realized her college experience was not affording her the opportunity to develop them.

Lacey's experience in Kenya also caused her to question her values and priorities within the context of her U.S. culture. As a student in the business school, she was surrounded by expectations of success and found herself asking, "Why is this world this way? Why do I have to be stressed out at school? Why does America say that I have to succeed?" It's like succeed or fail. And success, what does that mean in America?" She was actively trying to find her own belief system to navigate the pressure she felt in her academic program.

In addition to analyzing her beliefs and values, Lacey's study abroad experience also allowed her to reflect upon her intellectual power. Coming from a competitive and stressful academic program, she was nervous about the amount of responsibility required by her internship. Part of that responsibility required her to give business recommendations to communities.

Doing the recommendations was interesting. That's what they wanted me to do, was to write kind of a summary of everything and then give recommendations. But [I experienced] that status thing again, trying to say like, "I'm only a student." And, my supervisor, I did talk with her about that and how it was uncomfortable for me, and she told me to just own it and be bold and she said use it to your advantage because [community members] are going to listen that way.

These moments during her internship enabled Lacey to gain appreciation for the education and opportunity she had been granted as a female in the United States. She recognized the opportunity she had been given and felt fortunate that she "got" an education. Before going to Kenya, that opportunity had never "really meant anything to me. I felt [appreciation] but I didn't really internalize it." Education had become an important part of Lacey's value and belief system and she recognized the influence of the American cultural context that afforded her that opportunity.

Transitioning from the competitive and stressful nature of her business program to holding leadership and educational responsibilities in her internship was influential to Lacey. She reflected upon her intellectual power and how she valued the opportunities she was afforded as a U.S. female college student. Her experience abroad also allowed her to internally examine her beliefs and values. Being removed from the external barriers of the U.S. education, she was able to independently figure out “how *she* knew.”

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

Lacey was able to successfully navigate challenging relationships with members of her host family in Nairobi. Her host sister frequently challenged her faith and beliefs. Unaffected by the bluntness and perceived disrespectfulness of her host sister, Lacey maturely reflected upon her host sister’s actions with, “It was an interesting dynamic to learn about, because she would definitely tell me her side and she was asking not necessarily to learn but to tell me what to do, what to believe.”

Lacey found the relationships she had with her family, boyfriend, and close friends in the U.S. were stronger after she returned from Kenya. However, Lacey noticed changes in other relationships she had with friends on her home campus.

[With] some of my friends, I realized, the relationship isn’t necessarily two way – they might need me, but it’s kind of fake... Coming back to the college experience, and seeing friends going out all the time, and being able to see Kenya and what’s going on there, and coming back and having them thinking that drinking every weekend is important.

Lacey encountered challenges in the relationships she developed in Kenya and the relationships she re-established in the United States. She felt capable and confident in the way she wanted to navigate those relationships, both in Kenya and in the US.

### **Summary.**

Lacey's experience in Kenya allowed her to gain confidence in new and unfamiliar situations and it also contributed to the confidence she felt in her leadership skills. Lacey's moments of dissonance provided her with a context to internally examine her own identity and beliefs and this caused her to question her own plans. Lacey was able to take a step back, reflect, and take an active role in discovering her self and the relationships she wanted in her life – distinct steps towards self-authorship.

### **Rachel**

#### **Critical Experiences.**

Rachel developed close relationships with two other study abroad students during her semester in Florence, Italy. These relationships were the strongest friendships Rachel had during her college years and were critical to the experiences she had in Florence. In a majority of her interview responses, Rachel responded with “we” or “us”, illustrating how important and powerful those relationships were to her overall time abroad and only occasionally did she respond with “I” or “me” during her interview.

In addition to the close relationships she developed, Rachel also found the attention she received from Italian males to be “good positive reinforcement” in seeking independence and confidence; two outcomes she wanted to attain during her semester abroad. The attention she received and the relationships she developed were critical to her study abroad experience and to her development of self-authorship.

#### **Who am I?**

Throughout her interview, Rachel shared many moments of discontentment and dissatisfaction in her life as a student in the United States. Rachel thought spending a

semester in another country would afford her with the opportunity to “find herself.” She was feeling, “lost in America. I was sick of school, I was sick of where I lived. I didn’t know really what I wanted to do with myself”. Her time in Italy provided her with a certain sense of confidence, something she was intentionally seeking in Italy.

I felt like I was a changed person when I left [Italy]. I felt like I was more confident and, Italians are really confident in themselves. I think that kind of rubbed off on [me]. And just being on my own and having to talk to people in Italian... I think it made me more confident.

Rachel shared several instances that illustrated her increased confidence, but several of her reflections from her time abroad emphasized the dependency she felt on relationships in her life. The close relationships Rachel developed with two of her roommates resulted in a feeling of personal satisfaction because she “[liked] myself better when I was there than when I’m back [in the United States].”

