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Defining Self: Negotiating Cultural, Gender, and Ethnic Identity in a Short-term Study Abroad Program in Russia

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**Defining Self: Negotiating Cultural, Gender, and Ethnic Identity in a
Short-term Study Abroad Program in Russia**

by

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Dedication

To my mother who always believed in me and to my husband for all his love and support

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Defining Self: Negotiating Cultural, Gender, and Ethnic Identity in a Short-term Study Abroad Program in Russia

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Study abroad programs are a common component of many foreign language programs across the United States. Of these university-based study abroad programs, short-term language-focused programs are becoming increasingly popular in the United States. Despite the growing popularity of short-term study abroad programs, there is little research on students' sociocultural experiences under these short, intensive language-immersion conditions.

Relatively few studies have addressed the issue of gender in the study abroad context. Brecht et al. in their longitudinal study on the effects of a study abroad stay on language proficiency gains in Russian found that gender was one of the significant predictors of language learning. The impact of gender on the process of second language and culture acquisition becomes particularly important in countries like Russia where perception and construction of gender roles is very different from that in the United States. These gender-related differences may cause students to have negative attitudes towards the Russian language and culture.

Students belonging to ethnic minorities have different study abroad experiences from students who belong to the ethnic majority or mainstream culture. In the rise of terrorist attacks administered by Chechen separatists on the territory of Russia in the past several years, native Russians are becoming less tolerant with representatives of ethnic minorities and therefore, more suspicious and hostile towards individuals with non-Caucasian features. Being constantly racially-profiled can turn an otherwise pleasant language and culture learning experience into a nightmare. A better understanding of how race and ethnicity affect learning processes in a study abroad setting will result in rethinking of how learners' differences (and the outcomes of those differences) enter the formal language teaching curriculum.

The present study investigates how American college students visiting Russia on a five-week-long study abroad program perceive and describe their cultural, gender, and ethnic experiences. The results of this ethnographic case study are analyzed through the lens of critical theory that argues that human society is essentially oppressive and that societal inequality is reproduced through the dominant ideology.

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Chapter I: Introduction

STUDY ABROAD: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

My interest in the area of study abroad programs grew out of my own experience as a study abroad student. In January 1995, I came to the University of Texas at Austin from Russia for a semester-long study abroad stay. This study abroad trip not only defined my future research interests, but also changed my whole life: several years later I got married and moved to the United States permanently.

When I look back at my study abroad stay in the United States, I have no doubt that I went through a long and exhausting process of cultural adaptation. Yet, back in 1995, having received no study abroad orientation from my home university, I had trouble understanding what I was experiencing. I did not know how to cope with the effects of culture shock, how to deal with the tremendous emotional, psychological and even physiological impact it had on me.

I still remember quite well the initial euphoria I felt upon landing in the United States: everything was new, exciting, fascinating. Eventually, this happy period of revelation and discovery was succeeded by a period of mild irritation and frustration because I was unable to function efficiently in what seemed to be the most basic everyday situations. I thought that this frustration was caused by the language barrier I was trying to fight so desperately. The feeling of frustration and dissatisfaction gradually led to the feeling of disappointment. It was disappointment with myself as a language learner (and I thought I spoke English fluently before I landed in the US), disappointment with the program I was a part of, disappointment with Americans and their culture (or rather what seemed to be a lack of one). Closer towards the end of my study abroad trip, this state of disappointment gave way to a desire to understand the new cultural

environment I found myself in, and with a better cultural understanding came acceptance and even empathy. I realized that cultural differences were natural and unavoidable, that there is more than one way of doing things, and finally, that being different is not always bad. It seems that within the period of six months, I went through a complete cycle of the process of cultural adaptation.

Upon my arrival in the United States, I was also surprised to find out how culturally, ethnically and racially diverse this country is. It seems that I experienced the feeling directly the opposite to what many American students visiting Russia on study abroad programs experience. I got overwhelmed with the diversity of American culture, while many American students report being surprised by the cultural, ethnic and racial homogeneity of the Russian society. In the United States, I became much more aware of my own ethnicity or of my own ethnic identity as I would put it in the framework of my current research. I became conscious of the fact that I belong to the ethnic majority in my native country– this was something I never really thought about before. As a result of this new heightened ethnic awareness, I became more sensitive towards issues related to race and ethnicity.

Finally, during this first trip to the United States I realized that there is a difference in the interpretation of gender and gender roles in Russian and American cultures. Back in 1995, I came to the conclusion that American women are largely liberated from gender-related stereotypes that still existed in Russia. It seemed that, unlike Russian women, many American women were extremely emancipated. I also observed that, according to my Russian standards, American men were often ill-mannered or impolite. For example, I noticed that my American boyfriend (who eventually became my husband) was rather reluctant to take full responsibility for paying restaurant bills – something I never had to deal with in Russia. Conversely, the famous

“Southern” friendliness of the United States was very unusual to me: I was not used to greeting complete strangers or initiating small talk with other people standing in line or sharing an elevator. I was born and raised in Moscow, a city with a population of more than 11 million people, where most people hardly know their neighbors and avoid talking to strangers like the plague. Because of my upbringing, I interpreted Southern friendliness as a sign of exaggerated attention to me as a female.

As general and stereotypical as these first impressions were, they left an unforgettable imprint on my view of the American culture and society. Many years later, in 2003, when I started working with American college students going to Russia on a short-term study abroad program, I learned that these students’ interpretations of issues related to culture, ethnicity and gender in Russia were strikingly similar to my own perception of culture, ethnicity and gender in the United States. And so when the time came for me to research this topic for my dissertation, I decided to investigate the sociocultural experiences of American college students in Russia in more depth.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This is an interdisciplinary study drawing on the fields of sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, gender studies and Russian studies. The goal of the study is to research cultural, ethnic and gender experiences of American college students visiting Russia on a short-term study abroad program. The research hypothesis of the study is that American students will have different study abroad experiences in Russia, depending on their level of cultural awareness, their gender and their ethnicity.

Qualitative interviews were the sole data collecting method used in the research. The results of the study were interpreted through the lens of critical theory, i.e., with the assumption that human society is essentially oppressive and that societal inequality is

reproduced through the dominant ideology. Due to the study's small sample (only eight participants) and its qualitative nature, generating broad conclusions was not the goal of this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addresses the following three research questions:

1. How do American students negotiate their cultural, gender and ethnic identities in the context of a short-term study abroad program in Russia?
2. How do the differences in students' cultural experiences, gender and ethnicity influence the process of identity negotiation?
3. How does the short duration of the stay abroad influence students' cultural, ethnic and gender experiences in Russia?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This work is a qualitative study based on the constructivist epistemology or on the constructivist view of learning and knowledge which argues that meaning is created in interaction with objective reality and that this interaction always takes place in a social context. This study is also connected to the critical theory research which views society as essentially oppressive and strives to fight the oppression and inequality permeating human interactions. Methodologically, this study is an example of an ethnographic case study describing the sociocultural experiences of American undergraduates visiting Russia on a short-term study abroad program.

RESEARCH AUDIENCE

The primary audience of this study is directors and administrators of study abroad programs interested in improving their programs' pre-departure preparation techniques by providing their study abroad participants with more detailed information on acculturation, gender, and ethnicity in a study abroad setting. This study will also be a valuable source of information for other researchers working on issues of acculturation, gender and ethnicity in educational settings abroad. Governmental agencies interested in promoting and facilitating cross-cultural communication between the United States and Russia will benefit from the study as well. Finally, it is hoped that this study will help many American college students who are planning to undertake study abroad in Russia to achieve better understanding of the sociocultural aspects of Russian culture and get more out of their limited time in country.

DEFINING KEY TERMINOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions of the key terminology were used:

A short-term study abroad program is a study abroad program with a duration of three to eight weeks.

Identity is “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton 5).

Inequality is the unequal allocation of benefits (Cohn 3).

Discrimination is the provision of unequal benefits to people of different ascriptive statuses despite identical qualifications and merits (Cohn 3).

Prejudice is an attitude of hostility held by members of one ascriptive group towards members of another (Cohn 3).

Acculturation is the process of adaptation which takes place within cultures when two or more groups – each of which has specific cultural and behavioral models – enter into relations with one another (Bolaffi et al. 1).

Culture shock is the process of adjustment to an unfamiliar cultural environment that has an emotional, psychological, behavioral, cognitive and physiological impact on individuals who experience it (Pedersen 1).

Gender is the social elaboration of biological sex (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 10).

Ethnicity is belonging to a group of people who share cultural values, behavior patterns, language, territory and economic life (Ogawa 30).

Race is belonging to a group of people with common ancestry and genetically transmitted physical characteristics (Ogawa 30).

THE PROGRAM

The study abroad program described in the study is an intensive Russian-language and culture summer program that originated in 2002 in a large state university located in the southwestern United States. The program is divided into two five-week-long periods. During the first five weeks of the summer (June 5th through July 10th), students take intensive Russian language courses at their home university in the United States. During the following five weeks (July 15th through August 20th), they continue with their language courses at the Moscow International University (MIU). The second part of the courses is taught by the MIU faculty using the instructional materials and guidelines provided by the students' home university. Thus, within a period of ten weeks students participating in the program complete two semester-long courses of Russian language instruction.

One of the unique features of the study abroad program described in the study is that it provides intensive Russian language instruction at three different levels – beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Few study abroad programs in the United States allow their participants to travel abroad with a minimal level of linguistic proficiency, especially if the target language, like Russian, is one of the more difficult foreign languages to learn for native speakers of English.

Since the program covers two semesters of Russian language instruction within the period of ten weeks, it is highly intensive and requires a great amount of motivation, concentration and work on the part of the students. During the first half of the program, students have up to 3 hours of language instruction daily, which is followed by a substantial amount of homework. During the Russia-based part of the program, students have five hours of language instruction Monday through Thursday. The intensity of the program is counterbalanced by the small size of classes (usually 3-8 students per section), which is extremely beneficial for students under such conditions and allows them to enjoy the kind of instruction that is similar to individual instruction.

During the Russia-based part of the program, in addition to the in class language instruction, students are required to participate in a variety of cultural activities, such as going on a boat tour on the Moscow river or a trip to Lev Tolstoy's estate in Yasnaya Polyana. Due to the short duration of the program, the schedule for these cultural activities is very dense. A weekend trip to Saint-Petersburg scheduled closer towards the end of the program allows students to experience other parts of Russia besides Moscow.

In order to help participants in the program assimilate to the new cultural and linguistic environment, the program pairs them with native Russian language peer tutors. These tutors are carefully selected by the program and include young educated Muscovites looking for an opportunity to meet American students visiting Russia, share

their knowledge of the Russian culture, and learn more about the American culture. The primary responsibilities of language tutors are providing students with opportunities to practice Russian language skills in a natural language environment, helping them get around the city, and showing them places to shop, eat and entertain themselves. Students typically get together with their Russian language tutors once or twice a week for several hours. It is not unusual for students to build strong relationships with their tutors, meet their close friends and family, and go to their dachas over the weekend.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the study were eight undergraduates from a large state research university located in the southwestern United States. Participants' background information was elicited through a written questionnaire administered before the departure for the study abroad trip, and also through informal conversations that took place at the end of the interviews. The medium age of the participants in the study was 21 years old. Out of eight participants in the study six were females and two were males. Six out of eight participants identified themselves as white Americans; one female identified herself as South East Asian American; another female participant identified herself as "white Latin-American of Cuban parentage."

The table below summarizes the information on each of the participants in the study. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants, their real names are not used.

Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Proficiency in Russian ¹	Previous visits to Russia
Katherine	21	F	White	Advanced	0
Bella	21	F	White	Advanced	2
Jason	23	M	White	Advanced	0
Anthony	20	M	White	Advanced	0
Rita	22	F	Southeast Asian	Advanced	0
Veronica	21	F	White	Novice	0
Stephanie	21	F	White Latin American	Novice	0
Marianne	23	F	White	Intermediate	0

Table 1: Participants in the Program

¹ The language proficiency in Russian is an estimate based on whether the participant was registered for a first-year Russian course (Novice); second-year Russian course (Intermediate); or a third-year Russian course (Advanced) during the summer when the study abroad trip took place.

Chapter II: The Review of Literature

STUDY ABROAD

Why do students choose to study abroad?

Starting with the 1980s, study abroad has attracted an unexpected amount of interest and attention in American higher education. This interest and attention have not diminished since (Goodwin and Nacht). The popularity of study abroad programs is not accidental. According to Goodwin and Nacht, young Americans choose to participate in various types of study abroad programs because they want to understand the world they live in and become more global in their world views (2). Among other reasons that contribute to the attractiveness of study abroad programs, Goodwin and Nacht mention the gradually decreasing cost of the programs and the increasing popularity of traveling in general (3).

Many American college students choose to study abroad to improve their language skills and to expand their cultural knowledge. Improved linguistic fluency is often stated as the principal benefit of the study abroad experiences (Isabelli-Garcia; Mathews; Rochat and Zelljadt). Many researchers also agree that study abroad helps students develop cultural sensitivity or an international perspective (Carlson et al.; Goodwin and Nacht; Kauffman, Martin and Weaver). One of the most often cited large-scale studies in the area of study abroad was conducted by Carlson et al. and focused on the impact of study abroad programs on students' future careers and lives. Some of the conclusions Carlson et al. draw are very impressive and motivating for future participants in study abroad programs. For example, study abroad students tend to be more financially independent and are usually better achievers in the academic setting than students who

chose to stay at home. Moreover, study abroad students are, in general, satisfied with the outcomes of their trips and plan to use the acquired knowledge in their future career (16-17). They reveal a high level of interest in other countries and have a more positive attitude towards other cultures and their representatives (14-15).

Approaches to classifications of study abroad programs.

There exist multiple classifications of study abroad programs currently available to American college students. Most of these classifications are based on the structure of a program. Vande Berg proposes to substitute conventional classifications of study abroad programs that are based on structure with classifications that take into account the extent to which programs provide students with opportunities to integrate culturally. This new approach to program classifications takes into consideration the following seven program characteristics: 1) length of stay; 2) entry foreign language competence; 3) extent to which target language is used in coursework on site; 4) context of academic work; 5) housing; 6) cultural/experimental learning; and 7) on-site mentoring that helps to reflect on learning (2). All these seven elements have a substantial impact on student learning abroad.

