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# The Experience of Transgender Students in Study Abroad Programming

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THE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN STUDY ABROAD  
PROGRAMMING

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PIM 77

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in  
International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018

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## ABSTRACT

Studying abroad has become a highly valued experience for college students, though the types of participants that study abroad programming attracts tend to be fairly homogenous (Havergal, 2016; IIE, 2017). Sojourners who fall outside this homogeneity tend to go unrepresented in study abroad literature and research (Engel, 2017; IIE, 2017). This research will attempt to provide the experiences of one of these unrepresented groups by the answering the following research questions: *What is the experience of transgender students in study abroad programming? How can knowledge of this experience inform effective practices to provide transgender students with an experience equitable to that of their cisgender peers?* By drawing on the qualitative research study capturing the experiences of four transgender identifying sojourners and utilizing a conceptual framework informed by transgender identity development theory (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014), transgender identity affirmation theory (Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002), and the developmental theory of emergent adulthood (Arnett, 2000), this research demonstrates that study abroad programming has a demonstrably positive effect on transgender students, but comes with a risk to their mental health. The research will first present experiences of the four participants that will help describe potential moments that other transgender identifying sojourners might face during three distinct phases of the study abroad process: Pre-departure, in-country, and re-entry. Next, the research will also present specific advice suggested by the four participants as possible methods to aid in the experiences of future transgender identifying students participating in study abroad programs. Finally, the research will present concluding thoughts on the overall experience of transgender sojourners and the various methods providers can utilize to aid in the positive experience of future sojourners.

## Introduction

Educators have valued the intercultural experience and awareness that study abroad provides participants of all ages and backgrounds for years (Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014). Former United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1958) stated, “I believe...that the exchange of students...should be vastly expanded. In my opinion [this] could have no other effect than to increase understanding and to make more secure the peace – a just peace, that we all seek” (para. 5). In recent years the importance of study abroad to college students has reached a point where many organizations believe that college curriculums should require all students study abroad to obtain their degree (Goodman & Nevadomski Berdan, 2014). These are noble intentions, and both researchers and practitioners have documented the positive benefits of study abroad for decades (Bohrer, 2016; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Holloway, n. d.). The assumption some might make is that a form of education so universally lauded would be open and inclusive of students of all backgrounds. The reality can seem very different. Current figures estimate that nearly 70 percent of study abroad participants are white women and are nearly five times more likely to come from a high socioeconomic background than students who do not study abroad (Havergal, 2016; IIE, 2017). The existing literature on the barriers that students of color face, the lack of marketing towards male students, and the prohibitively high costs of study programming is both numerous and needed (Comp, 2006; Engel, 2017). This research will focus on another underrepresented study abroad group - students identifying as transgender and/or gender non-binary.

Specific data on the numbers of transgender students is hard to come by, and there is very little existing research in general on the experiences of LGBTQ+<sup>1</sup> students in study abroad programming (Bryant & Soria, 2015). This presents a problem for study abroad providers. First, how can they accurately determine the experience of LGBTQ+ students, particularly transgender students, if the existing research and participation of LGBTQ+ students are so scarce? Second, how can they effectively analyze existing practices to determine if they support LGBTQ+ students or further marginalize them? Third, how can they objectively evaluate marketing and recruitment strategies to judge whether they are attracting or LGBTQ+ students or simply ignoring them?

I agree with President Eisenhower's mandate that the purposeful intercultural and international exchange of students from across the globe would help create a greater understanding between cultures and countries. However, I question if organizations focusing on study abroad programming, from higher education institutions to third party providers, are truly committed to ensuring that this exchange is open and available to students from all walks of life. Because researching the experiences of all underrepresented students in study abroad is a gargantuan task that would take years, I choose to focus solely on researching the experiences of transgender students. This is a marginalized group whose visibility and demand for equal rights and equal representation has increased dramatically in the last decade (Faye, 2018). If, as President Eisenhower says, the exchange of students across the globe is essential for peace, then the exchange of transgender students across the globe is critical to increasing their visibility to other cultures that may not yet understand or respect them. Study abroad programming has a

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<sup>1</sup> The full LGBTQ+ acronym is LGBTQQIP2SAA, or, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, androgynous, and asexual (Milligan, 2014). I want to recognize this and indicate that I use LGBTQ+ for the sake of brevity and not to intentionally exclude any persons who might identify as a part of the larger whole.

duty and a responsibility to recruit these students and provide them with an experience that is no different from what any other student receives.

In conducting this research, I aim to contribute to the existing literature and advocate for an increased awareness of the challenges transgender students face when participating in study abroad programming by answering the following research questions: *What is the experience of transgender students in study abroad programming? How can knowledge of this experience inform effective practices to provide transgender students with an experience equitable to that of their cisgender peers?* I will first conduct a review of the literature relevant to this topic.

Because of the lack of literature focusing specifically on transgender students, I must instead make use of literature focusing on the overall LGBTQ+ experience in formal education. I will follow this with the process of how transgender individuals come to acknowledge, accept, and display their gender identity, and finish with the emerging adulthood development theory. My goal is to construct an understanding of how transgender students between the ages of 18 and 25 reconcile their gender identity against a societal paradigm that views the male/female gender binary as “normal” and anything divergent from that as “other” (Oswald, Marks, & Bloom, 2005; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012) and apply this understanding to a study abroad experience. I will also use this literature review to make explicit the gaps in the research on transgender sojourners and why this proposed research is necessary. Next, I will present the methodology and design of my study, which I will follow with the presentation of the findings of my research, focusing on three distinct phases of a study abroad program: Pre-departure, in-country, and re-entry. I will also address specific strategies students and providers alike should understand transgender identifying students might find effective. I will then conclude the research with a final synthesis of the overall results and suggestions the research implies.



## Relevant Literature

### Contextual Background

Understanding the development of gender identity requires understanding certain terms and statistics. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) defines *gender identity* as a person's personal understanding of being a man or a woman, but also acknowledges that, for some, gender identity does not necessarily fit neatly into either of these boxes (GLAAD, n. d.). Being *transgender* is a person's sense that their gender identity differs from the gender assigned at birth (Altilio & Otis-Green, 2011; APA, n. d.; GLAAD, n. d.) while being *cisgender* refers to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the gender assigned at birth (Valens, 2018). Being *gender non-binary* is a person who identifies as neither male or female, but rather blends certain traits of both genders, or rejects both genders and instead identifies as something separate from both (NCTE, 2018). Recent research suggests that about 1.4 million citizens in the United States identify as transgender, about 0.6 percent of the country's population (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). Transgender students face varying barriers in their education including lack of administrative support, restricted access to facilities that conform to their gender identity, and rampant bullying (Burns, Leitch, & Hughes, 2016; Ettachfini, 2016; NCTE, n. d.). Transgender students are also more likely than their cisgender peers to attempt or successfully commit suicide, experience sexual assault, or become a victim of physical assault or murder (AIUSA, n. d.; HRC, n. d.; Mustanski & Liu, 2013). It is also worth noting that, between 2013 and 2017, transgender women of color made up nearly 75 percent of all homicides involving a transgender person in the United States (Weissman, 2017). This is a population that, despite making large strides in equality and representation, continues to face increased risks of serious physical and mental harm.

Resources on LGBTQ+ students in study abroad are rare, and resources focusing specifically on transgender students in study abroad are even rarer. Because of this, I must rely on research that focuses on the general LGBTQ+ experience in educational environments. Under normal circumstances, I would find this approach inherently problematic. The lesbian experience is different from the gay experience is different from the bisexual experience is different from the transgender experience and so on. I find it misguided to assume that one uniform approach will work for every sojourner who identifies somewhere under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. However, due to the lack of research, I do believe it necessary to review what researchers have found about the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in educational environments to develop effective strategies to accommodate transgender students.

### **LGBTQ+ Educational Experience**

Existing scholarly literature on the LGBTQ+ experience in study abroad programming is hard to come by. Specific data on the number of LGBTQ+ students participating in a study abroad program is even harder to find. The Institute of International Education's (IIE) annual report on figures and statistics in study abroad, *Open Doors* (2017), includes no information on numbers of self-identified LGBTQ+ students undertaking study abroad programs. In another report published for IIE, Engel (2017) looks at the impact of study abroad on underrepresented students but focuses almost solely on students of color from low socio-economic backgrounds. The phrase "LGBT" appears only twice in the entire document, though I should mention the utilization comes in a call to expand the existing research on the impact of study abroad to LGBTQ+ identifying students.

There is quite a bit of existing literature about the experience of LGBTQ+ students in the K-12 world. Most contain similar findings: LGBTQ+ students are frequent targets of harassment

and are at higher risk of failure to complete high school (Goodrich & Luke, 2014). Some research contains more disturbing findings. Adelman and Woods (2006) found that the presence of a teacher or administrator who is known to be anti-LGBTQ+ can stifle any attempt from students to stand up to anti-LGBTQ+ harassment they witness at school. They argue that these attitudes on the part of school staff and faculty create an environment where some students feel empowered to harass LGBTQ+ identifying students while others feel unwilling to help because of the perceived loss of social standing or administrative reprisal.