After returning home, Rachel’s struggled with the relationships she had with her new roommates and found herself reflecting on the impact the relationships she had in Florence had on her.

Who I am right now is different than how I felt I would be in America when I was in Italy because I feel like I’m not too keen on [myself] anymore. I wish I was the person that I felt like I was in Florence.

The person Rachel was in Florence, and the person she wanted to be in the U.S., was influenced by the relationships with her roommates and the attention she received from Italian men. She found the attention to be “good positive reinforcement.” She was more “sure of myself and I was more sure of what I wanted than I am [in the U.S.]” She was heavily reliant on external factors in finding personal happiness and confidence.

### **How do I know?**

Rachel's courses had an impact on the way she understood and made sense of situations she experienced in Italy. Her psychology course in particular helped her gain a stronger understanding of American culture, something she had not recognized before her time in Italy.

When we all came [to Florence] we didn't really think that America had a culture. There's so many different people [in the U.S.]. We knew we were going somewhere that had a culture. But then when we left, our psychology teacher pointed out the fact that we were all very much aware now of what the culture in America is. We talked about the differences between Americans, and it was good to have that comparison because I think a lot of people didn't think America had a real culture.

Rachel's classes were influential to how she understood aspects of Italian and American culture. In addition, she also found some courses helped her understand issues she was experiencing with relationships she developed in Florence. Rachel shared the following example from her psychology course.

[We] took this personality test and [two of my roommates and I] came out as the exact same personality type. So we had [our other roommate] take it and [she] wasn't the same personality type. I think that just strengthened our bond together. We knew that we all, we were all pretty similar.

Rachel relied on her coursework and was not able to create new knowledge or understanding independent of external factors. *How she knew* was still heavily reliant on courses and authority and she was not able to find her own vision or understanding during her semester abroad.

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

Rachel shared many experiences that illustrate the dependency she felt on the relationships she had during her time abroad. She became close friends with two of her roommates.

It was nice always having someone to go places with. We'd go grocery shopping together. We'd go to markets together. We would try to walk to school together. So we always had a person to do things with, that we liked. That was really nice.

When asked how she dealt with differences in practices or beliefs, Rachel alluded to the strong relationships she had were a result of the similar personalities shared between her and her roommates. Even though Rachel defined herself through the relationships she had with others, she did recognize the need to end the relationship she had with her boyfriend in the U.S. This was not an easy decision for her, and it added to the difficulty of returning home.

I felt really confident about the fact that I didn't want to be with him. I realized that I didn't really feel the same way about him. So, when I got back it was just comfortable being with him even though I didn't like him in that way any more. And so it was hard to break up with him for the last time because I didn't really have anything else that was comfortable or anyone else that I could go to like that but I knew it was for the best to break up with him.

She also commented on the differences she noticed with friends upon her return to the home. Not knowing whether this was a result of her study abroad experience, or just growing up, Rachel shared:

I've met up with some of my high school friends again, and I realized that we don't really have anything in common other than we went to high school together. But I think that's what a lot of people realize when they grow up anyways.

Rachel defined herself in Florence through the relationships she developed with others who were similar to her. She did not seek new relationships and she did not critically examine the relationships she did develop. She was following external formulas and had not developed to a point of questioning herself or seeking her own internal identity.

### **Summary.**

Rachel's experience in Florence provided her with a sense of confidence and fulfillment. This fulfillment was temporary as she spoke frequently of the heightened sense of confidence taking place only in Florence, where she had developed a strong self-definition based on external others. The context of her study abroad program, the relationships with similar others, and the academic influence were all significant factors that contributed Rachel's happiness abroad. She had not yet come to a point of seeking an internal identity, an internal vision, or internal approval in her life and this contributed to the temporary satisfaction she experienced for one semester.

### **Stacey**

#### **Critical Experiences.**

Stacey's critical experience abroad was the time she was afforded to be on her own. Being by herself challenged Stacey to look more closely at her own personal development. Her semester in Florence, Italy served as the first time she took the opportunity for thorough self-reflection. She found that it took being "really on my own [to see] who I really was."

#### **Who am I?**

Stacey recognized the context of Florence provided her with an opportunity to find her own vision in who she wanted to be. Spending a semester abroad, independent from her family and friends, helped her acquire a stronger internal identity.

Culture shock didn't make me have a huge epiphany about life. I realized a couple things here and there and things I had been thinking about before just kind of came to life. When I came back [to the United States] I could look back and see it happened because I was in Florence on my own. It didn't exactly change who I was, just made me realize some things about myself.