Goodwin and Nacht, in their turn, argue for a classification that is based on the programs' goals and purposes. They distinguish between educational/social goals and administrative/institutional ones (9). In the middle of the 1980s, Goodwin and Nacht conducted a large-scale study on various study abroad programs offered by over forty universities and colleges in the states of California, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Texas. They came to the conclusion that programs that are not goal-oriented are doomed to failure (9). Among the primary educational program goals mentioned by Goodwin and Nacht are: mastering a foreign language, becoming truly multicultural individuals, and

learning more about self. Institutional program goals discussed by Goodwin and Nacht include, among others, attracting more students to the universities, achieving financial profit or saving money, and responding to governmental policies.

Short or not?

Short-term study abroad programs are programs with a duration of three to eight weeks. In her Complete Guide to Summer and Short-Term Study, O’Sullivan observes that programs that are currently called “short-term” used to be known as “vacation study abroad” programs (ix). This publication lists short-term study abroad programs with lengths from one week to several months, most of these programs being offered during winter, spring, and summer breaks. The 2001 guide demonstrates that short-term study abroad programs are gaining more popularity among college students, and that many colleges and language schools offer a variety of these programs to their students. The 2001 guide lists over 2,200 of such programs, located in different regions of the world. The Russian part of the guide lists 44 short-term study abroad programs located in different Russian cities and regions (84-86).

In the past decade, there has been much debate regarding which types of study abroad programs are most effective for fostering intercultural competence and foreign language acquisition. In connection with this debate, two questions are frequently asked regarding short-term study abroad programs: 1) How does the limited duration of a short-term study abroad program influence students’ linguistic and cultural gains? 2) What is the optimal length of stay for a study abroad program?

Despite of the large amount of recently published research on study abroad programs, answers to the first question are hard to find – research on the linguistic and cultural outcomes of short-term study abroad programs is still rather scarce. However, the

second question is widely discussed and argued in the literature (Wilkinson; Mathews; Pellegrino Aveni; Carlson et al.; Kauffman, Martin and Weaver; Goodwin and Nacht; Gorka and Niesenbaum). Below is a brief summary of the discussion on the optimal duration of study abroad programs.

The advantages of long-term study abroad programs.

Mathews considers the amount of time spent abroad a major factor influencing students' proficiency gains. She believes that the more time they spend abroad, the more profound are their linguistic and cultural gains. However, she admits that this assumption is general and one may argue that it is the quality of the study abroad experiences rather than their quantity that has the greatest impact on students' language gains.

Pellegrino Aveni argues that as learners go through their study abroad experience, they mature as language users both linguistically and psychologically (130). Therefore, one may conclude that the longer they stay abroad, the more beneficial it is for them. According to Pellegrino Aveni, "extended stay in the L2 culture also helps learners develop a body of strategies for maintaining their sense of security during interactions that may appear threatening" (130). Hence, students participating in short-term study abroad programs, experience a certain disadvantage in comparison to students going abroad on semester- and year- long programs. They have no time to develop effective communication strategies (which are essential for successful functioning in a language immersion setting), and they may never overcome the lack of security in using target language.

Kauffman, Martin and Weaver believe that six months abroad is the minimum amount of time needed to produce meaningful learning outcomes (62). These researchers share those concerns voiced by Pellegrino Aveni and believe that when students stay

abroad for a short time only, they experience minimal impact and personal changes. They do not have time to develop relationships with people in the host country, and often develop surface, stereotypical views of the target culture.

Goodwin and Nacht argue that students who travel on short-term programs have a narrow focus and specific purposes, because the time is precious and cannot be wasted. At the same time, a “serious study” usually requires a considerable investment of time, and students are better off spending a year or more in a study abroad setting (46). Goodwin and Nacht also note that if the study abroad program is based in a Third World or developing country, due to the more serious impact of the culture shock, more time is needed for the program to be successful and productive (88). In the “developed world,” a serious study can be accomplished within a semester or quarter.

Thus, the main argument in favor of long-term study abroad programs is that a longer stay abroad results in more profound linguistic and cultural gains.

The advantages of short-term study abroad programs.

Carlson et al. observe that the average amount of time spent abroad by American students is approximately ten months. Sixty percent of the students felt that this amount of time was just about right, thirty eight percent felt that it was too short, and only two percent found it too long (36). According to this statistic, when Carlson et al. conducted their research at the end of the 1980s, most students preferred long-term study abroad trips. It seems that in the past decade and a half, the situation has changed. The structure and the general goals of study abroad programs as well as the goals of the students who choose to study abroad went through substantial transformations. Study abroad programs also became a much more common component of foreign language programs across the United States. Many undergraduates who are unable to participate in semester- or year-

long study abroad programs, either for financial or personal reasons, eventually opt for shorter trips abroad, which become their only opportunity to experience a full linguistic and cultural submersion. According to Vondrova, the popularity of short-term programs that started in the 1990s is also due to the fact that they are much easier to align with the university's academic goals and are more conducive for faculty involvement (221). In connection with all these changes, one could argue that if Carlson et al. conducted a replica of their original research at the beginning of the XXI century, the results of their study would reveal that present day students are much more supportive of shorter study abroad experiences.

When discussing program duration, Gorka and Niesenbaum argue for the development of interdisciplinary short-term study abroad programs that could help non-language majors to connect meaningfully their specialization with language instruction. In their research Gorka and Niesenbaum found evidence that short-term programs “can provide students with an initial exposure to . . . culture and diversity, give them a different perspective on their own field of study, spark their interest in further language study, and inspire them to find a way to fit a semester- or year-long study-abroad experience into their academic careers” (100). Gorka and Niesenbaum note that both language and non-language majors should be able to study abroad, and that short-term programs provide a great opportunity for non-language majors to experience other cultures and improve their language skills. They remark that short-term study abroad programs are traditionally stigmatized by language professionals who believe that “fluency, or at least proficiency, can only be achieved with extensive, long-term exposure to the language in an immersion setting,” and advocate for a change in the attitude (101). According to these researchers, short-term study abroad programs have their audience and purpose. These programs might not be as effective in increasing students' linguistic

proficiency as long-term programs, yet they provide students with opportunities to use language learned in a classroom setting in real life situations. In addition, younger students may benefit more from short-term programs than students who are getting close to graduation, because they are more likely to find a way to fit in their studies another, longer-term study abroad trip before finishing school.

Gorka and Niesenbaum also comment on some of the disadvantages of short-term programs. They note that these programs usually have a different structure from longer programs: in many of them, students do not live with families and “might be little more than tourists who receive credit for traveling... [students] have very little contact with the people who live in the towns or cities they visit, and therefore, next to no reason to use their language skills” (103). They suggest that in order to overcome this problem students need to be better prepared before they leave the country and more actively involved in the community while abroad.

In connection with the better preparation before the departure on short-term programs, Kitao observes that pre-program orientation is extremely important for short-term study abroad programs. In her research on the changes in Japanese students’ perception of their proficiency in English and in the way they viewed the host culture and host culture nationals as a result of a short-term stay in the United States, Kitao concludes that the success of a short term program is due, among other things, to a substantial pre-departure orientation component. Kitao observes that, in the case of her own research, even though students’ linguistic skills could not have improved considerably within a period of one month, without doubt students became more confident language users, and their image of America and Americans became very positive. “In addition to gaining confidence in their English, many of the students seemed to have gained more motivation to further improve their English” (111).

Thus, the main argument in favor of short-term study abroad programs is that they provide students who cannot go abroad for a longer time period with an opportunity to go abroad and use language learned in a classroom setting in real life situations. Also, participation in a short-term study abroad program may inspire students to find a way to fit a semester- or year-long study-abroad experience into their academic careers.

IDENTITY

Defining identity

Norton uses the term identity to “reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (5). In his book on identity, Baumeister argues that the term ‘identity’ is hard to define: “People have always had identities. The modern difficulty with identity must be understood as resulting from a change in identity, or rather in the way identity is created and shaped” (4). Identity is hard to define because it is so subjective, fluid, and negotiable. It is constructed in the process of negotiation both through verbal and non-verbal behavior.

Wenger observes that building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities (145). The concept of identity, like a bridge, connects the individual and the social. According to Wenger, identity can be viewed as a negotiated experience, as a community membership, as a learning trajectory, as a nexus of multimembership, and as a relation between the local and the global (149). Since individuals are never disconnected from the social reality, their personalities and identities are shaped through the past and current practices they involve in. Thus, the construction of identity is a complex process that reveals how individuals position themselves and act in various socio-cultural contexts.

Identity and language learning

According to Pellegrino Aveni, language is not only the primary means of communication, but also “a fundamental mechanism of self-presentation and social identity, and it is simultaneously an instrument of power and a source of weakness for its users” (8). Identity is closely connected to language and culture which play a primary role in its development and expression. Recent research on identity formation in language learning has focused on various aspects of identity: social identity (Norton; Kinginger), cultural identity (Kanno), and gender identity (Pavlenko). Many researchers agree that those who lack the skills to express themselves in a new language often experience identity crisis. Identity crisis is caused by an inability to be who you want to be and to project a specific image of yourself in a given situation (Pellegrino Aveni; Lvovich; Hoffman). The result of identity crisis is general unhappiness and dissatisfaction with oneself, frustration, and even depression.

Threats to identity in language learning come both from external and internal sources. For example, language learners’ sense of security in using the target language is affected by the social distance between them and their interlocutors, and also by the way they perceive this distance (Pellegrino Aveni; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet). Pellegrino Aveni contends that language learners’ sense of security depends on the following four areas: 1) their status in a social interaction; 2) their control over the environment of an interaction; 3) their validation of their own self-worth (in other words, their contribution to the interaction should be considered valid by other interlocutors); and 4) their physical and emotional safety (35). Pellegrino Aveni observes that in a study abroad setting, language learners tend to be more comfortable using the target language with women, children, and interlocutors they consider physically attractive (73-74, 79). It seems that women and children are usually more forgiving in relation to language errors. Women are

used to dealing with children who are first language learners. And children, who are still actively acquiring their L1, find themselves in a situation rather similar to the situation of second language learners and, therefore, express more sympathy and understanding towards foreigners than adult native speakers do. As for physical attractiveness of an interlocutor, it gives language learners a false sense of security; in other words, they feel that physically attractive people are more trustworthy.

Gender identity and ethnic identity: differences and similarities

If any type of identity is fluid and context-embedded, ethnic identity is even more so. Ethnic identity is extremely unstable over time and across situations (Dijk; Stephan and Stephan; Payne). Situational changes in ethnic identity are associated with group solidarity, social distance and status. Van Dijk argues that concepts like “race” and “ethnicity” belong to the domain of group-membership rather than the individual domain (23-24). In connection with the flexibility of one’s ethnic identity, May notes that even though ethnic identity is flexible, its negotiation is still bounded by the existing categories: “negotiation is a key element here to the ongoing construction of ethnicity, but there are also limits to it. Individual and collective choices are circumscribed by the ethnic categories available at any given time and place” (40).

Payne, in his turn, observes that, with respect to instability and variability, race and ethnicity are very different from gender. For example, a person who is a female in the United States is still a female in Brazil and South Africa. Yet, a person who is considered “black” in the United States may be treated as “colored” in South Africa and even “white” in Brazil. In other words, “race, unlike gender, cannot be defined biologically with objective measures and innate characteristics” (33). What makes gender and ethnic

identities similar, however, is the fact that both of them could become a significant factor in expressing prejudice and discrimination.

Even if gender is more stable than ethnicity, it is still fluid and context-dependent. For example, if a woman feels that in a specific situation she has to present herself as a female rather than a non-gender-specific individual, her gender identity becomes very important and prominent. In other contexts, gender identity is situationally insignificant and goes to the background, while other types of identity (related to educational, social, economic, etc. status) come to the foreground.

Negotiating gender and ethnic identity in one's native culture can be a difficult task. Doing it in an unfamiliar cultural and linguistic environment, is even harder. Not only the context of a specific interaction, but also the more general context of a culture in which interaction takes place influence the process of identity negotiation. In this process of identity negotiation, language learners have to put together their previous gender and ethnic experiences, their knowledge of the target language and culture, and the concrete circumstances of an interaction.

ACCULTURATION

Culture shock

The notion of culture shock was introduced by Oberg in 1960. The term presupposes that coming into contact with a new culture is a potentially confusing and stressful experience. The notion of culture shock is closely connected to the notion of a u-curve of cultural adjustment which assumes that individuals entering a new culture go through three main stages: 1) the initial stage of happiness and optimism; 2) the middle stage of confusion and frustration; and 3) the final stage of regaining happiness and satisfaction with a new culture.

Adler describes culture shock as a sequence of five stages rather than three stages which makes his classification more detailed and elaborate than the traditional one. The first stage in Adler's classification is a happy stage during which travelers experience curiosity and excitement. The second stage is disintegration of old familiar cues; during this stage difficulties start arising. The third stage is reintegration of new cues when the ability to function in a new culture improves. In the fourth stage, reintegration becomes gradual autonomy or the ability to function independently in a new culture. The fifth stage is reciprocal interdependence, where travelers become truly bicultural and comfortable with both cultures (Adler).

The notion of u-curve adjustment was broadened to a w-curve by Gullahorn and Gullahorn who pointed out that returning home requires a new type of adjustment (Gullahorn and Gullahorn). Pedersen notes that both the u-curve and w-curve designs are flawed; their most serious weakness is the implication of a smooth linear cultural adaptation. Pederson argues that, in reality, cultural adaptation is never linear and should be viewed as a series of progressive and regressive steps (4).

Grunzweig and Rinehart note that the term 'culture shock' is out of date. The negative connotation of the term suggests to students that it is something that needs to be avoided and minimized rather than embraced (17). The positive effect of personal growth that is usually the ultimate outcome of going through a culture shock is not visible in the term itself.

In summation, culture shock is a process that involves multiple progressive and regressive stages. The ultimate outcome of culture shock is becoming truly bicultural and comfortable with both cultures.