Most research is uniform in agreeing that the presence of supportive faculty and LGBTQ+ focused programming, like Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), have a demonstrably positive effect on the chances of LGBTQ+ success in the K-12 world (Adelman & Woods, 2006; Goodrich & Luke, 2014; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013). It is worth noting that Toomey, McGuire, and Russell (2012) found that schools with active GSAs experienced more anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment than those who did not. The caveat these researchers introduce is that the schools that need GSAs may be schools with a much more polarized and anti-LGBTQ+ atmosphere. LGBTQ+ students at these schools might feel they need the presence of a GSA to have a safe outlet to socialize with like-minded peers. Students who do not experience anti-LGBTQ+ harassment might not feel the need for these outlets.

Though most researchers agree that there is still a substantial lack of research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ students, common threads emerging from existing research point to an increased risk of failure to complete high school, and most agree that the presence of positive LGBTQ+ role models or organizations correlates with an increased chance of success for LGBTQ+ students. The findings echo the research on the experiences of other under-represented students: Students of color, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with

disabilities, to name a few. However, I feel that understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ students partaking in study abroad programming requires an understanding of the challenges these students face in more formal educational environments, especially as research on the LGBTQ+ experience in study abroad is scarce. Research on the experience of students identifying as transgender in study abroad is essentially nonexistent.

The research that does exist on the LGBTQ+ experience in study abroad focuses primarily on the numbers of LGBTQ+ identifying students choosing to study abroad and their reasons why. In their quantitative analysis, Bryant and Soria (2015) found that there was not actually a significant difference in the likelihood of LGBTQ+ students choosing to study abroad compared to their peers. What they did find was that LGBTQ+ students would be more likely to participate in specific types of study abroad. For example, students identifying as lesbian, gay, and bisexual were more likely to study abroad within their home university than with another provider compared to their peers. Students identifying as transgender, queer, or questioning were more likely to participate in study abroad programming that focused on service learning, work, or volunteer opportunities. As these findings contested their hypothesis that LGBTQ+ students would be significantly less likely to participate in study abroad programming, they suggest that perhaps LGBTQ+ students choose to study abroad because it allows them to explore their sexual identity in a different culture from what they experience at home.

### **Transgender Identity Development**

Understanding how transgender individuals work through the process of developing their own gender identity is also critical to provide appropriate accommodations and concessions for study abroad programming. For this I lean heavily on the research Levitt and Ippolito (2014) conducted on transgender identity development. Through surveys and interviews with 18

participants who identified across a wide spectrum of non-cisgender identities, they propose that transgender individuals shape their identity through three distinct experiences: Developing tangible methods to authentically represent one's gender, finding ways to demonstrate and display one's gender identity to others, and balancing these needs against an often discriminatory political, social, and economic society. They argue that these themes combined represent a process of developing a complex identity within a fairly strict male/female gender paradigm.

This gender paradigm can present potential developmental issues, particularly involving mental health. Forty percent of transgender identifying citizens of the United States attempt suicide at some point in their life, nearly 10 times higher than the United States national average of 4.6 percent (Herman, Rankin, Keisling, Motter, & Anafi, 2016). Until recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) considered "gender incongruence" a mental illness (Klein, 2018, para. 1), Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, and Blumenstein (2002) developed a process called *transgender identity affirmation* to examine the mental health of transgender individuals. This process supposes that there are four distinct experiences in the social life of a transgender individual that can greatly impact mental health. These experiences include:

- Identity awareness, or hiding one's true self from others versus disclosing one's gender identity;
- Identity performance, where a failure to act upon one's true gender identity can negatively impact mental health while behavioral expressions of one's true gender identity can have a positive impact;
- Identity congruence, or how a transgender person's social groups (friends, lovers, family, etc.) respond or respect a transgender person's gender identity; and

- Identity support, or the ways in which a transgender person's social groups reject or support a transgender person's gender identity.

When paired with the transgender identity development theory proposed by Levitt and Ippolito (2014), there are clear parallels between how a transgender person understands their own identity and how the external reactions of society around them influence the overall experience of a transgender person. Using study abroad as an example, perhaps we have a student who identifies as transgender and, following the framework proposed by Levitt and Ippolito (2014), has developed concrete methods to express their gender identity. When participating in a study abroad program, they join a new social group that reacts negatively to the presence of a transgender student so open with their preferred gender identity. This leads to a period of negative identity congruence (Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002), and the hostile reactions of the other sojourners causes the transgender student to experience a decline in overall mental health. Because the facilitators of this program have never dealt with issues concerning transgender sojourners, they fail to act and accommodate this student, resulting in an experience decidedly more negative than their cisgender peers. International educators have a responsibility to recognize these situations before they occur, ensuring that transgender students have a positive experience. However, because there is a scarcity of research or literature on the transgender study abroad experience, it is difficult to expect study abroad programmers to know how to effectively recognize and address potential signs of negativity from the transgender student.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

Transgender students do not only deal with their burgeoning understanding of their own gender identity. They must also progress through various developmental cycles. Of particular

interest to this research, as it involves the developmental period into which many college students would fall, is a period that Arnett (2000) refers to as *emerging adulthood*. He categorizes this period as existing somewhere between youth and adult (roughly 18 to 25 years old) and by the acquisition of more independence from social roles and expected norms, along with the ability to explore many different directions in both love and work. This period is the time “when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

The distinctive features of emergent adults include negotiating instability, feelings of transition, a heightened focus on the self, and, importantly, identity exploration (Arnett, 2000; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Researchers should view the array of life's possibilities available to emergent adults through the various identities they must also come to terms with, whether it be racial identity, sexual identity, or gender identity. Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett (2005) argue that some emergent adults may find this process difficult without external guidance, while others may embrace the prolonged opportunity to explore their identity into their mid-20s. Still, social constructs often encourage emergent adults to trace their development along heteronormative and cisnormative paradigms, like marriage and parenthood (Morgan, 2013). For LGBTQ+ emergent adults, this presents a problem. Legal and political roadblocks combined with a potentially discriminatory society could prevent these LGBTQ+ emergent adults from achieving these goals.

There is no comprehensive research that looks at the experience of transgender students in study abroad through the lenses of transgender identity development and emerging adulthood. This research will attempt to fill that gap. Transgender students deserve to participate in study

abroad as much as any other student, but the complexities of their gender identity development, combined with the increased risk of mental health stressors and their progression through emerging adulthood, deserve deliberate and thoughtful analysis so that international educators can truly know how to accommodate and provide for these students.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

For this research I utilized a qualitative research methodology to conduct a phenomenological study of transgender students' lived experiences in study abroad programming framed within a critical humanist paradigm. I accomplished this through purposive sampling to select four participants for the research. I engaged each participant in three semi-structured interviews to better understand their lived experiences as transgender identifying individuals who participated in study abroad programming.

### **Methodology Choice and Rationale**

**Qualitative research.** Because my research focused on the lived *experiences* of transgender students in study abroad, I employed qualitative research methodology. Rossman and Rallis (2017) define the purpose of qualitative research as a means through which researchers can learn more about the social world. Qualitative research utilizes observation and conversation to make meaning from the participant's actions and words and applies this to social, behavioral, or cultural contexts (Hogan, Dolan, & Donnelly, 2009). My intent was to use these qualitative methods to explore the experiences of transgender sojourners to determine best practices to ensure their study abroad experience is as impactful as their cisgender peers.

**Critical humanist paradigm.** I researched the experiences of transgender identifying individuals who participated in study abroad programming and analyzed the results of my



research through a critical humanist paradigm. This paradigm combines *interpretivism*, a style of research that tries to understand society from the perspective of individuals, with the notion that *radical change* occurs at the individual level. Critical humanism asserts that social constructs impede the progress of marginalized groups and that individual consciousness is critical in transforming these constructs (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Plummer (2015) argues that humanists believe that no human being is a free-floating individual. Instead, the culture, society, and politics of the moment always influence our idea of our own identity. Our conception of self, he argues, is always changing, framed through these cultural, political, and societal constructs.

This paradigm was a suitable match for my research. Social constructs often force transgender people to define their gender within a male/female gender binary (Oswald, Marks, & Bloom, 2005). The nature of study abroad lends itself to this paradigm. The mix of students and their backgrounds and experiences dictate the atmosphere of a study abroad trip. It is entirely possible for a transgender sojourner to participate in one study abroad program where the other participants are completely open and supportive of their gender identity, only to participate in another program where the students are uncomfortable or even hostile with their form of gender expression. Critical humanism would argue that these atmospheres shape how the transgender sojourner experiences a study abroad program and defines themselves.

**Phenomenological approach.** The phenomenological approach was best suited to explore the lived experiences of transgender identifying participants. A phenomenological approach concerns itself with deriving meaning across a small pool of participants who share a common experience (Creswell, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). My research participants shared two common experiences: identifying under the transgender umbrella *and* having participated in a study abroad program.

Instead of focusing on one participant's experience of one specific event, this approach allowed me to discover the commonalities in the study abroad experiences of my participants. By focusing on only one or two participants I risked creating a false narrative. Incorporating a variety of participants increases both the validity of my research as well as the applicability of the results to the field at large. It is worth noting, however, that phenomenological research intentionally cultivates a small sample of participants, but conducts at least three interviews with each participant, allowing the researcher to explore the participants' experiences in depth and yielding a surplus of information (Lester, 1999). In keeping with this tradition, my sample size remained intentionally small, but by conducting several interviews with each transgender sojourner, I intended to produce rich data to ethically represent their experiences.