Stacey was the only study participant whose internship responsibilities required her to be proficient in another language. She humbly reflected upon her internship and felt “proud of that. At the time it wasn’t a huge deal but now that I look back at it, I’m like “yeah I went to work everyday in a company where I don’t speak their language.”

In addition to the confidence she gained through her internship, her advanced language skills also put her in situations that made her feel more confident. Stacey went on a few dates with Italian-speaking men while abroad and these experiences resulted in her learning more about herself. These opportunities pushed her to recognize her own self-definition and approval through her ability to navigate foreign relationships.

### **How do I know?**

Stacey’s semester abroad was an opportunity for her to reflect upon her own opinions and ideas and she was actively seeking her own vision. One of her goals was to form her own opinions about things and she assumed “experiencing different types of people and different attitudes about Americans and Europeans” would give her the chance to create her own ideas.

Since being in college, Stacey had noticed a shift in the relationship she had with her parents, as her opinions and ideas drifted away from theirs. She felt herself drifting towards a stronger internal vision and was struggling to rely on authority (her parents) for her beliefs.

My parents are more traditional and conservative. We have more Christian values and that kind of thing. So that’s kind of hard when certain things about the Bible – gay rights and everything. It’s been harder for me to grow up with these two paradoxes – what my parents think and what I think – being a college student in a liberal campus where I face these kinds of situations every day, and I feel differently about them than my parents do.

Crediting both her study abroad experience and the fact she was “growing up,” Stacey found it comfortable to discuss her beliefs with her parents and was discovering the ability to merge their traditional ideas with her own.

We had never really talked much about it, but I think since I’m getting older it’s easier now. We kind of talked about my personal religious beliefs and things that have changed since I’ve grown up so, I mean, I still have a lot of the same values as them but more like a modern approach. I feel like I’ve been able to take a lot of the great things that they’ve taught me and also form my own opinions as I’ve gotten older.

In addition to discovering her own values, Stacey’s experience living with an Italian host family influenced ideas she held on the “institution of the family.” The time families spent together, the time spent sharing meals, and the value of food were main differences Stacey reflected upon. She wanted to be sure to instill these values with her future family and wanted “make time to slow down and connect as a family, and teach my kids how to cook.” External authority influenced this vision but Stacey felt confident in bringing these values into her future vision.

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

After returning to the United States, Stacey recognized changes in relationships she had with professors. The relationships she had with professors in Florence were more informal than her relationships with U.S. professors. Since returning home, she found herself, “[Reaching] out to professors more, just using their expertise, which I never really thought about before.” She was no longer intimidated by authority and was not concerned with being approved by her professors.

Stacey reflected upon small changes she noticed in friendships as well. She noticed changes in the discussions she was having with friends, but did not attribute this to her study abroad experience: “I think that’s just part of getting older too; we’re going

out into the real world and stuff so it's kind of natural that we'll be bringing up deeper issues.”

### **Summary.**

Stacey's experience in Florence was influential on the plans and vision she had for her own future. Her time in Florence influenced her to “stop and enjoy life along the way. [American] culture doesn't work that way. If you don't keep up, it's going to leave you behind. It's hard to balance those things. I'm trying to bring both of them together.” Her study abroad experience created a *Crossroads* opportunity for her that influenced her ability to seek an internal definition.

### **Will**

#### **Critical Experiences.**

Will wanted to be a veterinarian as a young child and “from the third grade up until I went to Sydney I knew exactly what I had to do to be a veterinarian. I had my four-year plan in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.” Will identified his most critical experience during his semester in Sydney as the realization that he could follow a less traditional path to obtain this career goal. His internship in Sydney gave him the opportunity to leave an environment that made him focus on external approval and definition. His time in Sydney let him focus on finding approval and definition internally and let him, “trust myself a little bit more than I did.”

The relationships Will developed in his internship influenced this new realization. He met and worked alongside successful veterinarians, who had spent time enjoying and studying other things in their lives. Reflecting upon this, he said:

I realized that these people have a very great passion for being [a vet]. They really like their jobs, but they really like a lot of other things too. And that is OK. Then I started thinking, “how can I do this?”

His supervisor had taken the “quick way” – a four-year program in Australia versus an eight-year program in the United States – to become a vet. One of his other colleagues “got her first degree in fine arts and sculpture and that’s why she’s an excellent surgeon.” Will had never before been “afforded the permission to study something other than chemistry. It made me look at other ways that could get to the end, and I’m so much happier.”

Will’s internship experience was also critical to the self-confidence he developed in his ability to practice medicine on animals. He shared one critical moment when his supervisor supported and trusted his ability to treat a dog in a medical emergency. A black Labrador was brought in for eating poison, and Will’s supervisor asked, “Will, do you know what to do with a Decon poisoning?” He answered correctly. Then “[My supervisor threw] this black lab at me and shouts ‘19 kilos’... I wound up saving my first animal ever.”