Variables that affect acculturation

The process of acculturation is influenced by multiple factors. The conditions under which acculturation takes place, individual characteristics of each traveler (including personality traits and previous experience interacting with other cultures), and finally the distance between the native and the target cultures have a substantial impact on the outcomes of acculturation. Furnham and Bochner contend that while there is a general agreement among researchers that the process of acculturation is inherently stressful; there is substantial disagreement about the nature and determinants of cross-cultural stress and how it might be alleviated (33). Since the framework of the present study is sociocultural rather than psychological, and because one of the implicit goals of the study is to learn more about the effects of pre-departure orientation on acculturation, the following two variables that affect acculturation in a study abroad setting are discussed in more detail below: 1) the difference between the two cultures in contact, and 2) the quality and quantity of information on acculturation that is received during the pre-departure orientation.

The difference between the native and the target cultures

Furnham and Bochner believe that the nature of the society behind the target culture plays an important role for the process of acculturation (19). First, societies vary in the extent to which they are *internally* culturally homogenous. Culturally homogenous societies may be easier to understand and assimilate to because there are fewer cultural factors to deal with in the process of acculturation. And second, societies vary in the extent to which they are *externally* different. If the target culture society is externally similar to the native culture society, the process of acculturation will be easier. In the same manner, “as the psychological distance between cultures increases, so will the difficulties experienced by newcomers attempting to accommodate to the host society.”

(33) Furnham and Bochner find the distance between the native culture and the target culture to be the major determinant of the force of culture shock, and therefore, the major determinant in the process of acculturation (20).

In connection with the differences between the native and the target cultures, Grunzweig and Rinehart argue that the process of world globalization made the international educational exchange system face a serious crisis (5). The very foundation on which international educational exchange was built, the distance between the cultures and the necessity to bridge them, is disappearing rapidly. The implied assumption behind globalization is that a new, relatively homogenous, global culture is emerging. This assumption, however, should be treated with caution. Implicit in this assumption is an equation of a culture and consumption: same products are available to people all over the world. In reality, culture is a much broader notion: it includes not only products but also practices and perspectives, i.e., behaviors and beliefs. In other words, globalization reduces only the superficial differences between the native and the target cultures.

Pre-departure orientation

According to Ward, Bochner and Furnham, most people who cross cultures would benefit from a systematic preparation and training to assist them with the process of acculturation (248). Yet the majority of study abroad students receive a limited pre-departure preparation which, in most cases, is insufficient to make their cross-cultural adaptation more informed and less stressful. The strategies and approaches that are used during the pre-departure orientations to prepare study abroad students for a smoother acculturation may vary to a large extent, depending on how much time is available and how experienced and well-trained the individuals providing the information are. However, the majority of the pre-departure preparation sessions concentrate on providing

information on the following topics: the salient characteristics of the target culture (concentrating primarily on the differences between the native and the target cultures); the effects of culture shock; and strategies that may help study abroad students overcome culture shock.

Furnham and Bochner mention some of the training techniques that are used during pre-departure cross-cultural orientations. These techniques include information giving, cultural sensitization, and learning by doing (236-39). The first technique – information giving – is probably the most popular technique as it is easy to deliver. It is also the least efficient one, because the cultural information discussed is usually too abstract and general. The future study abroad participants rarely engage cognitively with the presented information; in other words, they do not relate the new information to what they already know, do not make critical comparisons and often erroneously conclude that culture can be learned in several quick steps. The second technique – cultural sensitization – is a step up from simply providing information on the target culture. This technique heightens students' awareness of their own culture, its principal goal being “to compare and contrast the two cultures, look at various behaviors from the perspective of each society and thus, develop a sensitivity to and awareness of cultural relativity, leading to the view that very few human values, beliefs and behaviors are absolute and universal...” The last technique – learning by doing – is the most efficient one for cross-cultural training because it is based on supervised stimulated or real target culture experiences. It is the most time consuming technique that requires a competent and a well-trained specialist to administer it and is rarely used in the pre-departure orientations.

In summation, in order to accelerate acculturation in a study abroad setting, study abroad programs should strive to provide their participants with as much cultural training as possible. No matter what training techniques are used to prepare students for the

process of acculturation, the point that has to be constantly emphasized is that acculturation is not something that occurs in isolation from the rest of the activities and that acculturation does not necessarily start at the beginning of the study abroad stay and ends when it is over.

GENDER

Gender in the study abroad research

The need for more research

Study abroad research has experienced much interest and attention on the part of language professionals in the past two decades, yet little has been written on the development of linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in a study abroad context (Freed; Regan). Research directly related to the issues of gender in a study abroad context is even scarcer (Wright; Twombly; Talburt and Stewart). This is particularly surprising because starting with the beginning of the nineties more and more women in the United States are applying for study abroad programs.

Individual differences play a crucial role in linguistic and cultural acquisition both in a classroom situation and on a study abroad trip. Outside of the study abroad setting, research shows that women are usually more successful language learners than men. Women traditionally have a better attitude towards language learning and are more collaborative in their language learning attempts than men. Women's better attitude towards language learning could be accounted for by a common belief that language teaching is a good, solid career choice for an educated woman. Men, on the other hand, are believed to be better off with careers in business, as well as in the medical and legal fields because those fields are financially more secure.

In the study abroad context, however, women are less successful in their language learning attempts than men. Thus, gender becomes one of the major factors contributing to individual differences in the linguistic and cultural acquisition in a study abroad setting (Regan; Carlson et al.; Huebner; Pellegrino Aveni; Bolen). The limited research on gender-related issues in a study abroad setting that is currently available focuses primarily on students' own perspectives on their experiences (Wright; Polanyi; Brecht and Robinson; Talburt and Stewart; Wilkinson). These few studies almost unanimously agree that linguistically (and most probably culturally as well) women gain less than men (Polanyi; Brecht and Robinson; Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg; Talburt and Stewart; Twombly; Wilkinson; Wright; Kline; Mathews). It is time that language researchers address women's problems in a study abroad setting and admit that gender is one of the variables that affect the quantity and quality of foreign language input female students receive during their stay abroad. Providing study abroad participants with information related to gender in the target culture may not only significantly improve their linguistic gains, but also facilitate their cultural adaptation, and help them make better sense of their study abroad experiences.

Overview of gender-related research in study abroad.

Twombly's research on the experiences of American students attending the University of Costa Rica is one of the first major attempts to study the effects of gender on student's study abroad perceptions. The research focuses on how unsolicited gender-related comments and women's friendships (or the lack of) influenced the study abroad experiences of American female students in Costa Rica. Twombly comes to the conclusion that study abroad experiences can be extremely gendered, and that culture shock or cultural adaptation can be different for men and women. Her recommendations

that might help female students overcome the culture specific gender bias include modifying dress habits to conform to the local cultural norms, using the support of the group, choosing to stay for a longer duration, and informing themselves about gender-related peculiarities of the target culture before the sojourn abroad.

Carlson et al. also examined gender as an individual and sojourn-related variable that has an effect on the variation in study abroad outcomes. When studying linguistic changes as a result of study abroad trips, they found gender to be “the single most powerful predictor of language change” (78). “Prior to the study abroad year, the males were substantially lower than the females in foreign language proficiency. By end of the sojourn, however, the males made gains that brought them up to the level of the females” (78). Unfortunately, Carlson et al. do not elaborate on the underlying factors that produced such a variety in the linguistic gains of male and female participants in their study.

Pellegrino Aveni discusses how the gender of the native speakers of the target language impacts language learners’ willingness to practice target language in a study abroad setting in Russia (79-86). She contends that both students’ personal experiences and the existing target culture gender stereotypes influence students’ preference for interacting with individuals of a specific gender. The pre-departure questionnaire data from Pellegrino Aveni’s research reveals that when asked if they preferred to speak Russian with females or males, 86.5 percent of the language learners reported that they preferred speaking to Russian women rather than Russian men. The results of the post-program questionnaire did not differ greatly from the initial results. Pellegrino Aveni concludes that many female students notice culture specific gender stereotypes that exist in Russia (for example, that females are supposed to be more passive than men), and this fact contributes to the uncertainty on how to behave with representatives of the opposite

gender and, consequently, to the avoidance of any interactions with them. As for male students, some of them prefer to interact with Russian women rather than men because they find the language of Russian women easier to understand. It seems that women traditionally tend to use more normative language and less slang. They are also experienced with child-rearing and the use of motherese, and hence tend to treat foreigners as small children who are making their first steps in language acquisition. Finally, women are traditionally raised to be more attentive to others' problems and caring than men (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 39-40).

Pierre Bourdieu uses the term "habitus" to refer to a set of beliefs and dispositions that individuals develop as a result of their socialization (Bourdieu). Since gender socialization is culture specific, one may argue that the existing gender stereotypes in Russia are a part of Russians' cultural habitus. While American language learners may be aware of these stereotypes, they don't necessarily share them, nor do they always have a sense when a specific stereotype is a part of an interaction. Some female students in Pellegrino Aveni's research report feeling insecure when interacting with Russian men because they sense that their motives are stretching beyond just being friends (81). Some participants are also aware of the stereotypical view of American females that exists in certain cultures, including Russian, mainly that American women are sexually active and even loose. Twombly's research supports the existence of this stereotype as well: American female students are often perceived as sex objects by Costa Rican men because American women are usually emancipated, liberal, and, therefore, morally loose and accessible.

Kline, in her research on acquisition of literacy skills in a French study abroad setting observes that there is a clear gender distinction in the experiences of male and female participants. Her research statistics reveals that out of nineteen women in the

group, nine were assaulted by French men at some point during their sojourn in France (most of them were just grabbed, one was raped). One of the participants in the study compared female experiences abroad to those of prisoners: their freedom is situationally constrained, and they have to avoid doing certain things (like, for example, going to the movies late at night) because of safety concerns. Kline comments on the situation by noting that women's "efforts to protect themselves imposed constraints on their activities and on their freedom to enjoy solitude" (178). Such conscious avoiding of interactions with native speakers of the target language deprives language learners from valuable practice and eventually results in low gains in linguistic proficiency.

The results of Kline's research also reveal that gender is a significant factor influencing students' choice of reading material. Women in her research preferred reading romance novels and women's magazines, while men preferred newspapers and news weeklies. Reading different types of materials allowed participants in Kline's research to develop distinct identities as literates; men and women formed different types of reading communities and, eventually, different types of language learning communities. This difference in the preferences for reading materials could be a result of different gender socializations. Men also experienced more pressure to confine themselves to specific types of materials; in other words, they would have liked to read women's magazines, but could not do so because they didn't want to be ridiculed. As Kline summarizes it, "women tended to use texts to establish and to maintain connections with others; men tended to use texts to establish and to maintain their position in conversational or interactional hierarchies" (206-07).

Unlike other studies dealing with gender in a study abroad setting, Mathews's research revealed no correlation between gender and students' proficiency gains in speaking and listening in a study abroad context in Russia. She concludes that the so-

called “gender-effect” is no longer present in a study abroad setting in Russia (9). With the absence of the gender effect, her study concentrates on investigating different paths men and women take to achieve similar linguistic results in a study abroad setting. Matthews’ hypothesis is that certain behaviors exercised in the study abroad setting could correlate with the students’ language proficiency gains. The results of her investigation reveal that the most important behavior that correlates with language proficiency gains is the use of the target language: the more it is used, the higher are the gains. For the male participants in the study, Mathews found a strong positive correlation between pre-program listening comprehension score and time spent with one Russian female or time spent with a host mother (189). A significant negative correlation was found between pre-program listening comprehension score and time spent with a host father. These results support the findings of Pellegrino Aveni’s research: just like female participants, male participants engage more actively in interactions with Russian women, and the linguistic and cultural benefits that result from these interactions are usually more substantial.

In summation, gender-related research in the study abroad context reveals that study abroad experiences can be extremely gendered, and that linguistically women usually gain less than men during study abroad trips.

Gender differences

Feminism and gender inequality

When discussing gender prejudice, discrimination and inequality, one cannot avoid talking about the feminist movement. In most basic terms, the feminist movement could be defined as a social movement whose goal is achieving equality between men and women. The history of feminist movement or feminism as an organized movement could be roughly divided into two major parts: first wave feminism and second wave

feminism. The first wave of the movement took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The goal of first wave feminism was to get equal legal rights for women including the right to vote, the right to have equal earnings for both genders and the right to have equal access to higher education (Lorber 2). The contemporary feminist movement took shape as an organized political movement in the 1960s and it is usually referred to as “second wave” feminism. The goal of second wave feminism is to achieve social changes by focusing attention on how women are still more socially disadvantaged than men and by analyzing the sexual oppression women still suffer (Lorber 4).

When talking about gender inequality, feminists usually refer to women who are disadvantaged in comparison to similarly situated men. Contemporary feminists’ view of gender inequality is not unified in any way. Depending on the type of feminism they belong to or work in (Marxist, socialist, psychoanalytic, etc.), feminists offer different solutions to the problem of gender inequality. However, the majority of contemporary feminists believe that gender inequality is not an individual matter, but is deeply ingrained in the structure of societies (Lorber 6-7; Bem 133-34; Connell 9-10; Chafetz 11-12).

From the social structure to cultural traditions

Gender inequality has various forms and is expressed at multiple levels (Lorber 5; Bem 1-2; Connell 55-59; Chafetz 14). For example, we can talk about gender inequality when work most frequently performed by women (such as teaching, child care and nursing) is traditionally less paid than work done by men (such as construction work or mining). We can also see gender inequality in the fact that women get less education than men of the same social position. As Lorber sums it up, “The modern forms of gender inequality are... an elaborated system within which, it was estimated by a United Nations

report in 1980, women do two thirds of the world's work, receive 10 percent of the world's income, and own 1 percent of the world's property" (7). Almost thirty years later, the situation has not changed to a substantial degree. Even in economically advanced industrial societies such as the United States women are still often disadvantaged in the labor market. The situation in the developing or third world societies is much worse.

Gender inequality is propagated both by the society's social structures (what some researchers call gender inequality at the macro level) and by the country's cultural traditions (gender inequality at the micro level). Chafetz notes that many feminists prefer to draw this distinction between macro and micro levels in the analysis of gender inequality; however, it is important to keep in mind that the distinction between the two levels is not precise because they interact with each other intricately. According to Chafetz, the macro level refers to society-wide phenomena such as economic, political and social systems. While the micro level refers to intrapsychic phenomena as they are affected by social and cultural factors and to the everyday face-to-face interactions. Even though the macro and micro levels of analysis are closely related, it seems that separating the two makes the analysis more comprehensible and manageable (14).