### **Participant Sampling and Recruitment**

For this research, I recruited participants that a.) identified as transgender or non-cisgender, b.) had participated in at least one study abroad program when they were, c.) between the age of 18 and 25. Because I was looking for a participant with three specific characteristics, I utilized homogenous purposive sampling. This sampling method deliberately recruits participants who share a common experience and are appropriate for the objective of the research (Crossman, 2018; Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Because transgender identity and recognition remains a controversial topic in the United States, I needed to rely on existing study abroad providers and higher education institutions to locate and refer transgender students. I worried that my position as the researcher might come across as invasive and unwelcome. I recognized this and in recruiting participants I reached out to those who have already established this relationship with students identifying as transgender. These resources ranged from colleagues in the field to my own work environment. My intention

was to utilize the positive relationships between my network and any transgender students they might have worked with so that those in my network can vouch for my credibility and sensitivity to the subject at hand.

Studying international education at the School for International Training (SIT) has given me access to a vast network of many diverse contacts. This is a network I took advantage of when securing participants. These colleagues had established relationships with non-cisgender students who they could contact to discuss participation in my research. Having someone vouch for both my credibility and legitimacy as a researcher was a potential method I felt would help to establish contact with transgender students and reduce the power distance inherent in the researcher/participant relationship.

Utilizing these networks to achieve homogenous purposive sampling initially seemed like it would be incredibly successful. Within a week of my initial outreach, I had spoken to and conditionally secured three participants. What followed was a gradual process of each of these three participants withdrawing their participation from the project. Though their voiced reasons had nothing to do with me personally, it did cause me to internally evaluate my own legitimacy in conducting this research. Reasons given for withdrawing from the research ranged from being too busy with school to, as one potential participant stated, a desire not to skew my results because they did not think they could accurately reflect their state of mind when they participated in their study abroad program because they had not yet acknowledged their transgender identity. Additionally, several contacts indicated they had given my contact information to a transgender sojourner, only for that person to never contact me directly.

Despite the assurance that I was not personally the reason for the withdrawal of the participants, it was hard not to internalize these withdrawals and the lack of communication as

something that I was responsible for. Was my identity as a cisgender male seeking to ask potentially probing questions deemed as too threatening? Reflecting on the frameworks proposed by Levitt and Ippolito (2014) and Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, and Blumenstein (2002) regarding transgender identity development and affirmation, I am curious if transgender students, having gone through a process of negotiating their gender identity within a restrictive social paradigm, intentionally withdraw from and avoid situations that might involve the memory or recollection of this experience. This is ultimately a question for a separate research paper.

### **Data Collection Methods**

To better understand the experiences of transgender sojourners, and in keeping with traditional phenomenological research methods, I conducted at least three individual semi-structured interviews with each participant (Lester, 1999). I prepared a set of questions that guided each interview, focusing each set of questions on one distinct phase of studying abroad: Pre-departure, in-country, and re-entry (see Appendix C). The benefit of a semi-structured interview is that participants dictate the flow of the conversation (Fylan, 2005). My questions were intended to serve as a road map to help participants feel comfortable and willing to discuss their experiences. It was imperative that the questions straddle the fine line between intrusive and curious. Because transgender individuals are a marginalized group and face rampant discrimination, it was important that our conversation allowed the participant to open up as much as they felt comfortable doing, and not because I might have forced them into a discussion they would rather avoid. I also ensured that participants understood that their participation in this research was voluntary – they were free to end the interview at any time and at their own discretion.

Because of the likely geographic differences between myself and the participants, I conducted many interviews via online webcam services, like Skype and Google Hangouts. Poster (1995) argues that virtual settings encourage participants to open up to the researcher and that participants are more willing to discuss sensitive issues with someone they have never met and will likely never meet. These virtual environments, he continues, reduce visual cues that may subconsciously influence both researcher and participant like age, socioeconomic status, and ability, allowing the interview to go in directions that a face-to-face interview might not have. With the participant's consent I recorded the interviews and transcribed them, placing them into the coding software Dedoose to properly code them. This process allowed for that connective thread phenomenological research seeks to develop organically from the findings.

### **Ethics**

Because the transgender population continues to face negative social stigma within the United States, ensuring that I treated participants and their stories with respect and dignity was paramount. All participant names will remain confidential, and I will use pseudonyms to refer to them when discussing my findings. Additionally, I will not include any information that could inadvertently reveal that participant's identity. This would include information that is so specific to the participant that to divulge it risks breaking their anonymity regardless of the use of a pseudonym.

Prior to their participation, all participants received and completed an informed consent form granting their consent to actively participate in the research (see Appendix B). This form explicitly stated that participation was voluntarily. Furthermore, it explained that the researcher supported and encouraged participants to take actions that make them feel most comfortable. This included setting the time and medium of the interview, a desire that I not record the

interview, freedom to decline any question they might feel uncomfortable answering, and an understanding that they could terminate the interview at any time and for any reason if they so choose.

As of the writing of this paper, I currently work for a third-party study abroad provider called Learn International (LI) based out of Naas, Ireland. I relied on my co-workers at LI to assist in reaching out and recommending transgender students who participated in LI study abroad programming. It was important to indicate to any potential participants that I was not conducting the research on behalf of LI. I will not indicate the names of previous LI participants taking part in my research. The distinction between LI as a study abroad provider and my research as a graduate student must be clear and explicit. If requested, I will share the final research findings with my LI co-workers so that they can continue to develop more inclusive policies and programming, but at no time will LI have access to any personal data regarding my research.

### **Positionality**

Many researchers understand qualitative research as a medium through which there is an attempt to transform the subjective into the objective (Ratner, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). My research will be no different. As a person who identifies as LGBTQ+ I understand some of the pressures transgender identifying individuals face in feeling like an “other”. It is important to note, however, that I identify as a cisgender male. There are aspects of coming to terms with a gender identity different than the one assigned at birth that I will never experience. Regardless, my instinct is to always strive for the accessibility and equity of all institutions and programming for anyone who identifies under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. As such, it was and is impossible to conduct and present this research without expressing my honest desire to see all LGBTQ+

identifying students afforded the same opportunities as their straight and cisgender peers, and for their experience to be no different.

My hope was that my own identity would help create a natural rapport with the participants. Westin (1991) describes her research into how lesbians and gay men experience otherness and negotiate their place in the world. The results demonstrated a tendency of her participants to refer to their LGBTQ+ circle of friends as if they were family, prompting her to coin the phrase *families we choose*. My own experiences as a cisgender male who identifies as LGBTQ+ fall in line with these results. I have often felt a natural camaraderie among other LGBTQ+ identifying individuals because of our shared experience as what heteronormative and cisnormative societal constructs would call an “other”. I hoped this camaraderie was present between myself and the participants, and that they felt encouraged to speak truthfully about their experiences. Because of this, the process of analyzing my data occurred through a social justice lens that seeks to increase the awareness and acceptance of transgender identifying individuals and the challenges they face.

I must also acknowledge that I am a student of international education and an active practitioner in the field. I place an enormous value on the intercultural exchange of ideas and awareness of different cultures that study abroad can afford its participants and believe it should be available to *any* person who wishes to participate.

### **Credibility of Findings**

To support the validity of my findings, I utilized different forms of triangulation. This is a process through which multiple methods of data analysis work in tandem with multiple sources to increase the validity of the findings (Thurmond, 2004). I intended to increase the credibility of

my research through both data triangulation, member-checking, and peer debriefing. Roulston (2018) suggests data triangulation occurs when the process of data collection incorporates multiple sources but utilizes the same method to collect data from each source. In the case of my research, data triangulation occurred by utilizing the same set of questions during each participant interview. Additionally, because phenomenological research requires at least three interviews with each participant, I achieved further data triangulation through multiple interviews with each participant.

As another method to support the credibility of my findings, I engaged participants in a process called member-checking. This process requires the researcher to involve the participants in the emerging findings of the research to solicit feedback and opinions, to correct unintended mistakes, or to incite discussion (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Due to my identity as a cisgender male, I found it especially important to incorporate member-checking into the development of research that seeks to explain the experiences of transgender individuals. Involving my participants by allowing them to review their interview transcripts for corrections or soliciting opinions about the process of data analysis helped ensure that the stories my research tells remained honest representations of the participant's lived experiences.

A final method I used to increase the credibility of my research was ensuring my findings went through a process of peer debriefing. This process involved subjecting the continuing development of my findings to peer feedback and evaluation (Spall, 1998). I accomplished this by using my academic cohort. This cohort consisted of fellow graduate students with a range of interests and topics, as well as varying degrees of experience in the field of international education. Their impartial feedback helped address points for further discussion that I may have



missed or overemphasized due to my positionality. Incorporating this feedback helped ensure my findings came as close to neutral and objective as possible, thus increasing their credibility.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

I recorded each interview with a digital recorder. Immediately following these interviews, I uploaded the recording to my password protected computer and deleted it from the recording device. Additionally, I secured the individual audio files behind passwords. Only I had access to recordings. Following the completion of interviews, I transcribed the audio files into written word. These transcripts will remain on my password protected computer and only shared with the corresponding participant if they request it. In this way, participants could address changes they wished to make to the text as well as receiving another chance to ask that I not include their contributions in the final research findings.

To analyze the data, I uploaded the transcripts to the digital coding platform Dedoose. I kept these uploads secure by using a personal, password protected account. Once I completed the transcripts, I began the process of data analysis through deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning is a process through which research tests a theory or hypothesis through observations and findings (Bradford, 2017). In the case of this research deductive reasoning occurred by creating codes that reflected specific themes discussed in the literature review (Saldana, 2009), such as study abroad or transgender identity, and assigning these codes to corresponding parts of the data. The relationships between codes suggested certain themes that transgender sojourners might encounter while studying abroad.