Will’s experiences in Sydney affected his pathway to becoming a vet. Since returning home, he has completed all of the required courses to apply to veterinary school and has changed his major from animal science to psychology.

### **Who am I?**

Will’s semester in Sydney allowed him to trust himself independently and around new people and pushed him to “figure out things” for himself. Being removed from his university’s stressful animal science program influenced his confidence and allowed him to gain new perspectives. Being away from his parents, advisers and professors and

“taking an art class and working three days a week in a small Italian suburb of Sydney,” gave him a lot of different perspectives beyond those he was used to within the field of animal science. These changes forced him to seek his own definition and he came back ready to make some adjustments.

Will’s experience in the animal science program was very competitive and he spent a lot of time comparing himself to others. This resulted in Will not having a lot of confidence in his own talents and abilities. His experience in Sydney gave him professional experience, and he gained confidence in his knowledge and skills to work with animals. His supervisor in Sydney had him working alongside her from the very beginning, and her encouragement and support gave Will the ability to learn from his mistakes. The relationship he had with his supervisor was mutually constructed. Will did not focus entirely on seeking her approval, but instead found internal approval through the trust and patience she gave him.

### **How do I know?**

After returning home and meeting with his university’s career counseling center, Will realized that there were other paths he could follow and still reach his career goals. He had “surpassed all the science [pre-requisites] by now, and [changing my major] just affords me so many more options. [Vet schools] accept any degree. You can be a music major as long as you have the [pre-requisites].”

Changing his major was a decision Will was “100% sure I would not have made without going to Sydney. My eyes opened that much wider, and it’s turned out to be something incredibly positive.” Will had previously relied on his home university’s expectations of how to become a vet. His experience in Sydney allowed him to question

his own plans and he returned home confident in pursuing his own vision in becoming an animal doctor.

In addition to figuring out new pathways, Will also recognized the need for work-life balance in his life, something he did not feel he previously had in the United States. Prior to studying in Sydney, Will never questioned the expectations put on him. Since returning to the U.S., he was now more “focused on balance” and wanted to “spread out my eggs a little instead of putting them into one basket. [This realization] was probably the greatest thing to happen in my entire education.” Authority influenced Will’s change in vision, but he was able to critically examine his goals within the context of his semester in Sydney, thus resulting in academic changes towards his path to veterinary school.

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

Will’s semester in Sydney was the first experience he had living with roommates. His roommates were from various parts of the United States and had very different behaviors and ideas from Will. His respectful expectations of how people should treat one another helped Will through the adjustment process.

If you can’t accept me you respect me. I just hope people can do the same thing. I have kind of this very liquid relationship with the beliefs and morals. I have mine and I like mine, but you can have yours and like yours too.

Will did not reflect on changes he noticed with direct relationships in his life. He did not notice any changes in friendships or with his family and only reflected on the importance of respect in future relationships he was to develop.

### **Summary.**

Will's semester in Sydney turned out to be very influential on his academic and professional path as well as on his personal happiness. He realized how many variables life had and how much he could control those. His semester was a time for *Crossroads*, which influenced his ability to question his plans without relying on external voices. After discovering this, he found "A little less control and a little more comfort, which I wouldn't normally think would coincide."

### **Cross-case Analysis**

All seven participants reflected upon critical experiences that were influential during their study abroad experience. This section summarizes these critical experiences and presents the common intrapersonal, interpersonal, and epistemological developmental themes identified through participants' reflections.

#### **Critical Experiences.**

Several situations and program components were identified as influential factors in the participants' experiences abroad. These include being independent, internship experiences, navigating complex situations, and developing relationships. All the participants acknowledged or identified at least two of the following themes as affecting situations during their semester abroad.

#### ***Being Independent.***

All of the participants recognized the influence that "being independent" or "being removed from..." had on their experience abroad. Living independently and being removed from parental, academic, or societal expectations were critical to the participants. This independence allowed Ann to discover and formulate her own identity.

It allowed Will to “trust myself in a new city and figure out things for myself.” Lacey’s semester of independence allowed her to “see what I could find out about myself in that situation when I’m not influenced by the everyday distractions, when I was just totally learning about myself.” And Stacey was able to “look back and see that that’s why [finding who I was] happened. I was in Florence on my own.”

The opportunity to successfully live in and adapt to an independent environment was critical for all the participants. It enabled them to discover what they were capable of accomplishing without the help of familiar authority or external others. For some participants, time alone allowed them to craft their own identity. And for all the participants, being removed from the relationships they had in the U.S. affected the way they understood relationships in their life as well as relationships they wanted in their future.