Many feminists firmly believe that the maintenance and reproduction of gender inequality is deeply rooted in the gender division of labor (Chafetz 11; Epstein 101-02). Cultural traditions and social structure interact in the creation of gender-related opinions and stereotypes. Epstein notes that culture labels tasks as either "male" or "female"; and in doing so it draws upon tradition and ideology. Cultural traditions can also define 'proper' statuses for males and females that lead to sex-typed status-sets in societies. "A male-typed status-set might be father – husband – steel worker – veteran; a female status-set, wife – mother – primary school teacher – volunteer community worker" (104). By putting men and women into spheres believed to be appropriate for them, such sex-typed

status-sets reinforce the social stratification system: if women are meant to be at home, they cannot compete with men in the labor market, especially for those higher ranking and better paid positions.

Chafetz argues that “Any division of labor requires some degree of cooperation and interdependence among people who specialize in performing only some of the tasks necessary to sustain life” (46). In other words, men voluntarily agree to provide for the family, while women agree to take care of the household and family members and maybe make a contribution to providing for the family as well. The fact that women are responsible for the family and for maintaining a job affects their career opportunities. At the macro level of analysis of gender inequality, it is the society’s ideology and gender-related norms that justify such unequal responsibilities. At the micro level, it is gender-related stereotypes and beliefs that promote unequal treatment.

Gender in Russia

The patriarchal nature of the Russian society

The essence of the patriarchal approach to gender differences is the belief that there is a natural division between men and women, and that women by their nature are intended to be mothers, while men are intended to be breadwinners. Kon believes that Russia has always been a patriarchal society where women are oppressed both in social and domestic spheres (198).

The patriarchal nature of the Russian culture is clearly reflected in Russian folklore and literature. Lissyutkina, for example, brings to our attention that the beautiful heroines of Russian literature who went against the patriarchal order, such as Nastasia Filipovna in Dostoevsky’s ‘Idiot’ and Helen Bezukhova in Tolstoy’s ‘War and Peace,’ are depicted as morally and spiritually deficient (282-83). She concludes that Russian

literature of the pre-communist period reflects traditional Russian culture that is conservative and opposed to the pleasure principle (282-83).

Gender in Soviet Russia

The October Revolution of 1917 initially tried to liberate women from the patriarchal oppression, primarily by weakening the institution of marriage. Yet, as time passed, Bolsheviks had to reverse their original politics in relation to family and marriage. In order to raise the birth rate, they returned to promoting traditional family values. Since the Soviet Union placed a great emphasis on the duties of its citizens, women's principal duty became taking care of their families and bearing and rearing their children. "Women in Soviet Russia formed an indispensable part of the work force, yet there was always a tension between their dual roles as workers and mothers" (Attwood Young People, Sex and Identity).

These traditional family values were not compatible with the idea of gender equality. Nor were they compatible with the idea of sexual freedom and liberation. Eventually, in relation to sexuality, Soviet Russia found itself in a situation that could be characterized with one single word – sexophobia. According to Kon, sexophobia enforces silence in the discussion of sexuality as a phenomenon, and leads to hypocrisy and cynicism widely observed when issues related to gender and sexuality are attempted to be addressed publicly (209). With the collapse of the Soviet regime, the state of sexophobia was succeeded by what researchers like Goldschmidt refer to as a "sexual revolution": sexuality as a former forbidden fruit turned into the object of mass obsession (321).

Gender in Post-Soviet Russia

Gender-related stereotypes and prejudice are widespread in contemporary Russia. The disintegration of the Soviet Union had a tremendous impact on reinforcing and

spreading gender prejudice in Russia. The transformation of the collectivist value system which (at least in theory) promoted egalitarian relations between genders into a more individualistic one, gave rise to a new wave of gender prejudice and discrimination in Russia. According to Attwood, “the market economy is said to require just those traits which have traditionally been ascribed to men – entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, activity, initiative, rationality, courage, a willingness to take risks – and the demise of state socialism has been accompanied by a celebration of masculinity” (Attwood Young People, Sex and Identity 112).

In general, the process of post-communist transition had a strong negative effect on the lives of Russian women (Stulhofer and Sandfort; Moghadan; Lapidus; Posadskaya; Attwood Young People, Sex and Identity). The unstable economy caused high rates of unemployment in post-communist Russia, and women were among the first employees to get fired or laid off. The inability to be financially secure caused by unemployment lowers the social status of women to the role of housewives who are fully dependent on their husbands/male partners to provide for the family. The economic instability and financial insecurity also bring many marriages to an end and lower the likelihood of marrying.

Gender and family

According to Kotovskaia and Shalygina, quoting Olga Voronina (a Russian researcher studying the emergence of Russian feminism), because of the power of the totalitarian regime and Russia’s firm patriarchal relations in all spheres, the traditional sex-role balance has persisted longer in Russia than in many Western countries (127). This traditional sex-role balance assigned men the position of primary breadwinners and women the position of principal family caretakers. The clash between traditional female

sex-role identity and women's desire to pursue their career goals became the basic source of an internal psychological conflict for many Russian women.

At the beginning of the nineties, Attwood conducted research on young Russians' attitude towards sex roles and sexuality. The research reveals that the participants in the study stressed repeatedly the different male and female roles in relation to the family order. A typical opinion voiced by the subjects in the research was: "The man is the protector and breadwinner, while the woman is responsible for tending the family hearth and reproducing the human race" (Attwood Attitudes Towards Sex Roles 135). The results of the study demonstrate that the traditional patriarchal view on the family and sex roles is still prevalent among many young Russians.

Gender and employment

Bridger and Kay argue that the economic reforms that took place in Russia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union "have reintroduced the concept of officially acknowledged unemployment for the first time in some sixty years" and that the transition to the market economy caused a massive drop in the living standards for many Russian families (21). From the very beginning of this chaotic period, women have formed an absolute majority of the officially registered unemployed. According to the 1992 World Bank report, at the beginning of the nineties, women made up 71 percent of all unemployed in Russia. It seems that for state and private businesses that had to deal with the harsh realities of the new market economy, women were "an expensive and potentially troublesome work force" (22). Being primary caregivers for their children, women require more personal business absences from work than men and are eligible for a paid maternity leave. Thus, as Tartakovskaia puts it: "In contrast to men, whose

personal circumstances have little impact on their careers, women's domestic arrangements were a key factor in determining career projects" (64).

Work or employment is crucial to women's sense of identity. It provides them with financial security and the sense of social importance. Many women prefer to keep their jobs even if they do not like them for two simple reasons: 1) they need a source of income and security; and 2) they are aware of their own disadvantageous position in the labor market. The labor market in post-Soviet Russia was very unfriendly towards women. Such extreme cases as rendering sexual favors in order to stay employed were not rare occurrences. The perception of women as sex objects and not employees is still very strong in the minds of some Russian men. Thus, the patriarchal approach to gender differences goes far beyond the mere belief that workplace is not a woman's realm – it often results in overt sexual harassment at work.

Gender and sexuality

With the fall of the communist regime, sexuality in Russia became more "visible." As Lissyutkina puts it, the disintegration of totalitarian ideology provoked the collapse of the image of the working woman as the ideal Soviet woman. She contends that the image of the woman worker was overthrown by the ideal of the woman as prostitute or beauty queen. Lissyutkina believes that this was a normal reaction to many years of "forced labor, a hypocritical sexual morality, and impoverishment" (275). Sexuality (and everything related to it) as a former forbidden fruit turned into the object of mass obsession.

Goldschmidt argues that at the end of the eighties Russia started experiencing a new sexual revolution. He believes that two factors were responsible for setting off this revolution – finally relaxed censorship and the rise of a free market (321-22). The policy

of glasnost promoted by Gorbachev relaxed censorship and consequently, “introduced new sexually explicit works to Russian culture, the most notorious of which were the films *Little Vera (Malen’kaya Vera)* and *Intergirl (Interdevochka)*, and Victor Erofeev’s novel *Russian Beauty (Russkaya Krasavitsa)*” (321). Banned during the Soviet times literary works with overt sexual content started being published as well (for example, Afanas’ev’s *Russian Folktales (Russkie Narodnye Skazki)*). With the rise of the market economy, pornography became extremely popular and, therefore, commercially profitable. The market striving to make more profit encouraged the spread of pornography as well.

Many Russians reacted to the rediscovered sexuality and the rise of the pornographic market with uncertainty and mixed feelings. After more than seventy years of conservatism and suppression, their desire to be and act liberal was very strong. At the same time, the psychology of high morality promoted by the Soviet state was still deeply rooted in the Russian mentality. Such ambiguous attitudes towards sexuality lasted until the beginning of the nineties when, as Goldschmidt notes, the interest towards pornographic materials in Russia subsided (323). The forbidden fruit was no longer forbidden and, consequently, became less desirable. It also became clear that contemporary pornography with its violence and humiliation could not serve as the hallmark of freedom in post-Soviet Russia.

Another problem that women living in post-communist regimes have to face is female trafficking into sex industries around the world. Quoting the International Organization for Migration (2001), Hughes estimates the number of women who have become victims of this criminal trade to be in the hundreds of thousands (209). It is no wonder that human traffickers target countries like Russia for the supply for this human trade. A weakened economy creates favorable conditions for finding easy targets: low

wages, high rates of unemployment, domestic violence and abuse – all these factors make women look for a better life outside of Russia, which often results in becoming sex slaves of the trafficking industry.

Female trafficking abroad is only one of the negative side effects of the post-communist Russian economy. A full range of sexual services, including pornography, prostitution, striptease clubs and telephone sex, started flourishing in the new market economy, having a significant effect on the interpretation of gender roles and sexuality in Russia. Viewing women primarily as sex objects demotes women to the status of second-class citizens whose primary role is to please men, both at home and at work (Zabelina). Thus, the gender inequality in post-communist Russia should not be exclusively confined to the topics of family and employment. The collapse of the communist regime has brought about changes in the cultural practices and made pornography, prostitution and human trafficking a common practice (Kon 212).

Attitudes towards feminism and gender studies

Because of its communist past and the strong belief that Russia should follow its own course of development different from the one imposed by the West, many Russians experience negative associations with such expressions as “gender equality” and “feminine emancipation” (Posadskaya; Edmondson; Lissyutkina). Edmondson argues that Russians resist western feminism because it is “understood to be a competitive ideology which aims to sacrifice all that is ‘feminine’ in women, in a mad pursuit of equal rights and opportunities with men...” (95). Lissyutkina observes that not only Russian men but also many Russian women are opposed to feminism. She believes that every experience of life during the Soviet regime made the idea of feminism or emancipation unacceptable to Russian women. The shortage of goods and services turned

everyday life of Russian women into a nightmare. Hence, throughout the times of Perestroika (and even after) Russian women remained extremely materialistic and fascinated by the newly discovered process of consumption. “They want to dress well, use makeup, and travel in cars” (Lissyutkina 276). Rejecting western feminism while trying to feminize their lives, behavior and appearance was a major paradox many Russian women had to face after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Occhipinti notes that political and economic instability in the post-communist times stimulates the development of the anti-feminist movement in the society: people start openly voicing their beliefs that women have to return to the sphere where they truly belong – the family (14). This anti-feminist movement was also in part a reaction to the “double burden” (work and family) expected of many women under the socialist regime.

It is important to keep in mind that not everyone is opposed to the idea of feminism in Russia. The reaction to feminism in Russia varies, depending on such background factors as social class, age, social position and family structure. Many Russians support feminism because they believe that Russian women benefited from the post-communist transition and found themselves engaged in new jobs and careers.

The current situation

The situation with gender prejudice in Russia have slightly improved at the end of the nineties. It seems that Russia has had enough of uncontrolled sex liberation. Pornography and prostitution are no longer an object of fascination. Many Russian women do not want to be perceived as sex objects anymore, and being a rich housewife is no longer a widespread ideal. Contemporary Russian women are striving to become independent in all respects; they are looking for opportunities for self-realization. The

generally negative attitude towards feminism and emancipation is changing as well, especially among the more educated groups of Russians.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity in the study abroad research.

Study abroad experiences of ethnic minority participants

Research examining study abroad experiences of ethnic minorities is rather scarce and limited. In the study examining the experiences of Japanese women working on their graduate degrees in the United States (a setting that could be characterized as a long-term study abroad stay), Ogawa argues that these women's perceptions of race, ethnicity, gender, class and nationality changed as a result of their long-term study abroad stay. Ogawa notes that when discussing race and ethnicity, the women participating in her research discussed both the existing stereotypes of Japanese women in the United States and how race and ethnicity are viewed in their native country, Japan (169-70).

The participants in Ogawa's study agreed that ethnic stereotypes are difficult to fight against and that they create oppression against students of color. When the participants in the study discussed ethnic stereotypes they personally experienced, they tended to "locate them in a race category under 'Asians' rather than the ethnic category of 'Japanese'... Therefore, their examples of stereotypes were situated in an American-Asian binary category scheme" (171). Ogawa argues that the participants were clearly aware how American society categorizes Asian as one group.

The participants in Ogawa's study also mentioned rethinking their ethnic identities because of the new cultural circumstances they found themselves in: they moved from an ethnically homogenous environment to an ethnically heterogeneous environment where they were constantly classified in terms of race hierarchy. The most

influential change in perceiving their own ethnic identities was caused by these women's positional change from ethnic majority to ethnic minority. As a result of the change, these women realized that before coming to the United States, they themselves held some deeply-rooted ethnic prejudice.

Why ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in US study abroad programs

In a study investigating how gender and ethnicity may influence students' decision to participate or not in a study abroad program, Lozano argues that certain ethnic minorities may be disadvantaged even before they embark on a study abroad trip. According to Lozano, many Mexican American college students, for example, choose not to study abroad because they are not supported by their families in their decision to leave home and the family for an extended period of time. The fact that the Mexican culture is a highly collectivist culture that emphasizes strong familial connections and dependency on each other prevents these students from taking an opportunity in globalizing their education (Lozano).