Inductive reasoning, on the other hand, seeks to create general conclusions through multiple premises that researchers consider true (Anderson, Mueller, & Schneider, 2017).

Because of the lack of current research on the topic of transgender students in study abroad, this style of analysis was particularly important. During the interview and transcription process I coded for the unexpected topics or themes the participants bring up that do not fall under the conceptual framework of this research.

In keeping with my intention of member-checking, I offered to share the preliminary findings with my participants to solicit feedback. This allowed for my participants to play an active role in the formation of my results. It also allowed for the participants, all of whom fell somewhere underneath the transgender umbrella, to offer corrections and insight into terminology and phrasing I might not have been aware of.

### **Limitations**

As a limitation implies a potential pitfall of a study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), it is necessary to provide some areas where I believe my research could encounter weaknesses. The first limitation is the time I had to both conduct the research and record the findings. Following a proposed timeline that aimed for a completion of my research by December 2018, I had just over five months to conduct the proposed research. This meant that the window of time I allotted to analyze the data from my participants was small, potentially resulting in superficial findings. Additionally, as I intended to employ a phenomenological approach, my sample size remained deliberately small. Though a strength of phenomenological research (Lester, 1999), it is important to note that, because 1.4 million United States citizens identify as transgender and no quantifiable data exists on the number of transgender sojourners (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016), my sample size does not reflect the larger whole. It merely provides the experiences of those included in the research.

Another limitation is the location of the study. Because I am based out of Ireland and relied on a network of contacts primarily based in the United States to find participants, I conducted almost all interviews virtually as opposed to face-to-face. While the content of the interview remains valid, there are subtle physical cues the participant might transmit through body language that I might not have been able to see. A person might have demonstrated discomfort through a variety of means involving hands or feet that I was not be able to view (Steber, 2017), meaning I may not have been able to tell if a participant was truly uncomfortable despite any verbal assurances they gave that indicated they were not.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study are, quite simply, “what the study is not” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 119). This study aimed to investigate the experience of transgender students participating in study abroad programming. It does not attempt to provide quantifiable data on the number of transgender students participating in study abroad programming. It does not examine how the different demographics transgender students fall into (such as race, preferred gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) impacted their study abroad experience. Though I encourage the research of both topics, it was necessary to delimit the scope of my research to meet the proposed timeline. Additionally, to aid in further research that will eventually examine the impact of demographics on transgender sojourners, I believe that a general understanding of what the transgender study abroad experience is like is necessary. Because this information is scarce, I believe delimiting this research helped provide the needed contextual background to truly explore the intricacies of these experiences in the future.

## Findings

I conducted this research to answer the following questions: *What is the experience of transgender students in study abroad programming? How can knowledge of this experience inform effective practices to provide transgender students with an experience equitable to that of their cisgender peers?* By conducting interviews with my participants and analyzing the data within a conceptual framework that incorporates aspects of transgender identity development and emergent adulthood, I found that transgender sojourners face risks to their mental health throughout the study abroad experience. Furthermore, these risks come mostly from the social aspects of study abroad programming. To describe how I arrived at these conclusions I will first introduce the participants, describing particular traits or similarities relevant to the research. I will then discuss their experiences during three specific phases of study abroad programming: Pre-departure, in-country, and re-entry. Finally, I will present specific recommendations made by the participants for future transgender sojourners and study abroad providers.

## Participants and their Study Abroad Programs

This research relies on twelve interviews conducted with four ( $n = 4$ ) participants. These participants, who I will refer to as Jordan, Blake, Noel, and Morgan, were each interviewed three times. The participants spanned a wide variety of identities. Two participants, Jordan and Blake, identified as trans non-binary. One participant, Noel, identified as transgender. The final participant, Morgan, identified as genderqueer. There were specific experiences and identities shared between the four. For example, Blake and Noel each identified as bisexual. Only Noel, who spent a month as an exchange student in a European country during high school, had participated in a study abroad program prior to their college study abroad experience. One significant commonality shared by each participant in relation to study abroad programming is

that each participated in a program based out of Europe. This could be potentially significant in that the participants selected a geographic location traditionally thought of as more accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals (Vomiero, 2018). It could also simply be indicative of the popularity of Europe among all study abroad participants (IIE, 2017). Noel emphasized the importance of culture in selecting their study abroad location, saying, “It was just always a country that I had like a slight fascination for and I like the folklore and the people and the culture” (personal communication, 2018).

In accordance with the findings of Bryant and Soria (2015) regarding the types of programming transgender sojourners select, three of the four participants (Jordan, Blake, and Morgan) completed an internship as part of their study abroad experience. Jordan and Blake selected the country they sojourned in because it was the only country that offered this specific internship. Blake indicated that, “there are no [specific programs] in North America so I had to look for programs in Europe” (personal communication, 2018). Both Jordan and Blake also selected their specific internship because of their work aspirations. Jordan was fairly direct in saying, “I did the internship to get experience in [the specific field] and I came out with the experience in [the specific field] that I wanted. . .I guess that was kind of my main focus” (personal communication, 2018).

### **Mental Health Impacts of Pre-Departure**

Once the participants selected their program and country to sojourn in, they began to reckon with the imminent intercultural immersion they faced, particularly as it related to social interactions. These initial thoughts can influence the mental state of all sojourners as they enter into their programs, so I intentionally began the interview process with questions concerning the pre-departure phase and the participants’ experiences prior to their participation in study abroad

programming (see Appendix C). I was curious about the level of comfort the participants felt with themselves and their gender identities prior to their participation. Would a higher level of comfort with their self-identification and acceptance of this identity yield a more positive study abroad experience? I found that each participant fell on one of two levels of awareness regarding their gender identity during their program. Two participants, Jordan and Noel, indicated they had not become fully aware of their burgeoning gender identity prior to their participation in their program. As both Jordan and Noel would have fallen into the developmental time period of emergent adulthood (Arnett, 2000), it would follow that both were maneuvering through a process of identity exploration. However, this was a source of potential worry for both. Jordan stated, “I’ve been so uncomfortable with who I was. I’ve always been very uncomfortable in social situations and dealing with people, so I was kind of nervous about that” (personal communication, 2018). Noel echoed these sentiments, saying, “I was a little bit worried about I guess making friends and leaving the ones that I had behind. I guess kind of typical standard stuff just because I know sometimes it takes just myself personally a little bit of time to warm up with people” (personal communication, 2018). These feelings of anxiety over social transitions also correspond with emergent adulthood (Arnett, 2000), and would continue into the in-country phase for both students.

The other two participants, Blake and Morgan, both indicated that they were aware of their gender identity, though were not explicitly open about it. During their participation in their study abroad program, Morgan was in the process of having their name legally changed to reflect their genderqueer identity. Still, both expressed a sense of nervousness prior to their experience. Morgan expressed a feeling of optimism prior to their participation, though they mentioned that this optimism coexisted with feelings of unease and anxiety regarding social interactions. Blake

indicated that they had only a little anxiety about moving to a new country but mentioned that the hardest part was having to be away from their partner. To try and counteract this, Blake mentioned that, “My partner and I had talked about doing an open relationship which we both pursued” (personal communication, 2018).

To analyze these responses through the transgender identity affirmation framework that Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, and Blumenstein (2002) developed, the affirmations defined as identity congruence and identity support both seem important to recognize regarding the differing levels of anxiety expressed by each participant. Identity congruence refers to how a transgender person’s social group responds to a transgender person’s gender identity, while identity support refers to how this social group rejects or supports this identity. It may not be a surprise, then, that when faced with the process of uprooting themselves from established social groups (or partner, in Blake’s case), each participant had to reckon with a forthcoming situation that would force them to contend with a new and unknown social group.

The transgender identity affirmation framework supposes that there is an exponentially negative effect in the mental health of a transgender individual should they find their social surroundings a threat or negative influence on any of its four pillars. I would contend that, in the case of my participants, the mere threat of an unknown social group threatened the idea of identity congruence and support. This would imply that the participants, perhaps unbeknownst to themselves, started their study abroad experience based in a negative mental health space as they grappled with anxieties brought on by a concern over their place in a new culture and surrounded by new people. Though participants were not consciously incorporating transgender identity affirmation into their predeparture reflections, Morgan and Blake both indicated these anxieties were due at least partially to their gender identity.

### **In-Country Experiences**

The most significant finding of this research concerns the feelings of social anxiety expressed by each participant while studying abroad. When analyzing the data from each interview, the most common co-occurrence between all participants was the expression of negative feelings regarding their social surroundings while they were participating in their program. The specific impetus behind these feelings did vary from participant to participant. For example, Morgan related a story of severe anxiety during the first night of their program. Because so many study abroad programs separate students and the facilities they use by gender, Morgan had to share a floor and a bathroom that corresponded to the gender assigned at birth, and not the genderqueer identity they now openly identified as. Morgan contacted their program coordinator to address this issue and made explicit the discomfort they felt.