### ***Internship Experiences.***

A majority of the participants interned during their time abroad. Those who did reflected upon situations from their internships that were influential to their experience. Alexa’s internship challenged the way she thought of education and lifestyle decisions and resulted in her critically evaluating her values and life choices. Will’s internship and the relationship he had with his supervisor increased his confidence in working with animals and interacting with authority. Ellen’s, Lacey’s, Will’s and Ann’s internships all confirmed their motivation to complete their academic program and to pursue their career goals.

The participants identified their internship experiences as contributing to their ability to question authority, and for others it provided a context for participants to

recognize their ability to take responsibility. The internship experiences allowed students to question their own plans, move towards discovering an internal identity, and for some motivated students to find approval internally instead of seeking approval through external others.

### ***Navigating Complex Situations.***

Many of the participants successfully navigated complex situations during their time abroad. Lacey's experience of presenting to an audience of strangers during *World AIDS Day* increased her confidence to lead and educate. Ann's ability to find inner strength and remain calm in a potentially dangerous situation gave her the confidence to take care of herself in unfamiliar situations. Ellen's experiences in the hospital reinforced her drive to study and practice medicine, especially after witnessing severe injuries and death.

These complex situations forced the participants to reflect upon their own abilities, awareness, and perceptions without the support of a familiar external network. The moments of dissonance that occurred during the semester prompted many of the participants to reach *The Crossroads* stage and this influenced their motivation to seek internal visions, identity, and approval.

### ***Developing Relationships.***

Several of the participants developed relationships during their time abroad and identified these as being influential to their learning or experiences abroad. Ellen's relationship with Violet led her to re-examine her values and also reinforced her desire to become a doctor. Rachel discovered the impact friendships and relationships had on her

personal happiness. And Ann recognized that developing relationships with people from various backgrounds was not only possible but also beneficial in her life.

The relationships developed abroad expanded some of the participants' awareness of themselves. For others, the relationships challenged participants to re-evaluate the bonds they had in the U.S. And for most of the participants, the study abroad experience influenced them to turn inwards to their internal voice to mediate the relationships they wanted to construct in their life.

### **Who am I?**

The context of the study abroad program affected the participants' ability to recognize their internal identity. The following themes were common in several of the participants' reflections and stories and illustrate how their study abroad experiences prompted many to critically self-reflect on the individual they wanted to become. These themes include exploration and understanding of self, increased autonomy, and shift in personal values.

#### ***Exploration and Understanding of Self.***

All of the participants experienced situations abroad that forced them to see a need for a stronger internal identity. The internship experiences provided several of the participants with the opportunity to explore their academic major or career goals. For all of the internship participants, the internship experience confirmed the type of career they were seeking. While this was the same for Will, his internship experience also influenced the path he would take to reach his goal of becoming a veterinary doctor.

Spending a semester removed from their usual environment gave the participants an opportunity to reflect upon themselves, removed from the pressures and expectations

they all had on their home campus. While the participants will still continue on their journey of developing self-authorship, the opportunity to explore and better understand one's self prompted them to develop stronger internal thoughts and ideas of who they wanted to be. The most noticeable changes to the individuals included increased confidence and independence, which changed the way six of the seven participants viewed themselves and increased their ability to depend on themselves, instead of depending on external others for support.

***Increased Autonomy.***

The study abroad experiences gave the participants an opportunity to better understand and explore themselves as individuals. The opportunity to self-reflect resulted in most of the participants developing a strong sense of autonomy. Being removed from their academic, familial, or U.S. societal expectations and exploring themselves in the environment of their study abroad program stimulated the participants to become confident individuals.

This increased autonomy was influential for participants like Ann to develop her own identity. She removed herself from her familial and U.S. social expectations and realized who she wanted to be was not the person her parents and friends wanted her to be. Lacey's and Will's increased autonomy resulted in them questioning their U.S. academic expectations and they returned home ready to follow new paths independent of those previously laid out for them. And Alexa's increased autonomy gave her the confidence to decide the type of career and life-style choices she was going to make in her future.

### ***Shift in Personal Values.***

Being removed from their usual friends, family, and environment affected several of the participants' values, priorities, or life practices. Five of the seven participants noted changes in their values and practices and tied this change directly to their experience abroad.

Alexa recognized a change in her personal practices and priorities upon her return home and realized, "I learned to exist perfectly fine with much less and so now a lot of stuff feels really unnecessary." Other participants returned home ready to make changes in how they interacted with family members. For example, Stacey's experience with her Italian host family forced her to "Really take the time to stop what [I'm] doing to enjoy food and family time together." Increased value on family was also an important outcome for Ellen who realized that "it's different things [like having dinner with my grandma] that are starting to be meaningful to me and that's wonderful. [Life] feels a lot better."