Perdreau notes that recently there has been an increase in the participation of ethnically diverse students in study abroad and student exchange programs, still "most predominantly white institutions would find it difficult to match the number of minority students on campus with a similar percentage of enrollment in their education abroad programs" (Perdreau). The major barriers to a larger enrollment of ethnic minorities in study abroad programs include: 1) students' own mindset and attitude towards study abroad programs; 2) students' lack of information on the availability of study abroad programs 3) students' anxiety and fear of racial prejudice (both on the part of target culture representatives and other participants in the program); and 4) students' inadequate financial situation (Hembroff and Rusz 21; Perdreau; Fels).

As for the first major barrier – students’ mindset – it seems that many ethnic minority students may not be familiar with the benefits of study abroad experiences because they have no friends or relatives who studied abroad. These students, who are frequently the first generation in their families to go to college, are also very focused on completing their college studies without getting involved in such interruptions and detours as traveling abroad. Thus, ethnic minority students often do not even consider including study abroad trips into their degree programs.

The next barrier – fear of racial prejudice – is a great psychological barrier that is hard to overcome even when one is on a familiar ground, i.e., at home, let alone when one is abroad. Students who belong to ethnic minorities fear that being singled out on ethnic grounds is even worse in an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural environment of a study abroad trip. Fels’s study of the assumptions African-American students have about international exchange education reveals that these students believe that they would be treated with suspicion and fear if they go abroad. Below are the examples of some of the opinions expressed by African-American interviewees in Fels’s study: 1) people overseas will be scared of African-American students who participate in study abroad programs; 2) people will stare at African- American students overseas; 3) African-American students must constantly assess the environment (both at home and abroad) to determine the level of threat and nature of bias (14-15). These same African American interviewees also believed that the universities keep them ignorant of the existing study abroad opportunities, and that African American students do not have access to the same information about international exchange opportunities that other students have.

The little research on ethnicity and study abroad programs that is currently available shows that the fear of prejudice that many minority students experience in relation to study abroad sojourns is justifiable and has a rationale behind it. In their

analysis of the experiences of a female African-American student on a study abroad trip in Spain, Talburt and Stewart conclude that overt racial comments impinged on this student's actions and interactions while abroad, and made her feel embarrassed and even humiliated.

Finally, the last obstacle to studying abroad is the lack of finances. Going abroad is almost invariably an expensive venture. Even if financially disadvantaged ethnic minority students are offered financial aid, this aid cannot always take care of all the additional expenses that might occur during the trip. For minority students who come from low-income families, being unable to receive full financial support for the trip often means being unable to go on a study abroad program.

Racial and ethnic differences

Defining terminology

In order to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity when talking about race and ethnicity, it is important to clearly define the terminology being used. The term 'ethnicity' was first used by G. Vacher de la Pougé in 1896 to describe the cultural, psychological and social characteristics of a population, and in order to distinguish the latter from the concept of race, which he identified as referring to a series of physical characteristics (Bolaffi et al. 94). Ethnicity places a special emphasis on cultural differences. Race up until recently has been perceived as a biological category. Even though today race is a sociocultural construct (Stephan and Stephan; Essed Everyday Racism: Reports from Women of Two Cultures; Orbe and Harris; Scott; Payne), the vestiges of the biological basis of racial categorization are still present in the term.

When talking about race and ethnicity, one cannot avoid mentioning ethnic prejudice and racism. Ethnic prejudice involves having or expressing adverse beliefs

about individuals based on their membership in a specific ethnic group. Racism goes further and ascribes superiority or inferiority to groups by asserting a connection between physical characteristics and shared capabilities or characteristics (Bolaffi et al. 259-60). Van Dijk argues that contemporary racism is more than a biological or a sociocultural phenomenon. It is a cognitive phenomenon as well, and as such it involves much more than a mere reproduction of common beliefs (25). Common beliefs related to racism are cognitively processed in the brain and eventually are linked to the personal experiences. Thus, contemporary racism is complex and hard to counteract.

Fishman et al. add that the term “racism” is one of those terms whose meaning has been so broadened that it lost its utility (Fishman and al.). When comparing racism to ethnicity, Fishman and al. note that, unlike ethnicity, racism focuses not on the celebration of difference, but on the evaluation of difference in terms of ‘better’ or ‘worse’ or ‘superior’ or ‘inferior.’ “The dynamics of racism represent a call and rationale for domination rather than for coexistence. While ethnicity can proclaim live and let live, racism can proclaim only bondage and death to the inferior” (11).

The concepts of “ethnicity” and “ethnic group” became popularized in the US during the 1970s (Essed Everyday Racism: Reports from Women of Two Cultures). These two concepts were a part of the cultural revival that changed the way cultural diversity was perceived in Western society. As a result of this cultural revival, diversity began to be seen in a positive light. However, not everyone shared this view on ethnicity and believed that ethnicity was a natural and necessary fact of human social life. Some people believed (and still believe) that the concept of ethnicity can be extremely harmful for humanity and that ethnicity causes discrimination and even genocide. Supporters of this point view argue that talking about ethnicity causes ethnic prejudice; they insist that “ethnicities can be transcended and that new or “higher” levels of ethnic integration can

be arrived at, including the level of terminal de-ethnicization, i.e., of no ethnicity at all” (Fishman and al. 5). Payne (1998) calls multiculturalism a “two-edged sword” (59). He maintains that, in a positive sense, multiculturalism represents a pluralistic view of American culture, in which ethnic groups can maintain separate, mutually-respected identities. At the same time, multiculturalism becomes an impediment to going beyond race because it embraces race as a source of self-esteem and self definition.

From mass media and education to everyday stereotyping

Ethnic and racial prejudice are reproduced through various types of a social discourse (Dijk; Essed Diversity). According to Essed, racial prejudice is communicated on two major levels: 1) a formal level (for example, through media and education) and 2) an informal level (through everyday communication) (Essed Diversity 9). The formal and informal levels of communicating prejudice are closely intertwined and influence each other. Prejudice is based on assumptions, rather than direct personal experiences, and assumptions are formed through the mutual influence of the media, education and everyday conversations.

The influence of media on the spread of ethnic prejudice cannot be overestimated. Coltrane and Messineo, for example, investigated how advertisement on American television contributes to promoting racial and gender stereotypes. They come to the conclusion that many TV commercials produced in the 1990s exaggerate cultural differences and promote stereotypes of African Americans (385). In these commercials, white men are typically portrayed as powerful and white women as desirable sex objects, while black men are depicted as aggressive and black women as inconsequential. Coltrane and Messineo contend that one of the reasons for this type of stereotyping is the division of the audiences of certain shows and programs by race and gender. Like most of

the signs of modern-day ethnic prejudice, the stereotyping promoted by television commercials is subtle and implicit; yet, it is a powerful tool that evokes strong emotional reactions on the part of the viewers.

The connection between ethnic prejudice and education was investigated by Hello et al. In a large-scale comparative study, they explored cross-national variances in the educational effect on ethnic prejudice. The following eleven European countries were part of their research: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden. The results of their research analysis reveal that different cultural perspectives result in different educational effects on ethnic prejudice. Hello et al. argue that a country's historical and political tradition influences its dominant norms of society (7). This idea is very close to the observation made by Stephan and Stephan that race and ethnicity are conceptualized differently in different cultures; in other words, they are often defined in culture-specific terms (541). Hello et al. observe that the results of their research show that the connection between the level of education and ethnic prejudice is relatively straightforward: more educated individuals tend to be less prejudiced against ethnic minorities. They consider it "the *universal* liberalizing effect of education" (6). However, they argue that there are also cross-national differences in this liberalizing effect of education. Their research reveals that in the countries with a short democratic tradition, like Poland and Hungary, there is a weaker connection between the level of education and ethnic prejudice because democratic values have not been introduced and re-enforced through these countries' educational systems for a substantial period of time. "As a consequence, there may be hardly any difference between the well educated and the poorly educated with respect to the degree of exposure to liberal values, such as tolerance towards other (ethnic) groups" (8). Democratic traditions in Russia, like in Poland and Hungary, are relatively young,

and following Hello's et al. conclusions, one could expect to find few differences in the ethnic bias of individuals coming from various educational backgrounds. Another interesting finding of the study is that across all the countries that participated in the research, gender had a strong effect on the amount of ethnic prejudice expressed: males tended to be more prejudiced than females.

Ethnic and racial prejudice on the informal level usually start with negative stereotyping or labeling (Leonard and Locke; Orbe and Harris). Stereotyping triggers defensive mechanisms and results in tense communication. This everyday negative stereotyping is supported and promoted by mass media and television. A greater exposure to other ethnic groups helps overcome the harmful effects of ethnic stereotyping.

Ethnicity in Russia

Is Russia ethnically homogenous?

Despite of the common belief that all Russians, like most Northern Europeans, are blond with blue eyes and a fair complexion, Russia is not a racially homogenous country. The following factors contributed to contemporary Russia's heterogeneous racial composition: 1) several hundred years of the Tatar Yoke; 2) the country's large territory (the result of Russia's ambitious imperialistic politics in the past several centuries); and 3) more than seventy years of the existence of the Soviet Union that made Russia a part of a unified multinational state. According to the 1989 Soviet census data, there were 128 officially recognized nationalities in the Soviet Union. In addition to the fifteen Union Republics, the Soviet Union contained twenty Autonomous Republics that embraced a substantial number of ethnic minorities co-existing with ethnic Russians on the same territory. Thus, in 1989 Russians constituted only half the population of the USSR (Williams).

The impact of the Chechen conflict

The sudden fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, numerous ethnic conflicts that followed it, and finally, the wars in Chechnya left many Russians feeling hostile and xenophobic towards non-Russians living in the country or simply visiting it. According to Levashov, the war in Chechnya and the terrorist attacks administered by Chechen separatists on the territory of Russia heightened Russians' sense of security (Levashov). "Persons of Caucasian extraction" – an extremely derogative term which probably originated in the police jargon and which is loosely applied to anyone who has a darker complexion and darker hair—became an everyday phrase for many Russians, especially for those living in larger cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg (Trenin, Malashenko and Lieven). Having a darker complexion and darker hair is often sufficient grounds for Russian police to check someone's papers or even detain someone. Hence, ethnic profiling and discriminating against anyone who doesn't look sufficiently Slavic became a common phenomenon in the streets of large Russian cities.

Trenin et al. argue that public opinion in Russia on the Chechen war has fluctuated, reflecting Russia's victories or losses in the battlefield (Trenin, Malashenko and Lieven). However, the total social impact of the Chechen conflict on Russia has not been estimated yet. The rise of ethnic hostility, in particular, towards individuals that look "Chechen," is only one part of this social impact. Normally, the average Russian will not be able to distinguish between Chechens, Georgians, Ossetians and other ethnicities from the Caucasus region simply because these ethnicities cannot be distinguished by physical appearance. The Chechen war triggered multiple discussions, both on Russian television and in mass media, of the so-called "Islamic threat". Thus, caucasophobia became intimately linked to islamophobia (Trenin, Malashenko and Lieven 60). This general

negative attitude towards Islam in Russia was only strengthened by the events that took place in the United States on September 11, 2001.

Contemporary Russian nationalism

As many researchers note, nationalism is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary Russia (Oracheva; Williams and Sfikas; Sandle). According to Oracheva, the collapse of the Soviet Union put Russia in the process of triple transformation: as a nation, as a state, and as a people (47). Unable to establish a new national identity they could be proud of, many Russians became frustrated and depressed. As a result of this frustration, nationalistic values and beliefs started spreading among the Russian population. Oracheva considers this spread of nationalistic attitudes among Russians an adaptation to a new situation. “The destruction of established political and cultural values caused by the disintegration of the empire has led to the formation of new stereotypes. This includes the sense of “lost greatness,” and of being “an offended nation” but it also includes the tendency to blame Russia’s ills on “someone else” (48). Many Russians view nationalism as the only way to unite and survive in a situation characterized by chaos and lack of order.

According to Oracheva, a public survey conducted in the Russian Federation at the beginning of 1989 reveals that only 2.7 percent of the respondents were hostile towards people of different nationalities who lived in Russia. By 1993, however, the situation has changed dramatically: 37 percent of Muscovites, 33 percent of the population of Stavropol and 12 percent of the residents of Ufa expressed hostility towards people of non-Russian nationality. Oracheva argues that such a marked difference in the public opinion over a short period of time is only natural during rapid political and economic changes. “Of the set of beliefs that form the political doctrine of Russian

nationalism, ethnic distinctiveness holds the key. This notion stresses the greatness and superiority of Russians, thereby defining the nation and the state not in political but in ethnic terms” (Oracheva 50). Of course, the easiest way to identify one’s ethnicity and therefore, to decide whether that person is “one of us” or not, is to start racial profiling.

Williams and Sfikas observe that since Russia has been invaded by multiple enemies over the centuries, the Russian psyche is extremely vulnerable (1). Many Russians experience the inferiority complex of being Russian caused by the country’s uncertain geographical position: is it Europe or Asia or both? Finally, some Russians believe that more than seventy years of the Soviet regime cut off Russia from the rest of the civilized world, and Russians try to compensate for the lack of respect from the first-world countries with exaggerated nationalism.

Some of the most common expressions of nationalism in contemporary Russia are ethnic distinctiveness, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, fascism and racism (Oracheva 50, 55, 57-59). Ethnic distinctiveness stresses the superiority of Russians over other ethnicities. The idea of being superior and unique requires a clear distinction between “us Russians” and “them non-Russians.” Xenophobia could be defined as “a group process where majority ethnic groups feel threatened, act and fight against members of other ethnic groups, both longer resident minorities and recently arrived newcomers” (Oracheva 55). The existence of xenophobia often signals that the identity crisis is serious.