Jordan would suggest similar concerns by saying, “I’m still uncomfortable [with bathrooms] just with the fact that I have to gender myself walking into one” (personal communication, 2018). This falls in line with the argument Levitt and Ippolito (2014) make concerning the development of a non-binary gender identity framed within a binary male/female gender paradigm. The lack of appropriate facilities for a genderqueer or trans non-binary student challenges this non-binary gender identity and precipitates a social climate where the transgender student feels out of place amongst their peers. This is particularly relevant to the idea of identity performance proposed by Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, and Blumenstein (2002). A failure for a transgender student to act upon their own gender identity, such as lack of access to gender appropriate facilities, risks a negative impact upon mental health.

Noel was particularly forthcoming about their experiences with the social climate of their program. What had been a fairly light-hearted and jovial interview process turned serious as



Noel described how “the experience of [studying abroad] was one of the most, I think, interesting times in my college career but also definitely one of the loneliest”. Noel also detailed a discomfort with expected gender norms in social situations saying, “[They] wanted to talk about like gendered. . . subjects. I definitely had this feeling, it's like ‘you are not fitting in or meeting like the standard stereotypical [gender] expectations’” (personal communication, 2018).

Jordan expressed a similar sentiment regarding gender norms saying:

I was in a place where I was trying to fit into the box that society gives you, so I wasn't obviously not non-conforming, I just wasn't comfortable with myself. . . I always kind of hoped that I would somehow manage to actually make better friends and whatnot in study abroad things, but that never really happened. (personal communication, 2018)

While Blake would never explicitly mention gender norms as a cause of anxiety regarding socializing with other sojourners, they did make comments supporting the isolation from others they experienced. Blake said, “I. . . never fit in with [them]. A bunch of them got really close and part of me couldn't care less. I didn't really fit in anywhere” (personal communication, 2018). However, Blake did express more positive recollections regarding their living arrangements. They recounted, “I was living. . . with a 60-year-old. . . and three [others]. I wasn't really out to any of them, a couple clued in later when I had a. . . partner over a fair bit and the flat mates were chill about it” (personal communication, 2018).

Perhaps the dual positive and negative attitudes Blake referenced were not that surprising. Each of the theoretical frameworks at use in this research suggests that social integration is a vital part of developing a transgender identity. Identity congruence is one of the four main pillars of transgender identity affirmation (Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, and Blumenstein, 2002) and, as I have suggested earlier in the research, this pillar is already at risk during the pre-

departure phase of a transgender sojourner's study abroad experience. The experiences expressed by participants regarding social interactions during their programs indicate that this risk carries over to the in-country phase, providing further negative effects on the sojourner's mental health.

Noel was explicit in recounting their experiences with mental health during their program. Regarding their ability to socialize, Noel expressed that they found it difficult and that, "I did not know it at the time but I have been diagnosed with anxiety" (personal communication, 2018). Delving further into their mental health, Noel said:

I started slipping into just like some bad habits vis a vis depression. So, I started not necessarily having like a nocturnal sleeping schedule. . .I developed like a little bit of insomnia where I would go like a couple of days at a time without sleeping. And I would also go like a day or two days I think even one time three days without eating. . . a lot of dysphoria leading into self-loathing was kind of kicking in real bad and so it was very easy to isolate myself and to do some of these bad habits. (personal communication, 2018)

Jordan would echo Noel's experiences, particularly regarding a discomfort with themselves, by saying of their experience, "I wasn't comfortable with myself and I didn't know who I was and so I wasn't comfortable in social situations and also I think people were less likely to talk to me and approach me" (personal communication, 2018).

Not every participant had specific negative reflections on their in-country experience. Blake repeatedly mentioned positive aspects of their experience and the social climate within. They referenced another transgender identifying classmate they bonded with, as well as meeting another classmate who was new to exploring their gender identity. Blake also referenced how,

“Everyone in my class was good about me not using my legal name and eventually the professors caught on as well” (personal communication, 2018). The use of preferred names and pronouns is a theme that frequently occurred in discussing how providers could better accommodate transgender sojourners, so it may not be surprising that Blake, a sojourner whose classmates and professors used their preferred name, expressed more positive recollections of their experience.

This is not to suggest that the other participants expressed an overall negative recollection of their experience. Despite any negative events, each participant described the overall impact of their in-country experience as positive. Noel referred to their study abroad experience as “monumental” (personal communication, 2018). While Jordan stated that they had participated in their internship to learn skills needed to enter the workforce, and since they had successfully entered that work force, their overall feelings towards their program were positive. Morgan called their experience “great” and said they would happily participate again.

### **A Lack of Re-entry Programming**

Another commonality shared among all participants was that none participated in any re-entry activities, because none were available. I find this important to mention considering the consistent theme of social interactions being a focal point for transgender sojourners during their study abroad experience. Many international educators consider the process of re-entry just as important to acknowledge as the initial process of culture shock brought on by entering a new country for the first time (Gray & Savicki, 2015). Referencing back to the transgender identity affirmation framework (Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002), each of my participants referenced moments in both the pre-departure and in-country phases of studying abroad that could conceivably threaten one of the four pillars of this framework, therefore increasing the risk

of negative mental health developments. Two of the participants, Jordan and Noel, discussed how they dealt with a developing understanding of their gender identity during their program. This understanding carried over after the participant finished their program. For example, In Noel's case, they reflected upon this experience by saying:

I had a great time studying abroad. I would not trade that experience for the world and I feel like I gained so much from it. I think . . . I couldn't have liked the experience of being in a completely new place where I had like this almost freedom. I couldn't have had that without like the negative mental health stuff that went with it. (personal communication, 2018)

Blake echoed this, describing their experience of being in a new country with new people as “stressful” but that they “still regularly talk to many of the friends I made even though we are all in different countries now” (personal communication, 2018). Jordan remained (and still remains) in the country of their program, and as Morgan mentioned earlier, they would happily participate in a study abroad program again.

Regarding re-entry as an experience akin to culture shock and one that can threaten the mental health of a transgender sojourner, the assertion Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett (2005) make regarding emergent adults comes to mind. They argue that emergent adults grapple with identity exploration and feelings of transition, among others, and that this process may be difficult without external guidance. This research shows how each of my participants dealt with challenges to their understanding of their gender identity in the context of a study abroad program. These challenges did not end with the conclusion of their program. No participant indicated that they had a full and complete understanding of themselves and their identities post-program. Because there were several years between the participation in their programs and the

participation in this research, I argue that they were able to reflect on the benefits of their experience more positively because they have been able to witness the long-term effects. If I had interviewed the participants almost immediately following their participation when they were still dealing with the effects, positive and negative, on their personal identities, I hypothesize that their responses might have been more negative. The lack of re-entry activities demonstrates a lack of external guidance that Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett (2005) argue may be necessary for emergent adults, and, I would contend, especially ones who may be grappling with a gender identity different from the male/female gender paradigm.

### **Advice to Transgender Students**

Part of the intention of this research was to address the provisions my participants believed could help improve the experiences of future transgender students. To that end, I asked my participants what advice they would offer to future transgender sojourners. One of the most common suggestions from my participants, perhaps unsurprisingly given the data on their experiences in their own programs, dealt with social situations. Noel advised students to find others with shared interests in their country, and Blake mentioned that having a local as a friend could help. Jordan explicitly stated, “I would probably be. . .a lot more focused on the social side” (personal communication, 2018).

Expanding on the benefits of increased socialization, there were some further explanations. Noel referenced a support system back home, suggesting having a “designated help buddy” or “someone who you know if you message them they will respond to you and know that they will be there to chat. Just. . .understanding that you're not alone out there even though it might be like intimidating or scary to be in a foreign country by yourself” (personal communication, 2018). Blake emphasized the importance of confidants nearby saying, “Find

people you trust. Make friends and tell them about your situation” (personal communication, 2018).

Jordan was slightly more cautious in approaching this social situation. They stated, “I feel like I would give different advice depending on someone’s situation because everyone who’s trans is different in how they identify and the issues they might face depending on so many different variables” (personal communication, 2018). I find this quote especially relevant when considering Levitt and Ippolito’s (2014) transgender identity development theory. As this theory suggests that there are three distinct phases that cause transgender identifying individuals to develop their own gender identity, I would argue that, in the context of study abroad, each transgender individual will find themselves at a different phase of this framework. Because of this, I find Jordan’s comment especially salient. Blake and Morgan would fall under being further along in the development and understanding of their gender identities during their study abroad program, whereas Jordan and Noel were not as progressed. The advice that a sojourner like Jordan or Noel might need compared to Blake or Morgan would be quite different. For example, Jordan further explained their position saying:

I guess you also kind of have to think about what you want to tell people. . .based on how you identify, and if you’re someone who is meant to be transitioning, like where you are in that process. I guess you want to think about how you’re going to explain that to people and if it’s kind of a situation where you’re going to be there temporarily depending on, if it’s like a month, if it’s worth coming out or not and all that kind of thing because it can be scary. (personal communication, 2018)

I wanted to highlight this quote because, despite the reflection on social interactions, I think Jordan brings up an important point, one that also relates to the assumption that not every

transgender identifying person will need the same type of social advice. The conceptual framework of this research assumes that there are distinct phases transgender individuals progress through in developing their gender identity, as well as four distinct experiences that affect the mental health of these individuals as they progress through these phases (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002). This would suppose that transgender identity development is less of a linear path, and more of a point somewhere on a graph. A transgender individual will need specific advice depending on where they fall on this graph.