### **How do I know?**

The epistemological development that occurred in the seven participants was not as evident as the interpersonal and intrapersonal development that occurred during their study abroad semester. Some participants indicated heavy reliance on authority in how they understood situations from their time abroad. However, for others there was evidence of a change in how other participants viewed and relied upon authority. Prior to their study abroad experience several of the participants were reliant on authority to direct them through aspects of their decision-making, personal choices, and knowledge acquisition. Being removed from that usual authority led the participants to start seeking

their own beliefs, understandings, and guided them to turn inwards to find understanding. The following components were identified as influential in *how* the participants knew.

### ***Curriculum and Faculty.***

All of the participants shared at least one reflection on the academic structure or support their study abroad program provided them. Their courses were often a catalyst to increased understanding in certain situations they experienced abroad and illustrate that several of the participants were still heavily reliant on authority for knowledge acquisition. This was evident through Rachel who defined American culture using the examples brought forth by her Italian psychology professor. Stacey's professor was also influential in how she understood the behavior of Italian men. After questioning the behavior and the practices she observed over the semester, Stacey's professor contradicted her reaction and she succumbed to his opinion stating, "[My professor] was saying that, so it kind of makes sense."

Other participants found the curriculum challenging and contradictory to the knowledge or expectations they had previously accepted. After hearing the experience and values brought forth by the female Islamic guest lecturer, Ellen did not feel as though the woman had represented the entire Islamic faith. This experience inspired Ellen to research the faith independently to gain a better understanding.

### ***Co-Curricular Components.***

The internship experiences and living arrangements were influential to how many of the participants made sense of themselves and their beliefs. For some participants, these situations challenged them to defend certain ideas or practices. And for others it challenged them to examine their previous ideas or practices.

Lacey's experience with her host sister in Nairobi led her to defend her faith and her religious practices. She did so articulately and politely, but the situation challenged Lacey to re-evaluate her Lutheran upbringing. Ellen also experienced challenging moments with her Kenyan host mother who believed that divorced American parents "didn't care about [their children] because they didn't stay together." Ellen defended the relationship she had with her divorced parents and shared her own life examples with her Kenya host mother.

The students who participated in internships were regularly in situations that challenged the way they thought about values, beliefs or lifestyle choices. For some participants, this experience reinforced their own confidence and they were able to recognize their ability to find internal beliefs and visions in their life. Ellen experienced several traumatic situations during her internship in the rural Kenya hospital. She realized she did not have the proper training to go forward with certain procedures, but she had a strong internal voice in questioning the way some of the Kenyan doctors conducted their practice. Will's experience with his internship influenced the vision he saw for his future and he returned home ready to make changes because he knew that his current path was not how he wanted to pursue his career of becoming an animal doctor.

### **What relationships do I want with others?**

There were two distinct circumstances the participants encountered abroad that influenced the changes that occurred with their interpersonal development. For some students, being removed from the relationships in the U.S influenced how they wanted to construct future relationships in their lives. Others were motivated to re-evaluate their

current relationships as a result of the practices and values they encountered during their time abroad.

### ***Constructing New Relationships.***

Ann presented the most significant change, both personally and among all the participants, in her interpersonal development. Prior to her semester in Sydney, her Asian-American community determined most of Ann's relationships. Ann discovered that "[I learned so much] living with people who were so completely different from me." And she returned home ready to develop new and diverse relationships in her life.

Alexa also shared thoughts on changes she noticed taking place with current friendships. She wanted to seek people with similar values and beliefs to hers and felt that she knew there "[were] other people [in the world] with similar hopes and dreams that I have and I'll find them." Ellen also reflected upon changes she wanted to make with relationships in her life. She wanted to develop relationships that were more than just "fun" with "people that care about things and [who I] can have meaningful conversations [with]."

### ***Renegotiating Existing Relationships.***

Several participants reflected upon the relationships they had with friends in the United States and admitted that they were struggling to find harmony in what may have once been a very strong bond. This was especially apparent with the three students who studied in Kenya. The lifestyle Alexa, Ellen, and Lacey lived during their semester in Kenya challenged them to re-evaluate their friendships and the people they wanted to interact with in their lives. They developed a more active role of bringing themselves into

the relationships they developed with others and these were starting to mutually negotiate how their relationship needs would be met.

These thematic findings are important for study abroad practitioners and educators to understand in order to successfully encourage the development of self-authorship through study abroad. Using these findings can contribute to stronger programs, better support and more powerful experiences for study abroad students. The final section will further discuss the identified themes and how they can be used to influence practice and research in education abroad.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The participants' narratives demonstrate the variety of critical experiences that occurred during their semester abroad. With the exception of the programs' internships, few of the critical experiences identified were directly influenced by programmatic components. Instead, being removed from their familiar environment, relationships, and expectations contributed to the participants' critical experiences. Navigating and reflecting upon these experiences illustrates the potential study abroad programs have in contributing to the development of self-authorship in study abroad students.