As for anti-Semitism, it has been widespread in Russia for the past several centuries. National politics propagated by the Soviet Union made anti-Semitism even more acceptable for some Russians. Brym and Degtyarev conducted a telephone survey that dealt with attitudes towards Russian Jews. In all, 1060 Muscovites participated in the survey. The results of the survey reveal that 17.8 percent of the respondents expressed anti-Semitic attitudes and agreed or were inclined to agree that a global Zionist plot

against Russia exists. Brym and Degtyarev note that, taking into consideration the fact that Moscow is one of the most liberal areas in Russia, the results of this survey are striking. The researchers come to the conclusion that the level of animosity against Jews revealed by this survey exceeds black-white animosities in the US at the beginning of the eighties (7). The results of the research also show that anti-Semitic attitudes are most strongly associated with such variables as age (older Muscovites were more anti-Semitic), level of education (less educated individuals were more anti-Semitic), and income (anti-Semitism increased in the lower economic group). Another important finding of the research reveals that Jews are still not the most disliked ethnic group by Muscovites (4). Muscovites express even more hostility towards individuals from the Caucasus region, or the *chernye*, i.e., Azeris, Chechens, Gypsies, Georgians, and Armenians.

In his book Language and minority rights May argues that modern nation-states find it extremely difficult to impose a uniform national identity on their citizens because of the increasingly global economical and cultural conditions today. “Consequently, a new decentered and ‘hybridised’ politics of identities is emerging” (23). One’s national identity is hard to define in straightforward terms these days. Thus, individuals tend to view themselves primarily in terms of their ethnic, cultural and gender identities.

Chapter III: Methodology

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is an interdisciplinary qualitative study. Rossman and Rallis note that the two unique features of qualitative research are 1) the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted, and 2) the purpose of the research is to learn about some facet of the social world (5). To put it differently, qualitative research is subjective and social. The subjective and social features of qualitative research determine how it views the process of learning: it is constructing rather than receiving knowledge, and both the researcher and the learner are assigned an active role in the process. Constructing knowledge means connecting new information and experiences to what is already known and familiar; it also means actively using the contextual support provided by the learning situation in order to enhance the process of knowledge acquisition.

Good qualitative studies have to be theoretically solid, i.e., grounded in a specific epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. Research epistemologies are concerned with how people construct knowledge. I chose to employ constructivism (or constructionism, as Crotty terms it) as the guiding epistemology for my study. Researchers working within the constructivist framework argue that meaning is constructed in interaction with objective reality (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 14; Jones, Torres and Arminio 18). Crotty gives the following definition of constructionism: “practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (42).

A theoretical perspective directs the research, informs its methodology and shows how research fits within the theoretical traditions of a given field (Jones, Torres and

Arminio 20). Since the subject of this study is directly related to the process of identity negotiation, as well as to the issues of power and discrimination, I found the theoretical perspective offered by critical theory to be most appropriate for this study. The main postulate of critical theory is that human society is essentially oppressive (Rossman and Rallis 92; Rubin and Rubin 35-36; Jones, Torres and Arminio 22). This oppressive nature of the society connects research to the issues of power, race, class, and gender. The principal goal of qualitative research based on critical theory is taking an action in fighting oppression and inequality.

Brookfield argues that critical theory is founded on three core assumptions (viii):

1. That apparently open, Western democracies are actually highly unequal societies in which economic inequality, racism and class discrimination are empirical realities;
2. That the way this state of affairs is reproduced and made to seem normal, natural, and inevitable (thereby heading off potential challenges to the system) is through the dissemination of dominant ideology; and
3. That critical theory attempts to understand this state of affairs as a necessary prelude to changing it.

By exploring how gender and ethnicity influence the study abroad experiences of American college students, this study suggests that both natural and classroom learning environments are affected by the differences in learners' social position and status. The study also examines how the impact of prejudice, inequality and discrimination on the outcomes of a learning experience could be counteracted by understanding that the issues of power and oppression permeate all human interactions.

Research methodology connects data collection techniques to the desired outcomes of the research. Crotty (1998) argues that a specific methodology should govern the data collecting methods employed in research. From the very onset, this study took the shape of an ethnographic case study describing the sociocultural experiences of American undergraduates visiting Russia on a short-term study abroad program. Merriam argues that qualitative case studies are prevalent throughout the field of education and that their single most defining characteristic lies in delimiting the object of study – the case (26-27). She defines the case as a single entity with the boundaries around it. In the context of the present study, the case is a group of American undergraduates participating in a short-term study abroad program in Russia. Yin emphasizes that case study designs are particularly suited to situations in which the phenomenon under investigation cannot be separated from its context (13). The present study examines how the variables of previous cultural experiences, gender and ethnicity influence the experiences of a group of individuals in a new cultural context.

Qualitative interviews conducted after the period abroad were the sole data collecting method used in the research. “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale 1). Since study abroad is about learning while traveling, Kvale’s metaphor comparing qualitative interviews to the experiences of a traveling person is very appropriate when applied to this study. According to Kvale, a qualitative interviewer, like a traveler, undertakes a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. The interviewer-traveler wanders through the unknown lands, enters into conversations with different people he or she encounters, and tries to draw a hidden, implicit meaning from these conversations.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that this journey of interviewing is not completely unstructured and spontaneous. Qualitative interviewing “goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge” (Kvale 6). It is the researcher who gives qualitative interviewing structure by controlling the conversation and choosing specific topics to be discussed in the process of an interview. The researcher makes qualitative interviewing subjective from the very onset. The qualitative researcher is never neutral towards the subject of the research (Rossman and Rallis 10; Rubin and Rubin 12). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis discuss the researcher’s voice in portraiture (a type of qualitative inquiry that combines science and art). They argue that a researcher’s voice is the research instrument, because it is everywhere – “overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes” (85). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis view the researcher’s voice in multiple dimensions. They note that it can be used to distance the researcher from the observed phenomenon in order to be able to see the whole picture (voice as a witness). It can also be used to interpret the observed phenomenon and to give it the meaning (voice as interpretation).

Kvale notes that a common objection to viewing qualitative interview interpretation as a scientific method is: “Different interpreters find different meanings in the same interview” (210). It is true that the same interview may produce multiple interpretations with different interviewers; however, the possible plurality of interpretations is only a natural outcome of critical and postmodern thinking on which qualitative interviewing is based. “A postmodern approach forgoes the search of true fixed meanings and emphasizes descriptive nuances, differences and paradoxes” (Kvale

226). Moreover, different interpreters may be guided by different research questions and therefore, come up with different meanings of a text.

Thus, the subjectivity of qualitative studies should not be interpreted as a drawback. Yet it should be acknowledged and kept in constant view. As a researcher, I was aware of my own background (as a Caucasian female and ethnic Russian), my personal experiences (having participated in a study abroad program myself), and my position in relation to the participants in the study (as a language instructor for the majority of the participants) shaped the way I designed the research, conducted it and interpreted the results. My personal background and my experiences not only defined the goals of the research but also formed certain preconceptions and prejudices towards the phenomena I researched. This fact should not be disregarded when interpreting data and the conclusions of this research.

Generating broad conclusions was not the goal of this study, nor was it possible due to the study's small sample and qualitative nature. As Ward Schofield argues, the goal of qualitative research is not to produce a standardized set of results that other researchers could successfully reproduce, but rather to "produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of this situation" (203). Generalizing the results of qualitative studies to larger populations is not workable simply because a close reproduction of an in-depth study of a small research site is unpractical. Moreover, as Ward Schofield reminds us, broad context-free generalizations have little that is useful to say about human behavior (207).

DATA COLLECTING TECHNIQUES

This study was conducted during the summers of 2005-2006 at a large state university located in southwestern United States. In the summer of 2005, I conducted a pilot study for the main portion of the research that took place during the summer of 2006. The goal of the pilot study was two-fold: first, to test the data collecting techniques I designed for the research (two questionnaires and the interview template), and second, to see what information related to the social and cultural adaptation of American students visiting Russia on short-term study abroad programs would come up in the process of the initial data collection. During the pilot study, I was primarily interested in getting interviewees' insights on the topics of cultural adaptation, gender and ethnicity rather than in categorizing their experiences in terms of a specific theory.

After completing the pilot study, I had to make certain adjustments to the initial research design. I chose not to analyze the data provided by the questionnaires because the sample of the research was too small for any type of a quantitative analysis. Yet the questionnaires provided me with important biographical data for the participants in the study.

I used my pilot study participants as generators of ideas and themes for the main study. As a result, the overall design of the first interviews was not very structured and the questions were not always explicit. Some of the questions I posed in these pilot study interviews lacked definitions of terms and required expansions. For example, the question on the culture shock turned out to be rather perplexing and confusing for the participants, because I failed to provide a basic definition of the term culture shock. When conducting the main part of the research a year later, I tried to correct this mistake and defined culture shock in my own terms as "the state of discomfort a person experiences in a new cultural environment that could be expressed in feeling lonely, sad, and even depressed."

I devised my own definition because I wanted it to be short, simple and straightforward. Unfortunately, this short definition of culture shock might have given the interviewees the impression that culture shock has to be a serious psychological condition. It is possible that as a result of this definition, some of the participants were reluctant to admit they went through any aspects of a culture shock at all. Perhaps, a better strategy would have been to ask the participants to define culture shock in their own terms, rather than imposing on them a rather general and limiting definition.

Rossmann and Rallis characterize the ideal research site as a site that: 1) is easily accessible; and 2) allows the researcher to build strong relationships with the participants in the research (136). Both of these characteristics played a crucial role in my selection of the research site and its participants. When I conducted the pilot study in the summer of 2005, I was appointed as an assistant to the resident director of the Russian part of the program. In the summer of 2006, I worked as an instructor for one of the language classes taught under the program. This class included five out of eleven participants in the program. As a result of these two appointments, I was closely connected to the study abroad program under investigation and was able to get access to its participants.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE INTERVIEWS

Following the three main research topics of the study, I broke the interviews into three parts: acculturation, gender, and ethnicity. At the beginning of the interviews, I briefly described the goals of the study and the general structure of the interview to the interviewees. As a primary moderator of the discussion, I wanted the interviews to follow a specific format and tried to avoid jumping from topic to topic. I also wanted to spare the interviewees any confusion caused by multiple topics being the focus of the interview.

At the conclusion of the pilot study, in the process of re-designing the original questions for the interviews, I tried to formulate them in an open, non-constricting manner. I wanted the interview to be structured and focused, yet allowing interviewees to take initiative and modify the questions and topics for discussion if they were inclined to do so. I found that my initial fear that in the process of interviewing, I would lose control over the direction of the conversation, was easy to overcome. The interview script in front of my eyes provided me with the psychological support and comfort, as well as with the direction and control.

I chose the order of the topics covered in the interviews – acculturation, gender, ethnicity – by considering the degree of sensitivity students may experience towards these three topics. Although the general aspects of cultural adaptation, such as going through a culture shock and coping with its effects, were not the principal focus of the research, I believed that discussing these relatively non-sensitive, non-threatening themes at the beginning of the interviews could help interviewees relax and become more comfortable communicating with the researcher. The second major topic of the interview – gender – was potentially more sensitive than the topic of acculturation, especially for those participants who might have experienced any type of discrimination because of their gender during their trip to Russia. The sensitivity of gender as a research variable may stem from the fact that it is so closely connected to the subject of sexuality. Morgan argues that gender is a problematic research variable primarily because it is both ubiquitous and hidden. It is ubiquitous because it is one of the most common “face-sheet” variables, and it is hidden because it is often buried under other “more important” variables (31). Ethnicity is an even more difficult topic to discuss for a researcher than gender. As a category, ethnicity is more fluid and situationally-embedded than gender; it lacks clear objective criteria for its definition and measurement (Payne 33). Unlike

gender, ethnicity is culture specific. For example, a male from the United States is still a male in Russia, however, a Mexican American visiting Russia could be perceived and treated as a Chechen by the local population (with all the unpleasant consequences that may come out of this perception, i.e., hostility and even aggression). As a category, ethnicity is also more personal than gender because it places a bigger emphasis on group solidarity and identity (Dijk 23-24).

Within each of the three sections of the interview, I tried to position my questions in a logical order. In other words, I would start with more open questions on a specific topic and gradually narrow down the focus of the discussion. Posing initial questions as broadly as possible helped interviewees to predict and hypothesize on what might be coming next. For example, in the gender part of the interview, the question on gender-related discomfort was followed by a question on sexual harassment and not vice versa.

Each subsection of the interview—acculturation, gender, and ethnicity—contained six or seven questions, and some of the questions, especially in the gender and ethnicity sections, paralleled in the way they were posed: for example, “Do Russians interpret gender roles differently from Americans?” and “Do Russians interpret ethnic prejudice or racism differently from Americans?” The parallel structure of the interview subsections allowed the interviewees to foresee the kinds of questions that were coming next.

APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing data obtained through qualitative interviews is a complex and challenging task. The subjective nature of qualitative interviewing allows researchers to have a certain amount of freedom in approaching data analysis. Yet, freedom brings the responsibility for the choices made in the process of data analysis. Since these choices are

in abundance, it is the theoretical framework of the research that defines how the data collected through interviews will be analyzed.

Depending on the theoretical framework, the data analysis may either generate a new theory or test an existing theory. In conducting the research, I did not set myself a goal of establishing a new theory as a result of the data analysis. I interpreted the results of the study through the lens of critical theory, i.e., with the assumption that human society is essentially oppressive and that societal inequality is reproduced through the dominant ideology.

Standards for a solid qualitative analysis are different from the standards for a convincing quantitative analysis. In quantitative research, researchers most frequently use validity and reliability for measuring a study's credibility. Validity in quantitative research means that the research findings represent the phenomenon the research was set to measure, while reliability reveals the ability of a given study to produce similar results under similar conditions. Instead of focusing on the constructs of quantitative validity and reliability, I chose to concentrate on the criteria for judging the credibility of a qualitative study suggested by Rubin and Rubin: 1) transparency; 2) consistency-coherence; and 3) communicability (85). According to Rubin and Rubin, transparency allows readers of a qualitative research report to understand the process of data collection. Consistency in a qualitative study is achieved through accounting for all the inconsistencies that occurred in the process of data collection or analysis. Finally, communicability of a qualitative study is a straightforward communication of the results and the outcomes of the research. In connection with these three criteria, I did my best to provide a thorough and detailed description of the data collection procedures used in the study and to communicate the results of my analysis in a clear and coherent manner. Also, instead of trying to eliminate

all the inconsistencies that happened in the course of the study, I made an effort to acknowledge them and explain to the reader why they might have occurred.