I will use Morgan and Noel as examples to further explain this supposition. I would argue that, considering Levitt and Ippolito's (2014) framework, Morgan has developed tangible methods to represent their gender identity, as well as finding ways to demonstrate that identity to others and has a fairly progressed sense of their gender identity, such as changing their legal name. However, because the program Morgan participated in placed them in a housing situation that forced them to gender themselves, this threatened their identity performance (Nuttbrock, Rosenblum, & Blumenstein, 2002), increasing the risk of negative mental health. The advice that Morgan might need would differ from someone like Blake, who was perhaps even further progressive in terms of their gender identity and who also had less of an issue with their identity performance.

Noel admitted struggling with their mental health, referencing body dysmorphia and depression, and had barely begun to recognize their gender identity. Therefore, it is hard to say that Noel had any sort of progression along the lines of transgender identity affirmation or their transgender identity development. The advice Noel would need is vastly different from a sojourner like Blake, or even Morgan. I think this is important note to show that there is not a

one size fits all solution to accommodating these sojourners. Instead, each will bring a unique background and understanding of their gender identity that providers should expect.

### **Advice to Study Abroad Professionals**

The other advice I solicited from my participants was what they would tell study abroad professionals and providers to better accommodate transgender identifying students. The responses I received were much more varied, reflecting the diverse needs of transgender sojourners. What the participants expressed was the first thing providers should be aware before a program even starts was to know who they are dealing with. As Noel stated:

Just doing the most basic reading about like trans and non-binary identities is like step one. [I]f you know you have a trans student who is coming to your program know like, okay, 'Are they like a trans guy or are they a trans girl' because there's going to be different. . .things with them in regards to that, like different identity issues and feelings.  
(personal communication, 2018)

This resonated with other participants. Jordan emphasized the importance of equality and diversity trainings, especially ones that help explain what transgender and non-binary concepts mean. This would be a way for providers to ensure that professionals can properly accommodate transgender sojourners.

The most common method mentioned as a way to demonstrate an understanding of transgender identity issues was to make sure that providers use the proper pronouns of their students. Noel mentioned that providers should "[Be] inclusive in their language, trying not to use gendered words. Specifically making sure you do get pronouns and names right" (personal communication, 2018). Jordan agreed, saying that professionals should always ask for someone's



preferred pronoun or name, offering up icebreakers as a way to incorporate this. Jordan further reinforced the importance of using proper pronouns saying, “Mis-gendering [us] on a regular basis can make us extremely uncomfortable and may trigger dysphoria and it’s really not fun” (personal communication, 2018). Similarly, Blake directly said, “Listen to [what] names and pronouns people are using and respect that” (personal communication, 2018).

Jordan also mentioned that another way transgender individuals can feel misgendered is through a lack of appropriate showers or bathrooms. As mentioned earlier, Morgan reflected that this was a cause of anxiety on their first night because it forced them to gender themselves according to a male/female gender binary, and not the genderqueer identity they belonged to. Jordan stated that while “[Study abroad providers] probably don’t have any control over [gender neutral facilities], but. . .if they do in a certain situation, having flat out gender neutral bathrooms or an ‘other’ option always helps” (personal communication, 2018).

Another common piece of advice was for study abroad professionals to provide transgender specific resources. These ranged from lists of LGBTQ+ focused organizations to transgender friendly doctors. Noel emphasized the importance of these provisions, saying that it would be helpful if providers could tell students prior to the start of their program that “we’ve got a LGBT counselor and they will specifically give you. . .advice and we’ve got like a list of transgender friendly doctors in the area that if you have a prescription they will fill it out for you” (personal communication, 2018). Jordan also mentioned the importance of prescriptions saying “[A] trans individual would have to consider. . .if they are on hormones or blockers. [T]hey will need to either be able to get and bring what they will need over their study abroad [program] or have a way to access them while abroad” (personal communication, 2018).

Another provision mentioned by the participants was access to counselors. As Jordan stated:

If someone sees a therapist or psychologist on a regular basis being away would mean pausing that and that could be detrimental to their mental health and could potentially be a reason some trans people may choose to not go on a study abroad. They may not be in the right place to give up that support system for the length of a study abroad [program].  
(personal communication, 2018)

This is a salient point to note because of the importance and continual mention of mental health in this study. Contextual research conducted for this study suggests transgender identifying individuals face negative stimuli affecting their mental health at a rate higher than that of their cisgender peers (Schreiber, 2016), and the data collected for this study suggests that transgender sojourners are at a constant risk for mental health issues through the entirety of their study abroad experience, including pre-departure and re-entry. Making sure that transgender sojourners have access to mental health services, even if they do not explicitly request it, should be something that study abroad providers consider making a routine part of the planning and implementation of their programs.

A final frequent suggestion was to ensure that living environments were safe. Jordan and Morgan both completed homestays as part of their internship, and Jordan emphasized the importance of these homestays being a safe living environment because “for many [transgender sojourners] that can be the only place they feel they can be truly themselves” (personal communication, 2018). One participant mentioned that binding, an act that intentionally minimizes the female breasts to conform more to their true gender identity (Dutton, Koenig, & Kristopher, 2008), is an act that requires a safe and private space. Blake also indicated that

telling study abroad participants of the safe places in their host country or city could be beneficial. Finally, Jordan indicated that “It would be good to regularly check in with the individual to make sure they feel safe” (personal communication, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to explore the experience of transgender participants prior to, during, and after their study abroad. Additionally, this research sought to solicit advice from transgender sojourners that could assist study abroad providers and future transgender sojourners in ensuring their study abroad programs are inclusive and accommodating of their unique needs. The major finding of this research highlights the positive impacts of study abroad programming for transgender students, but also acknowledges that this experience comes with a risk to mental health. The advice my participants offered to future transgender sojourners regarding their potential participation reinforces this aspect. The wide variety of responses regarding the way study abroad providers can better accommodate transgender students helps reinforce the idea that the transgender population has a diverse set of needs that providers should allow for.

The process of compiling this research and these findings was challenging, both in the second-guessing of my legitimacy and credibility in conducting my research and the securing of participants in a different country than my current location. However, I found it important, both as an active practitioner and as a person who identifies as LGBTQ+, to put forth this research as a potential guide to aid in the future participation of transgender sojourners. Utilizing the results from the research, there are a few things I, and other study abroad professionals, can do in the future. First, we must recognize that not every study abroad participant will identify as cisgender and prepare materials and methods that are inclusive to all. This could include options beyond the cisnormative practice of only being able to select “male” or “female” on an application or

providing an option to indicate a sojourner's preferred pronouns. Second, providers should be sure to include inclusive pre-departure materials to all sojourners, so as not to assume that the program does not contain any transgender participants.

I think it is also important that study abroad professionals recognize that the transgender sojourner may not be fully aware or comfortable with their gender identity yet. As Schwartz, Cote, and Arnett (2005) argue that emergent adults may find this developmental process challenging without external guidance, which might be even more difficult for an emergent adult who is also progressing through a period of transgender identity development (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). The data provided by my participants suggests that the pre-departure phase of study abroad programming is equally as important to the mental health of a transgender sojourner as the in-country portion. Study abroad providers have a responsibility to provide as much guidance as possible prior to a transgender sojourners participation in study abroad programming because to ignore this risks starting the transgender sojourner off with a higher risk of mental health issues than their fellow cisgender sojourners.

Next, providers should ensure that they are open and receptive to potential problems transgender sojourners may face during their program, particularly involving social interactions. Each of my participants referenced moments where they struggled socially and how this precipitated further personal issues, such as Noel's experience with insomnia and depression. Knowing that these situations are like to occur before they happen would allow study abroad providers to recognize warning signs and act appropriately before they occur. One example of a preventive measure could be what Noel suggested, by making sure students are aware of transgender friendly doctors, counselors, and resources available to them during their in-country

experience. This could provide the transgender sojourner with a necessary outlet in the event they require one.

Another recommendation is that study abroad professionals should recognize that the process of re-entry is as important to the transgender sojourner as the pre-departure and in-country phases (Gray & Savicki, 2015). If transgender sojourners are working through a process of developing and understanding their gender identity during their program, that will undoubtedly continue following that program's completion. Having some form of re-entry activities or check-ins could provide an outlet for transgender students to fully synthesize their experiences abroad and incorporate them into their daily life. As Arnett (2000) says, emergent adults may need guidance as they progress through their developmental phase. Some form of re-entry would be a way to continue to provide that guidance instead.

The final point I would like to emphasize is the positive impact of study abroad on each participant. No matter what issues they brought up during their study abroad experience, the lasting memory each one expressed was that the experience was incredibly positive and had a definite impact of how it shaped their lives, whether they exited their program with an increased understanding of their own gender identity or with greater experience in their chosen professional field. This underscores the importance of study abroad to all participants. As President Eisenhower (1958) said, the intentional global exchange of students is necessary to increase the understanding of cultures and experiences. I would argue that this understanding also applies to the internal development of transgender sojourners. Providing them with the experience to explore their gender identity in a new culture and surrounded by new people may produce issues of social anxiety. Study abroad providers can ensure they adequately prepare and provide for these students, acting as a guide for transgender sojourners as they develop and

understand their gender identity. Study abroad is a chance for all students to experience different cultures and define themselves in this new culture and determine what parts of the experience will have lasting personal impacts. This is especially important for transgender sojourners. By participating in these programs, transgender sojourners can develop a deeper and more personal understanding of their gender identity, and by facilitating these sojourners, study abroad providers can act as the guide, ensuring the experience is as inclusive and accommodating as it can possibly be.