Some of the critical experiences shared by the participants took place during moments of dissonance. This supports Pizzolato's research that found the first movement towards self-authorship could often be associated with a critical experience, or experiences that "challenged students' current ways of knowing and conceptions of self" (2003, p. 803). The context of a study abroad program is an ideal opportunity for educators and practitioners to create an environment that simulates *The Crossroads*. Doing so can influence the students to begin seeking their own internal vision and identity and can influence the way they construct relationships without external approval. The following sections will demonstrate what study abroad researchers, educators, and practitioners can do to strengthen study abroad programs by creating more developmentally enriching opportunities.

### **Implications for Future Research**

In the beginning stages of this study, one of the original three research questions sought to identify specific factors or moments that contributed to a critical experience. I

assumed that the participants would be able to identify particular events or programmatic factors that influenced these experiences. However, after finishing the interviews, I discovered that students were much more reflective upon larger, more extended experiences that affected changes or personal development.

Measurement tools like the Self-Authorship Survey (SAS) or the Experience Survey (ES) may help to identify specific factors that contribute to student learning experiences abroad. The format of these tools could allow for more time for the participants to reflect and remember situations from their time abroad. This was not possible in the interview context as participants had only a limited amount of time to respond to the interview questions. Using these tools may allow future researchers to identify the facilitators or catalysts of critical incidents or discover what programmatic factors contribute to moments of dissonance on a study abroad program.

In addition to finding the specific catalysts that influence learning and development, a longitudinal study that followed students through their experience abroad could better demonstrate the progression of self-authorship that occurs over the duration of an entire study abroad program. Using a tool like the SAS or ES prior to a student's departure as well as upon their return from an experience may help better identify the self-authorship development that occurs in study abroad. Researchers could learn how study abroad experiences influence the way students create meaning. In addition, conducting an ethnographic study in a study abroad program location may allow a researcher to specifically discover what situations affect how students make sense of their experience during a study abroad program and how those situations affect their development of self-authorship.

## Implications for Practice

The critical experiences and relationships reflected upon in the participants' interviews indicate that the study abroad experience has the potential to be a moment of *Crossroads* for students. Study abroad practitioners and educators can use this information to create and implement programs that expose students to stimulating situations that places them into reasonable levels of disequilibrium. In addition, study abroad advisers can also play an important role in challenging the expectations and assumptions students have prior to leaving for their program.

Table 4 suggests strategies for how practitioners can strengthen the developmental opportunities for study abroad students by creating *The Crossroads* in study abroad programs. It is important to be mindful of the cultural sensitivity necessary to implement these strategies. Cultural practices and beliefs must be recognized and understood within the context of the host culture before such strategies can be implemented.

| <i>The Crossroads</i>  | <b>Developmentally effective study abroad experiences and advising practices</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>How do I know?</b><br>Question plans; see need for own vision   | Create and implement a multiple-disciplinary curriculum that introduces and utilizes various perspectives. This type of curriculum will encourage students to think about how they're constructing knowledge and making sense of the topic and how their assumptions may be contributing to their understanding.  |
| <b>Who am I?</b><br>Realize dilemma of external definition; see need for internal identity   | Require students to participate in an experience that puts them in an independent and unfamiliar situation, such as an independent volunteer or service learning experience. This can encourage students to reflect upon their own identity and challenge them to navigate situations independent from other students. In addition, being independent from other study abroad students can allow them time to reflect upon their experience and their identity within the context of their study abroad experience. |
| <b>What relationships do I want with others?</b><br>Realize dilemma of focusing on external approval; see need to bring self to relationship | Through the curricular and co-curricular activities, ensure students are given the opportunity to develop relationships with host nationals in the study abroad country, including the staff and professors of the program. Doing so encourages and challenges the students to assess their own background through interactions with diverse ideas and others.  |

Table 4 Strategies for Practice

Many of the implications for practice demonstrate the importance for U.S. study abroad offices to provide resources and support for students upon their return. As indicated in several of the interviews, students continue to process their experience after the program ends. It can be difficult for students to find meaningful and receptive outlets to help process their thoughts and feelings. Providing support and resources for students is important as they continue to make sense of the experiences they had as well as to better understand the personal changes that occurred during their study abroad experience.