While analyzing the data, I was struck by seemingly contradictory statements produced by the same subjects throughout the interview. I came to the realization that as a qualitative researcher working in the areas of gender and ethnicity – two very complex and controversial research topics – I have to be prepared to deal with contradictory data in my analysis and that I should find a way of interpreting contradictory statements in terms of situational variability. Edwards, when talking about interviewing on racial prejudice and stereotyping, points out that researchers should be aware of the following three issues: 1) interviews on controversial topic are difficult to interpret; 2) these types of interviews often entail contradictory statements; 3) meanings depend on the interview as an interaction (32). He contends that inconsistencies that might come up in the analysis of such interviews should be viewed as instances of situational variability rather than contradictions. “If we examine talk for the situated actions it performs, then inconsistencies and contradictions are best used as potential paths into those actions for analysts, rather than basic phenomena themselves, or analytic conclusions about this phenomena” (33).

In analyzing the interviews, I tried to pay attention to the smallest details of the interviewees’ speech such as pauses, false starts, and fillers. I realized that certain things cannot be said aloud in the process of an interview for the fear of being accused of sexism, racism or any other type of a prejudice. While a detailed discourse analysis of the data was not the goal of my analysis, I tried to keep attention to the presence or absence of certain discourse markers in the data of the study. Edwards, for example, argues that such a common filler as “you know” appeals to intersubjectivity or shared knowledge in interviewing on controversial topics (36). It saves the speaker the trouble of having to

spell out things that are “sensitive” and “slippery”. It seems that the participants in the study were constantly aware of potentially dangerous statements they may produce, or the statements that might shed a negative light on their identity and attitudes. The presence of hesitations, long pauses and the frequent use of fillers such as “you know,” revealed that the participants were trying to be as careful as possible in tackling controversial issues.

CODING PROCEDURES

One of the most basic definitions of coding can be found in Strauss who describes coding as “the general term for conceptualizing data; thus, coding includes raising questions and giving provisional answers (hypotheses) about categories and their relations” (20-21). In other words, coding involves discovering categories of data and putting them together in a logical order. Strauss warns that for inexperienced researchers coding is the most difficult operation to understand and to master. Coding the data derived for this study, with its abstract conceptualizations and relational subcategorizations, was challenging and, at times, baffling.

I started my coding procedures by reading and rereading the interview transcripts in search of apparent categories (which I initially defined for myself as themes). While getting familiar with the content of my interviews, I was looking for common trends in my subjects’ stories. I was also interested in discovering the way my interviewees narrated their stories, and in how they constructed their identities around such controversial and sensitive topics as gender and ethnic discrimination. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis observe that there is a common tendency among qualitative researchers to experience a tension between the desire to categorize data and to maintain the complexity of the human experience they are describing. They argue that it is best for

the researcher not to choose one side over the other but to maintain the dialectic approach to the research material (192). Looking for broad similarities in the answers to the interview questions may be convenient in terms of the analysis procedure, but it may create an idealized and even inaccurate version of what the participants were trying to say.

Strauss describes this initial type of coding as “open coding” (28). The main characteristic of open coding is that it is unrestricted. In the process of scrutinizing the transcripts of the interviews, I was looking for any concept that was in some way related to the main topics of my research: acculturation, gender and ethnicity. Thus, one of the biggest difficulties I experienced in the process of open coding was selecting what was relevant to the goals of my research from what was not. I also tried to separate the material that needed to be analyzed in depth from the material that (although relevant for the research) had to be mentioned and then put aside. My structured approach to grouping interview questions around specific topics turned out to be a very time saving strategy for the open coding stage.

The open coding procedure produced a set of broad and unrefined categories of data. I selected the following major categories in each of the subsections of the interviews:

Acculturation	Culture shock Cultural understanding Shortness of the program
Gender	Russian women vs. American women Russian men vs. American men Gender within Russian family Gender in work situations Courting rituals Gender in teacher-student interactions
Ethnicity	Ethnicity in Russia vs. ethnicity in the US Ethnic descriptors used by Russians

Table 2: Open Coding Categories

Having worked out these preliminary categories, I moved to the stage which Strauss describes as “axial coding” (32). Axial coding consists of intense analysis done around one category at a time. My axial coding resulted in generating multiple subcategories. I also began thinking about the relationships between the categories and within the categories. The following table summarizes the results of my axial coding:

Theme	Category	Subcategory
Acculturation	Culture shock Cultural understanding Shortness of the program	N/A
Gender	Russian women vs. American women	1. Physical appearance 2. Behavior 3. Attitudes towards them
	Russian men vs. American men	1. Physical appearance 2. Behavior 3. Attitudes towards them
	Gender within Russian family	1. Status 2. Household chores 3. Providing for the family
	Gender in work situations	1. Hiring 2. Income 3. Power 4. Sexual harassment
	Courting rituals	1. Staring 2. Catcalling 3. Marriage proposals 4. Paying restaurant bills
	Gender in teacher-student interactions	1. Male teachers vs. female students 2. Male teachers vs. male students 3. Female teachers vs. all students
Ethnicity	Ethnicity in Russia vs. ethnicity in the US	1. Understanding ethnicity 2. Ethnic discrimination 3. Ethnic homogeneity
	Ethnic descriptors used by Russians	1. The term 'chernyi/chernaya' 2. The term 'negr'

Table 3: Axial Coding Categories

Chapter IV: Acculturation Analysis

CULTURE SHOCK

Before leaving for Russia, the participants in the study attended a short cultural orientation course administered by their university's study abroad program. The goal of the course was two-fold: 1) to familiarize students with everyday Russian culture (commonly referred to by language professionals as a small 'c' culture), and 2) to provide information on culture shock that they might experience during their stay in Russia. In most basic terms, culture shock could be defined as the process of adjustment to an unfamiliar cultural environment that has an emotional, psychological, behavioral, cognitive and physiological impact on individuals who experience it (Pedersen 1). The cultural orientation course consisted of five one-and-a-half-hour-long sessions and was conducted by a graduate assistant who went to Russia with the students. Having received this type of preparation, the majority of the participants in the program believed that going through a culture shock was nonetheless inevitable for two reasons: first, everyone goes through at least some aspects of culture shock when traveling abroad, and second, Russia is very different from the United States.

When analyzing the interview data related to the process of acculturation in general and to culture shock in particular, I came to the conclusion that even after completing the culture orientation course, some participants still did not understand how culture shock occurred. For example, they were convinced that travelers start experiencing the harshest effects of culture shock immediately upon their arrival to the foreign country, which is usually not the case. Also, in spite of the orientation, all of the participants in the program were unaware of the different stages of the process of acculturation, such as the initial stage of relative happiness; the middle stage of confusion

and frustration; and the final stage of regaining happiness and satisfaction with a new culture.

Ward, Bochner and Furnham argue that there is now sufficient evidence, accumulated over the past several decades, that suggests that most people who cross cultures benefit from some kind of systematic preparation and training to assist them with coping with culture shock. Among the most noticeable benefits of pre-departure cultural training are 1) a better understanding of one's own culture; 2) a decrease in stereotyping members of the other culture; 3) an increase in confidence in the ability to deal with cross-cultural differences; 4) and more realistic expectations about goals and achievements for an upcoming trip. Unfortunately, cultural training provided to the study abroad students is not always systematic and is usually "delivered by non-specialists and therefore tends to lack a firm theoretical and empirical base" (249). In order to be most efficient and beneficial for the students, cultural training should be not just information-giving but also experiential. In other words, it should encourage a greater involvement on the part of the participants and include simulated activities and scenarios. Unfortunately, due to the time constraints, lack of financial resources and the absence of well-trained specialists in the field, such intense, hands-on cultural courses are not always possible to administer as a part of the study abroad pre-departure orientation.

Upon their return to the US, some of the participants in this study abroad program reported either not going through culture shock at all, or going through a very mild version of it, while others believed that the effects of the culture shock they went through were tremendous. Among the participants who claimed not to have experienced culture shock were those with extensive prior traveling experiences; they believed that they didn't go through culture shock for two major reasons 1) they already knew how to adapt

to a new cultural environment, and 2) Russia was not that much different from other European countries:

I mean, it might be just the fact that I've traveled a lot, so I prepared to be prepared all the time, and it's basically I think works for both countries, just have to expect the unexpected kinda of a thing, so I definitely didn't experience culture shock (Veronica).

I've traveled quite extensively...and when I got there I am like well it's just like any other European even foreign the city (Marianne).

I think the main shock was probably that it wasn't as culturally different as we had been told it would be, it was a lot more westernized and modern than I'd expected, that might be culture shock, but I really wasn't shocked because it was just like any other big city in the world, you know, it had stratification, it had the poor, the rich, and there is a lot of influence of globalization, things like that (Rita).

Klineberg (qtd. in Furnham and Bochner 236) compares academic study abroad to a life history. He points out that such factors as pre-departure experiences (including prior traveling) will affect what happens to the person while abroad (Klineberg). In their own turn, Furnham and Bochner argue that the distance between the native culture and the target culture is the major determinant of the force of culture shock (20). If the students do not find the target culture to be too different from their native culture, they might not experience culture shock to the full extent. For some of the participants in the program,

Russia (Moscow, more accurately) appeared to be a rather Westernized or Americanized country. These participants believed that they escaped culture shock for the simple reason that there was nothing too novel or too shocking to experience.

Grunzweig and Rinehart argue that the process of globalization shook the principal foundation on which the international student exchange system is built: bridging the gap between different cultures (5). This process of world globalization makes students believe that a homogenous world culture is about to emerge, and that this homogenous culture will be based on similarities in consumption patterns. What these students fail to understand, however, is that the notion of culture cannot be equated with the notion of consumption. In other words, people are more than what they eat, wear, watch or listen to. As individuals, people are still very much products of the unique cultures they were raised in.

It seems that those students who had strong ties and connections with cultures other than mainstream American culture were able to achieve cultural assimilation more easily than other students. A female participant who identified herself as Cuban American thought that Russian culture was similar to what she called Latin American culture: for example, both Russians and Latin American are very “family oriented” and “concerned with being hospitable.” Another female participant who identified herself as Southeast Asian American also noted that her bicultural background affected her opinions and perceptions of the Russian culture. Like the Cuban American interviewee, she compared Russian culture to her native culture and found certain similarities. For example, according to her, both Russians and South Asians are “relaxed,” “easy going” and “enjoying food and friends.” Ward, Bochner and Furnham note that all cultures and societies can be positioned on the scale of Individualism-Collectivism. European and North American countries are highly individualistic societies, whereas Asian and Latin

American countries tend towards the collectivist end of the continuum (11). The level of individualism-collectivism regulates the social relationships between individuals belonging to a specific culture. One could argue that on the scale of Individualism-Collectivism, like many Latin and Asian countries, Russia is positioned closer towards the collectivist end of the scale: it is characterized by interdependent, cooperative relationships and tight social networks. Belonging to a similar background on the scale of Individualism-Collectivism made cultural assimilation of these bicultural students easier. Being raised in a multicultural environment, bi-cultural students are accustomed to constantly analyzing cultural patterns and looking for cultural differences and similarities. The students' multicultural background could have made their cultural adaptation to life in Russia go more smoothly.

Not everyone shared the opinion that being in Russia was similar to being in any other European country. One female participant explained that for her being in Russia felt very different, and certain things were hard to get used to. A male participant, Anthony, said he definitely experienced culture shock upon arrival to Russia. He believed that the effects of culture shock were intensified by physical exhaustion and lack of sleep. Unlike, other participants, Anthony described Moscow as a very different place from anywhere he has been before. He was surprised by the huge contrast between the rundown and fashionable parts of Moscow which he described as "Vegas versus ghetto right next to each other." He also had trouble accommodating to the very fast, frantic pace of the city's life.

When looking at the patterns of cultural adaptation, the size of the city where the study abroad trip takes place and "the big city psychology" should always be taken into consideration. The fact that Moscow is one of the largest and busiest cities in the world must have had a substantial influence on the participants' process of cultural

accommodation. Unfamiliar and seemingly unfriendly new cultural environments – and that is what Moscow often feels like for someone from a relatively small place in the United States – slow down the process of cultural adjustment by making it harder and more challenging. The fact that Moscow is the city of contrasts where the richest people in the world reside and work next to the poor and unprivileged masses also makes a striking impression on American college students. Many students find American cities more integrated and homogenous, and the wealth disparity typical of Moscow may be confusing and even culturally shocking for them

Another male participant Jason also mentioned being overwhelmed by the big city effect and reported feeling lost, even during the second week of his stay in Russia. During this time period, this student preferred to stay in his room and read a book or listen to the radio to going out and dealing with the unknown world of a new culture. Yet, eventually, he had to push himself out of his “safe zone around the university” and deal with “a series of barriers” that need to be overcome in order to perform even a simple task in a new culture.

One of the students, Bella, who had visited Russia before this study abroad trip, did not believe that this time she went through a culture shock. Instead, she described the train ride from Moscow to Saint Petersburg as her most memorable cultural experience. She concluded that even though Russia has become very westernized in recent years, there are still certain cultural things that most Americans would find “new” and “not ordinary,” like a ride on an overnight train.

One participant described the effects of reverse culture shock which she went through upon her return to the US:

It just seemed really weird to be back for a while, I think for a couple of weeks ... having to drive...I like taking the bus now, because [] [laughs] public transportation, so but ... it was hard to re-adjust, I think it was harder to re-adjust than to adjust to there (Katherine).