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## Appendix A: Human Subjects Review Application

# School for International Training

@ World Learning



## Human Subjects Review Application

The researcher has the primary responsibility to ensure safe research design and to protect human participants from all types of harm. Research that exposes human subjects to the risk of unreasonable harm shall not be conducted. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the primary responsibility for determining whether the proposed research design exposes subjects to risk of harm.

All materials must be typed; handwritten materials will be returned.

**DO NOT** begin contacting potential project participants or data collection until the IRB notifies you that your project has been approved.

**DO NOT** leave a question blank in Section III; write "N/A" if a question does not apply to the application. Unsigned or incomplete applications will be returned for resubmission.

### Section I

Researcher Nicholas McIntyre

E-mail Nicholas.mcintyre@mail.sit.edu Phone +353 83 434 6364

Graduate student  Faculty  Staff  SIT Study Abroad student

Advisor Dr. Alla Korzh

Type of Project: Capstone  IPP  Independent Study  Faculty research

Project Title The Experience of Transgender Students in Study Abroad Programming

Project Site(s) Naas, Co. Kildare, Ireland; Various locations in the United States

Practicum/Project Site Supervisory Organization Learn International Contact Cara Simon, +353 45 939

773, cara@learninternational.ie

Proposed project dates: from September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018

### Section II

**Read and check all appropriate boxes.**



**My research does not need IRB review because it**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Does not involve the participation of human subjects.
--------------------------	---

**If you checked the box above, make sure none of the elements under Exempt apply. Go to the end of the form, sign, have your advisor sign (digital signature), attach your proposal and submit to [irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu)**

**My research design may be EXEMPT because the research:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves the observation of public behavior
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is conducted in an educational setting (classroom) involving normal educational practices such as evaluating tests procedures, curricula, or lessons and does not identify subjects or pose any risk
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves surveying or interviewing public officials
<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses anonymous surveys, interviews, or observations of adults and poses no risks

**If you checked any of the EXEMPT boxes, please be sure none of the elements under Expedited and Full apply to your research. Go to the end of this form, sign, have your advisor sign (digital signature is fine), and attach your proposal, consent form, interview, survey or focus group questions and other relevant documents. Submit as one document to [irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu)**

**My research design may require an EXPEDITED review because the research:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Does not involve children or other vulnerable participants. Vulnerable participants are children, the economically or educationally disadvantaged, prisoners, refugees and others vulnerable in the local research context.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves individual or group contact in no risk/minimal risk circumstances and with non-sensitive topics.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves collecting data from voice, video, digital or image recordings made for research purposes.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Concerns individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior.)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Uses surveys, interviews, oral histories, focus groups, program evaluations, human factors evaluations, or quality assurance methodologies in which subjects are or can be identified directly or indirectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	Was approved under 12 months ago, minor changes to the research design have been made and additional research will be conducted.

**If you checked any of the EXPEDITED boxes in section above, please read the next section on full review, determine if none of those factors applies, and continue to Section III, Question 1**

**My research design may require a FULL REVIEW because:**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Children or vulnerable groups are involved (e.g. prisoners, educationally disadvantaged persons, cognitively impaired persons, trauma survivors, or populations considered vulnerable in local social situations or cultural contexts).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Research involves the intentional deception of subjects, such that misleading or untruthful information will be provided to participants. Participants includes people being observed or interviewed as well as supervisors of those participants

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Projects use procedures that are personally intrusive, stressful, or potentially traumatic (stress can be physical, psychological, social, financial, or legal)</p>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Research concerns sensitive subjects such as sexual attitudes, preferences, or practices; the use of alcohol, drugs, or other addictive products; activities that may be illegal, or likely to offend prevailing standards of ethical practice for a given country context.                      Research may collect information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that, if released, could reasonably be damaging to an individual's financial standing, employability, or reputation within the community;</li> <li>• that, if disclosed, could reasonably lead to social stigmatization or discrimination;</li> <li>• pertains to an individual's psychological well-being or mental health;</li> <li>• that, if released would put the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability</li> <li>• in other categories that may be considered sensitive because of specific cultural or other factors</li> </ul>

### Section III

All questions must be completed. If the question does not apply to your research please mark N/A. Please do not leave any questions blank. Incomplete applications will be returned and resubmission will be required.

1. Briefly describe the proposed project including the research question and objectives: The proposed research aims to investigate the following two research questions: 1) What is the experience of US transgender students in study abroad programming? and 2) How can knowledge of this experience inform effective practices to provide transgender students with an experience equitable to that of their cisgender peers? This research will utilize a phenomenological approach and identify no more than five transgender sojourners but will conduct at least three interviews with each participant. Because there is a scarcity of existing literature on this topic, one objective of this research is to provide a foundation through which future researchers can build upon. A second objective is to gain insight into potential roadblocks transgender students faced in both accessing study abroad programming and receiving a study abroad experience equitable to that of their cisgender peers. The researcher will use these insights to develop suggestions for best practices that study abroad organizations (universities, third party providers, etc.) can utilize to ensure their programming successfully facilitates transgender sojourners.

#### 2. Data Collection

A. Please indicate the number of participants by age and gender:

- a. N/A Children (under 18 years of age), female N/A male N/A other N/A
- b. 5 Adults (over 18 years of age), female N/A male N/A other 5. As participants will all identify somewhere under the transgender/non-binary umbrella, I do not wish to presume what the final gender make-up will look like, or what gender identity the selected participants will choose to identify themselves as. However, each participant will fall between the ages of 18 and 25.

B. Does the study involve any vulnerable populations? Yes  No  If yes, please explain. Those who identify as transgender face rampant discrimination, both in the United States and abroad. This has become especially volatile in recent years as the demand for transgender representation and equity has grown internationally. The researcher will ensure participants are aware of the potentially triggering nature of the research and the interview process, with explicit guidance that they are allowed to end their participation in the research at any time.

C. What will participants be asked to do? (**Append interview questions, focus group questions, survey instruments, and other relevant materials**) Participants will agree to a minimum of three interviews, each focusing on specific portions of the study abroad experience: Pre-departure, in country, and re-entry. I will also include participants in the process of developing the findings to solicit their feedback about any patterns emerging or corrections they wish to make to transcripts, including allowing for any post-interview desires that I omit the contents of their interview from the final results.

D. If participants are interviewed, will you conduct the interview yourself and, if not, who will? In what language(s) will participants be interviewed? Where will these interviews take place? I will conduct all interviews with the participants. I will conduct interviews in English via online communication tools like Skype or Google Hangouts. Participants will select the medium of interview they feel most comfortable with.

E. How many meetings will you hold with participants and where will these meetings be held? (Will it become a burden to the participants of the research?) A minimum of three interviews

- will be held with each participant in keeping with the tradition of phenomenological research. The interviews will take place online. However, the informed consent form will notify participants that they are allowed and encouraged to stop the interview or their participation in the research at any time and for any reason without fear of reprisal from the interview. I will allow the participants to determine the time that works best for their schedule to allow for a maximum level of comfort on the part of the participants. Should a participant indicate that their involvement in the research has caused undue stress or has become a burden, the researcher will support the participant in either terminating their involvement in the research or adapting necessary parts of the interview process to fully accommodate the participant.
- F. How will participants be recruited? Recruitment of participants will take place through utilization of researcher's own contacts, as well as a network of international educators based primarily in the United States. This method is ideal for this research because of the sensitive nature of the topic, as well as the potential power dynamics between a cisgender researcher and a transgender participant.
- G. Are participants compensated in some form? If yes, please describe. Yes  No
- H. Explain your sampling protocol. What are the criteria for including or excluding participants? How will you select potential participants? Selected participants will meet three criteria: Identification as transgender or gender non-binary, participation in at least one study abroad program, and between the ages of 18 and 25. This sampling protocol falls in line with the theoretical selection of the research participants, and it is important that all participants meet these three criteria to maintain consistency in the findings. The researcher will rely on personal contacts and the recommendations of a professional network to suggest participants. Due to the desired small sample size, the researcher will make all attempts to neutrally select participants, that is, select participants without considering if their overall study abroad experience was positive or negative, which could skew the findings towards a particular result.
- I. How will you protect participants from feeling pressured to participate in the study due to any power differential? For instance, if there is a formal relationship between researcher and participants (teacher/student, aid worker/client) that might influence a participant's ability to refuse to participate, identify alternative options to participation in the study. The researcher will rely on professional contacts to help secure participants. Having a contact who can vouch for the researcher's credibility and sensitivity to the research topic may help in securing participants as they will enter the interview process with an awareness of the researcher's sensitivity to the topic. The researcher will ensure that participants are always aware of their ability to decline answering any question at any time or terminate their involvement in the research at any time. This will include written instructions through an informed consent form and verbal reminders prior to all interviews of the voluntary nature of the study. The researcher will make all attempts to have participants control the time, medium, duration, and overall atmosphere of their participation to ensure they are as comfortable as possible and feel secure in their participation.
- J. How might participation in this study benefit participants (there may be no benefit)? Through their reflections in the interviews, participants may develop a better understanding of their own experiences in study abroad programming, as well as potentially aiding in the development of best practices for the equitable inclusion of transgender students in study abroad programming.