Supportive resources can include implementing on-campus discussion groups to provide returned students with an opportunity to discuss their experiences and reflections with advisers and peers. It is important for students to engage with peers and to discuss their experiences with advisers who have gone through similar transformative experiences. This activity provides returned students with an outlet to critically reflect upon and share moments from their time abroad, something they may be struggling to do with friends and family who have never experienced similar opportunities. In addition, encouraging on-line journaling opportunities that engage students while abroad and upon return can provide them with a holistic narrative and reflection of their international experience. This not only gives students an outlet to document the various experiences they have abroad, but it can also give them an opportunity to reflect upon changes they notice in themselves as a result of their study abroad experience.

As illustrated through the seven participants' narratives, study abroad experiences are powerful opportunities that can influence the development of self-authorship in students. Increasing the understanding and utilization of self-authorship in the field of

education abroad is important for practitioners to better prepare, engage, and develop students during their study abroad experiences.

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## Appendix A: IRB Approval

### UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

*Twin Cities Campus*

*Human Research Protection Program  
Office of the Vice President for Research*

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01/11/2011

Emelee Volden  
Ofc of International Prog  
Room 94m BlegH  
269 19th Ave SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

RE: "Critical Incidents Abroad: The Development of Self-Authorship in Study Abroad"  
IRB Code Number: **1012P94232**

Dear Ms. Volden:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your response to its stipulations. Since this information satisfies the federal criteria for approval at 45CFR46.111 and the requirements set by the IRB, final approval for the project is noted in our files. Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent form received January 10, 2011.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 23 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

For your records and for grant certification purposes, the approval date for the referenced project is January 5, 2011 and the Assurance of Compliance number is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003). Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal; approval will expire one year from that date. You will receive a report form two months before the expiration date. If you would like us to send certification of approval to a funding agency, please tell us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

As Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Unanticipated problems or serious unexpected adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur.

The IRB wishes you success with this research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at 612-626-5654.

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. How did you decide to participate on the program?
  - a. What were the most significant reasons for choosing the program?
  - b. Who else was involved with the decision making process?
  
2. Please describe the most significant learning experience you had during your time abroad.

(This can be a learning experience in any context – classroom, internship, studying, etc.)

  - a. Why do you identify that moment as the most significant?
  - b. What factors do you think influenced this situation?
  - c. Were there other people involved in this learning experience?
  
3. Thinking about your learning experiences, please share a time when you felt challenged **by** what you were learning. (This could be through your coursework, through relationships, internship experience, community, etc.)
  - a. How were you challenged? / Why do you think you felt challenged?
  - b. Did you find yourself consulting with others about the knowledge you were learning?
  
4. Please describe a time when you felt challenged **in the way** you thought about or believed in something.
  - a. What caused you to feel challenged in your thoughts/beliefs?
  - b. How did you feel about this?
  - c. What was the outcome from this situation?
  
5. Please share a situation you experienced that involved some level of distress or anxiety.
  - a. How did this situation challenge you and why was the situation challenging?
  - b. How did you feel after the situation had ended?
  
6. Please share a situation you experienced that required you to make an important decision.
  - a. How did you make this decision? (By yourself, with others' input, etc.)
  - b. Looking back, would you have made the same decision?
  
7. Please describe your living arrangement in **[City/Country]**.
  - a. What was your relationship like with your roommates/host family?
  - b. Over the course of your semester abroad, were there changes in the relationship you had with your roommates/host family?
  
8. What differences did you notice in perspectives, practices, and beliefs between you and your roommates/host family?
  - a. How did you find your own practices and perspectives were challenged or influenced by your roommates/host family?

9. Please share an experience that involved interaction between you and a person from [City], other than your host family/roommate.
  - a. How did it make you feel?; How did you make sense of this interaction?
  - b. Did this interaction impact specific thoughts, ideas, or practices you felt strongly towards?
10. Please describe your internship experience.
  - a. How was your internship influential towards your overall experience?
  - b. Please share a moment from your internship experience you found to be important/stressful.
  - c. What was the result from that moment of stress or importance?
11. Is there a situation(s) you can reflect upon from your time abroad when you felt challenged about yourself as a US American?
  - a. What caused this situation to occur?; How did this make you feel?
12. What changes do you notice in how you think of yourself as a U.S. American now and how you thought of yourself before you went abroad?
  - a. Changes in you as a male/female; You as a college student?
13. Reflecting on the situations and memories from your time abroad, what are the differences that you notice now in how you view or interpret daily parts of your life in MN?
14. Please describe differences you've noticed in the relationships you have with people in your life.
  - a. Were these differences affected by situations you experience abroad?
15. Have you experienced situations upon your return the US that have been hard to understand or deal with?
  - a. What do you think caused this? When & Why?
16. Please generally describe how you have changed between August of 2010 and now.
  - a. Was this change a result of your experience abroad?; What had the most impact on this change?
17. What impact do you think your study abroad experience will have on future decisions you make?
18. How critical do you think your study abroad experience was to your overall college experience thus far, or overall?