- K. Do participants risk any stress or harm by participating in this research? Yes  No  If yes, describe the risk or harm and the safeguards employed to minimize the risks. The researcher will inform participants of the potential stresses and mental health risks prior to their participation in the research via an informed consent form. These risks could include, but are not limited to, mental stress regarding the discussion of an identity they may not feel fully comfortable with when recalling distressful experiences associated with their identity disclosure in the past; the potential familial reaction upon discovery of participation in this research should the participant have not already disclosed their preferred gender identity; or stigmatization at school regarding the participant's gender identity if classmates discover the participant's part in this research. The researcher will make clear that all information that could identify the participant will be redacted from transcripts and final results, and that the participant is empowered to request further information be redacted with no judgement from the researcher. Furthermore, upon securing the final roster of participants, the researcher will develop individualized resources for each participant based on their geographic location that the participant can use if they choose to. These resources could include mental health professionals, transgender support groups, providers located at their college campus, etc.
- L. Will participants receive a summary of results? Yes  No  How will you disseminate the results to them? The researcher will keep participants informed of the state of the research, preliminary findings, and final results to solicit feedback. The researcher will distribute these results via an e-mail address that the participant provides. Participants will receive the final capstone paper as well as the final capstone presentation.
- M. Indicate what type of consent you will obtain and explain any waiver of written consent. For research with children you will need a minor assent and parental consent form. The researcher will develop an informed consent form that each participant must complete to participate in the research. This form will detail the nature of the research, the rights of the participant, the potential stressors of the research, and the resources the researcher will provide each participant to safeguard against these stressors. Participants will indicate the level of participation they feel comfortable with and indicate their consent via signature. Participants will submit this form to the researcher who will provide his signature before returning a copy to the participant.
- a.  Written
- b.  Electronic
- c.  Oral
- d. If your subjects are non-English speakers, explain how you will obtain consent/assent. N/A

**(Append sample consent/assent language, including consent forms for each type of research participant)**

## 3. How will the following be addressed?

A. Privacy: Protection of participant rights as a person to control access to oneself (intellectual, physical, and behavioral). To maintain the privacy of the participants the researcher will require each participant complete and submit a form indicating their informed consent before conducting any interviews. Participants will also select the time and medium of the interview to ensure they can be in a space they find most suitable for their desired level of privacy. Because the interviews will take place virtually, the researcher will always ensure that the location they conduct the interview in is private and will not risk any non-participating individual overhearing any discussion or information mentioned during the interview. The researcher will also make sure participants are aware of their rights to always request the researcher omit specific pieces of data from the final results, even if the participant had originally consented to their use. Because of the population this research proposes to study, it is paramount that all participants feel comfortable and at ease with their input.

## B. Protection of participant information:

a. Anonymity (protecting names and other unique identifiers of participants): To maintain the anonymity of participants, names cannot be collected. Subjects cannot be identifiable in any way.

To protect anonymity, the researcher will inform the participants that the final product will use no identifiable data that could expose their participation in this research. This will include information such as names, the participant's college, the program or provider name the participant studied with, etc. Additionally, the researcher will encourage participants to note any information they do not wish the researcher to include. In all cases the researcher will utilize appropriate language to protect the identity of participants. This could include the development of pseudonyms for participants, describing colleges by the type of university or traditional length of study (i.e., four-year liberal arts university), and referring to the continent or geographical region in which the participant studied instead of the specific city or country (i.e., the researcher would refer to a participant who studied in Beijing, China, as having studied in Asia).

b. Confidentiality (protecting data about participants): How is access to data protected? How will data be stored and for how long? Will it be used in the future and, if so, how will permission for further use be obtained? Will your data be accessible online? The intended use of the research data, as stated in the informed consent form, and the actual use of data by the researcher in practice must be consistent.

To ensure confidentiality the researcher will protect all audio recordings with passwords and will store them on a password protected personal computer. The researcher will store this data for the duration of the research period and will destroy the data following the successful completion of the research. Other researchers may utilize the findings as the researcher presents them in the final products for further studies, but the specific transcripts and audio recordings will remain completely confidential and available only to the researcher and the corresponding participant, should they request a copy. Tell us about when the data will be deleted (upon completion of the project or you will store it for some years?)

4. Does your study require approval from an external IRB in addition to the SIT IRB? Yes  No

If yes, please identify the institution as well as your plans for seeking approval: N/A

5. If necessary, please discuss other details or procedures of the study that should be known by the Institutional Review Board: N/A

By initialing below, I certify that all of the above information (and that attached) is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and that I agree to fully comply with all of the program’s ethical guidelines as noted above and as presented in the program and/or discussed elsewhere in program materials. I further acknowledge that I will not engage in research activities until my advisor has notified me that both my proposal and my Human Subjects Review application are approved.

Nicholas McIntyre  
Student’s full name (printed)

NCM 12/08/2018  
Student’s initials Date

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AS APPROPRIATE  
(CHECK ALL THAT ARE ATTACHED):

- Proposal
- Recruitment letters or fliers
- Informed consent form,
- Minor consent form,
- Parental consent form
- Observation guide
- Interview guide
- Survey instrument
- Instructions to informants
- Organization letter of support
- External IRB documents
- Other(s) (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

The faculty advisor’s initials confirms that the composition of this proposal has been supervised and approved for submission to the IRB for review.

AK August 23, 2018  
Advisor’s initials Date

Advisor’s name printed: Alla Korzh

Submission Instructions: Please submit application AS ONE FILE to [irb@sit.edu](mailto:irb@sit.edu). Submission must come from your official SIT email with the following file name: last\_first\_type (example: Smith\_Jane\_expedited.docx; Nguyen\_Viet\_exempt.docx).

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study Entitled:

*The Experience of Transgender Students in Study Abroad Programming*

You are invited to participate in the research for an independent practitioner inquiry capstone entitled *The Experience of Transgender Students in Study Abroad Programming*, conducted by Nick McIntyre in fulfilment of the capstone requirements for the School of International Training's (SIT) International Education master's degree program.

This research aims to investigate the experiences of transgender sojourners who have participated in at least one study abroad program. Participation in this study will involve consenting to three interviews with the researcher. Each interview will last between 30 minutes and 1 hour. With your consent, the researcher will record each interview and transcribe the recordings following the completion of the interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are encouraged to voice any concerns or questions to the researcher at any time and are also supported in requesting the researcher make certain provisions regarding your participation. These provisions could include, but are not limited to, a desire to not have interviews be recorded, withdrawal from the interview process at any time with no questions or reprisal from the researcher, or a request that the researcher retract your interviews from the final product. As this study could involve the discussion of potentially stressful or triggering issues, the researcher will also provide a list of resources tailored to your geographic location that you may utilize if needed, as well as more general, globally accessible resources.

All audio recordings and transcripts from the interviews will remain confidential. The researcher will store the recordings and transcripts on a password protected device that only the researcher will have access to. Additionally, the researcher will remove any information from the final paper and presentation that could identify you as a participant in this study such as name, university affiliation, country of origin, etc. You are also encouraged to request the redaction of specific information. The researcher will share, upon request, any transcripts of your interviews with you and only you. The researcher will also ensure that, as a participant in the research study, you are updated with the overall research process, including initial findings and overall themes. You are strongly encouraged to give feedback on this process. Upon completion of the research process the researcher will destroy all audio recordings and transcripts of your interviews. Finally, as a participant in the research, the researcher will make available to you the final paper and presentation.

If at any point you have questions about the research, you may contact the researcher at [nicholas.mcintyre@mail.sit.edu](mailto:nicholas.mcintyre@mail.sit.edu) or by phone at +353 83 434 6364. Additionally, you may also contact the researcher's advisor Dr. Alla Korzh at [alla.korzh@sit.edu](mailto:alla.korzh@sit.edu) or +1 802-258-3395.



Please indicate your choice below:

- I consent to participate in this research study and have my individual interviews recorded
- I consent to participate in this research study but **do not** consent to the recording of my individual interviews
- I **do not** consent to participate in this research

I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older. I give my consent to be recorded.

**Participant's signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix C: Interview Guide**

#### Interview 1 - Pre-departure:

1. Tell me about yourself. What are you studying, or did you study in school?
2. What identities are important to you?
3. What attracted you to study abroad as an educational option?
4. How did you decide which study abroad program to participate in?
5. What was the experience like leading up to your participation in the program?
6. What sorts of hesitations did you have regarding your participation, if any?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

#### Interview 2 - In Country:

1. How would you describe your experience abroad, from start to finish?
2. What is the most positive memory you have of your study abroad experience?
3. How did you get along with the other students in your program?
4. Were there any instances, either as part of the program or within the culture of the country you were studying in, were you felt you were viewed as the “other”?
5. What is the most negative memory you have of your study abroad experience?
6. How did you deal with the challenges brought on by this or any other negative experiences?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

#### Interview 3 - Re-entry:

1. Overall, from pre-departure to re-entry, how would you describe your study abroad experience?
2. What events occurred during your program that continued to impact your daily life, positively or negatively, upon completion of the program?
3. How did any re-entry activities organized by your provider, such as reunions, presentations, meetings, etc., help you adjust to life back in the United States?
4. If you decided to participate in another study abroad program, what sorts of provisions (marketing, staff members, financial aid, etc.) would convince you to enroll in a specific program?
5. What recommendations would you share with other gender non-binary students who might be considering study abroad
6. What recommendations would you share with study abroad professionals working with gender non-binary students?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?