The students' return home is also influenced by their stay abroad. Storti argues that fighting the effects of reverse culture shock is even harder than adjusting to a new cultural environment. Coming back home means coming back to a place where you are familiar with everything, a place of "rituals and routine interactions; of entirely predictable events and people and very few surprises; the place where you belong and feel safe and secure and where you can accordingly trust your instincts, relax, and be yourself" (Coming Home 15). Most people do not foresee the need to re-adjust to the already familiar cultural setting, and the effects of the reverse culture shock come to them as a big surprise. According to Storti, coming back home from a study abroad trip is another type of a transition, and as such it involves the following major transitional phases 1) separation from a new culture; 2) an unstable period; and 3) a reintegration period.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

All of the participants in the study reported improved cultural understanding as a result of their short-term study abroad trip. The majority of the participants expressed the opinion that they still might not understand all the intricate peculiarities of the Russian culture, yet they have a much better understanding of its basics. One of the participants noted that he got a better understanding of modern Russian culture rather than traditional Russian culture. The students mentioned the following results of improved cultural understanding: better understanding of Russian literature; becoming a part of the Russian

culture and enjoying it; and becoming more accepting of the differences between Russian and American cultures. One of the participants even reported getting a better grasp of the Russian mentality and Russian humor:

I think I am starting to get a pretty good grasp about how Russian society works and how... the mentality and the humor I got a really good feeling for Russian humor I think, in general, what they think is funny you know, a kinda sometimes very sarcastic and... I don't know... I like it... It's more clever ... I think it's wittier, takes a little bit more of thought, it's not just like... hitting somebody on the head or something (Bella)

Many participants in college study abroad programs name improved cultural understanding as one of the primary reasons for their choosing to study abroad. However, as Stephenson argues, gaining cross-cultural understanding is by no means a guaranteed outcome of the study abroad experience (85). Some of the students who study abroad go through profound cultural transformations as a result of their sojourns, while others remain completely untouched by their cultural experiences abroad. Some students' personality traits such as cultural curiosity, general cross-cultural knowledge and previous cross-cultural exposure might be responsible for their greater sensitivity to cross-cultural impressions.

According to Stephenson, concepts like "cross-cultural adjustment" and "cross-cultural learning" are frequently used by study abroad researchers to describe the process of acculturation; yet, these concepts are not always adequate for characterizing the cultural transformation that takes place in a study abroad setting (86). Experiencing a

cross-cultural adjustment implies that some elements of one's native culture have to be discarded, which is not always beneficial for acculturation. Cross-cultural learning assumes a major cognitive transformation which does not necessarily take place, especially on a short-term study abroad trip. To fill in the terminological gap, Stephenson introduces the concept of "cross-cultural deepening" which, in her opinion, grasps the full potential of cultural experiences during study abroad trips. Cross-cultural deepening presupposes the ability to understand two different realities simultaneously. It can be perceived as a series of developmental stages that range from denial to acceptance, and from frustration to cognitive and behavioral adaptation.

The improved cultural understanding mentioned by all the participants in the present study does not necessarily mean that they all achieved the state of cross-cultural deepening. Cross-cultural deepening is a long and gradual process. Like many other researchers in the field, Stephenson argues that the longer the study abroad stay, the better are the chances of achieving cross-cultural deepening. Five weeks in the host country may be very little time in comparison to a year-long study abroad program, and they might not result in the utmost cross-cultural deepening, yet, they can be culturally illuminating. It seems that cross-cultural deepening should be treated as an ideal cultural outcome of a study abroad trip. Cross-cultural deepening is perfect for estimating learning perspectives of a study abroad stay, but it is not necessarily realistic, possible, or even desirable to achieve.

SHORT DURATION OF THE PROGRAM

When talking about cultural adjustment, several students wished their stay in Russia was a little longer.

Towards the end it was... almost like... you are being [] ragged, because you are always tired, because you are always moving, not enough hours in the day to see everything you wanna see, and... do all the work that you need to do, and it was almost like you are... tired of Russian, and you wanted to go home at the end of five weeks, but at the same time you wanted to stay... and five weeks is not a lot of time... (Jason).

One student noted that despite the short duration of the stay, the general design of the program was very beneficial for faster acculturation. Having attended classes together back in the United States for five weeks, students got to know each other well and became friends by the time they landed in Russia. Being surrounded by individuals they were familiar with in a new cultural environment provided additional psychological comfort and helped fight the state of loneliness and sadness caused by culture shock.

Another student was surprised how much interaction with native Russians they had during their relatively short stay in Russia. Having native Russian language and culture peer tutors was extremely helpful for overcoming the language barrier many study abroad students experience when arriving in a foreign country. Given the shortness of the program and very little time to overcome the language barrier – especially for the beginning level students – the tutor arrangement might have played an essential role in accelerating the initial cultural and linguistic adjustment. As another participant described it, “I actually was surprised how much contact we did have with Russian, I thought that would be harder... so I did get to talk to a lot of Russians...” (Katherine). Another participant voiced an opinion that both the university professors who taught his language classes and the tutor who took him around the city on a weekly basis became his “doorway into Russian culture” (Jason). Because the program required all the students to

stay in the dormitory and living with a host family was not an option, it was hard for the students to establish informal connections with native Russians. The afterschool interactions with the professors and tutors gave students an opportunity to communicate with Russians in an informal atmosphere and practice their Russian language skills in a casual environment.

The short duration of the program may also have prevented students from experiencing the unpleasant stage of culture shock, the stage that succeeds the initial stage of elation and enthusiasm. Students who go abroad on short-term programs are more like tourists rather than traditional study abroad travelers. Furnham and Bochner offer the following possible explanations of why tourists do not become victims of culture shock as often as other types of travelers: 1) their stay is short (they don't have time for the unpleasant stages of culture shock); 2) their stay is pre-planned and pre-arranged (they do not have to contact the natives of the target culture as frequently); 3) they have some type of a leader who serves as a cultural mediator; 4) they usually go to destinations where they can find other representatives of their native culture and use them for social support; and 5) they tend to act as observers rather than participants in the new culture (149). Like many other study abroad programs, the program described in the study pre-arranged multiple cultural activities for all the participants in the program. The fact that the students did not have to make these arrangements on their own reduced the amount of authentic cultural interactions they had to involve in and, therefore, possibly reduced the amount of anxiety and stress they might have experienced. The constant presence and the support of the resident director of the program and her assistant also allowed students to feel less frustrated by the linguistic and cultural challenges they had to face.

Chapter V: Gender Analysis

ARE RUSSIAN WOMEN DIFFERENT FROM AMERICAN WOMEN?

When I started coding the data from the gender section of the interviews, I noticed that the majority of the interviewees commented on the physical appearance of Russian men and women. Almost all the participants observed that Russians look and dress differently from Americans. It could be that the age of the participants and their family status played a determining role in making physical appearance a popular interview topic. The average age of the participants in the study was twenty two years old, and all of them were single. Being young, single and, probably, actively engaged in the search for friends or partners, they were paying close attention to the way people around them looked and behaved. As Hatfield and Sprecher explain, there is variation between people in how important physical attractiveness is. The importance of physical attractiveness will depend on an individual's age (121-22). "Looks may be especially important to young people because of their need to conform in order to be popular (or at least to be accepted) by their peers... by the time men and women reach middle age, they have learned that looks matter less, while wit, intelligence, personality, and character matter more" (Hatfield and Sprecher 122).

A closer look at the gender breakdown of the interviewees revealed that only female interviewees talked about the physical appearance of Russian men and women. The two male participants in the study commented on the way some Russians acted, for example, when shopping for groceries in the supermarket or riding the metro, but they did not focus on their physical appearance. It is possible that in everyday interactions, young women tend to pay more attention to the physical appearance of people around them. According to Hatfield and Sprecher, women are more likely to believe than men that "physical attractiveness is very important in day-to-day social interaction" (27). It

could be also that women are more willing to make observations related to physical appearance than men.

When talking about the physical appearance of Russian women, all of the female interviewees noted that Russian women dress differently from American women. The overall opinion expressed by the participants in the study was that many young Russian women wear more revealing outfits, high heeled shoes, a heavy amount of makeup and perfume, i.e., Russian women tend to dress up more and show more skin and body. One interviewee, Stephanie characterized Russian women's dress style, when compared to American women's dress style, as more "feminine." Several participants believed that Russian women try to dress up because they outnumber Russian men and therefore, have to "try harder to find a man."

In Moscow I was particularly impressed by the women, how much they dressed up and how they wore high heels and stuff. And I am from Europe, people dress up all the time, the men and the women, but I just really got a sense that the women were trying to impress the men even more so, the men dressed up too and looked nice and you know that was very much of a normal European thing, in Saint Petersburg I felt it like less so, I felt it was more like European, everyone is just a kinda dressed up but in Moscow I felt like the women were trying so so hard, like competition was so thick (Veronica).

According to Perevedentsev, "women in Russia have always constituted more than 50 percent and at certain times a much higher percentage of the huge population of the Russian Federation... This numerical dominance of the female sex is the result of brutal wars and the higher male death rate during peacetime. For example, the number of

women for every 100 men... was... 114 in 1989. The disproportion between the sexes is significantly greater among the adult population” (73). Thus, the hypothesis voiced by some of the participants in the study that Russian women have to try harder to find a man than American women is not entirely groundless. In connection with the selection of mates and marital relations of men and women in the former Soviet Union, Boss and Gurko note that not only the ratio of the sexes at the customary age of marriage, but also the educational levels of potential marriage partners, play an important role (42). In the former Soviet Union, the educational level of women has always been slightly higher than the educational level of men. And as Boss and Gurko argue, “The failure of available men to meet requisite standards as marriage partners has led to an increasing number of unmarried women, including intentionally unwed mothers” (43). One could argue that this situation has not changed drastically after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and that both single and married Russian women have to pay special attention to their appearances in order to find partners or keep their husbands.

This desire of Russian women to look attractive could have yet another explanation. According to Gradskova, the concept of beauty is extremely important to the production of femininity in any society, and can shed light on hidden mechanisms of inequality and domination (21). Gradskova believes that from this perspective the Soviet case is very interesting. “Although the majority of women were employed outside of the home and in spite of constant shortages of fashionable clothes and other beauty products, Soviet women continued to show interest in ‘looking nice’ throughout the Soviet period. Indeed during the perestroika years western visitors were often impressed by Soviet women’s attempts to look ‘as feminine as possible’” (21). In Gradskova’s view, the Soviet ideology expected women to “dress with care, to be able to sew well and to take care of their skin and hair” (25). In other words, Soviet women were discouraged from

being interested in fashionable clothing and make-up. The traditional patriarchal norms expected women to constantly improve their “beauty qualifications” (37). It seems that the traditional gender norms had a stronger influence on Russian women’s beauty standards and routines than newly imposed Soviet norms. At the same time, the patriarchal attitude towards women in the Soviet society was only reinforced by this fascination with physical attractiveness.

One of the participants in the study noted that Russian women go through many hardships and sacrifices when dressing up in order to “ensnare” men: “I heard that there is a sixty to forty ratio, where it’s like sixty percent women and forty percent men in Russia, and so it seems that the women occupy a lot of their time ensnaring men... that’s my interpretation of it anyway” (Marianne). The outfits they often choose to wear are short and revealing and therefore, not very comfortable or appropriate for the occasion. To illustrate her point, this student described the woman she saw at the Moscow Zoo: “...we are at the zoo in the middle of the day, and the woman is wearing a cocktail dress and four inch heels, and you know she can’t even sit down in the thing because it’s so short and you know we are at the zoo...” (Marianne). It seems that the student felt genuinely sorry for this inappropriately dressed Russian woman; however, she did not think that Russian men were worthy of going through such hardships because she was not very impressed by Russian men.

When talking about Russian women’s beauty sacrifices, Gradskova also notes that Soviet and post-soviet women were willing to go through enormous hardships for the sake of beauty. The constant shortages of consumer goods made these women’s beauty efforts time-consuming and exhausting (37). As for dressing appropriately for a specific occasion, Hatfield and Sprecher argue that it is not always easy for a woman. For example, career women often get caught in a damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don’t

world: they are encouraged to be feminine, yet, they cannot be too attractive or they may not be taken seriously by those in power (60).

Several participants in the study observed that in traveling situations they have to dress comfortably rather than stylishly. The most comfortable clothing for traveling is baggy pants or jeans, t-shirts and sneakers. Being so underdressed by the Russian standards, one participant found herself ignored by Russian men:

... but I was on vacation... I am wearing baggy jeans and shirts stuff like that, and I did not get catcalled, unless if I had some nice clothes, if I dressed up, showed some skin, then I would get catcalled, it was just like night and day, the men don't even look at you, not that I want the Russian men looking at me but they don't unless if you are I mean ... just ridiculous levels ... you know showing a lot of skin, lots of makeup, perfume (Marianne).

A lack of attention on the part of the opposite gender caused by being underdressed by Russian women's standards made this participant slightly uncomfortable and self-conscious. As Hatfield and Sprecher explain, all individuals have to face a fundamental paradox: "We have to admit that appearances matter. We know that small details of our appearance can be critical determinants of how well we will do in love, at work, and in life. And at the same time, each of us knows we do not really 'measure up,' and we feel slightly ashamed that we expect other people to do so" (xix).

One of the participants in the study who attended a Sunday night service in an Eastern Orthodox Church observed that the way Russian women look in their everyday life contrasts with the way they dress when they go to church. According to her, in church, both Russian men and women were dressed very modestly and respectfully:

I saw that the Russians took their church very seriously, and even though some of them weren't dressed very nicely they were dressed as best they could because a lot of people were poor but even the poorest person there didn't dare to go without their head covered if they were a woman, or their head uncovered if they were a man (Stephanie).

Such a disparity between the usual dressed up appearance and not being dressed as nicely in church could be explained by the fact that Eastern Orthodox Church enforces a specific dress code for the church goers. Women, for example, are supposed to wear long skirts and long-sleeve tops; their head has to be covered at all times. Women who are wearing pants or outfits that are too open and expose bare skin are viewed as disrespectful and irreverent.

Linda B. Arthur argues that “dress provides a window through which we might look into a culture, because it visually attests to the salient ideas, concepts and categories fundamental to the culture” (1). According to Arthur, strict dress code in a religious context helps the religious social bodies exert control over the members' physical bodies. While the internal body is controlled through restrained emotions, appetite for food, knowledge and sex, the external body has to be visibly restrained. “While a person's level of religiosity can not be objectively perceived, symbols such as clothing are used as evidence that s/he is on the ‘right and true path’” (1). To put it differently, a strict dress code in a religious context functions as an effective means of non-verbal communication in social interaction; it influences the establishment and projection of a religious identity.

The majority of the interviewees believed that Russian women not only look differently but also act differently from American women. Several of the participants found Russian women more independent. One possible explanation for the independence

exhibited by some Russian women could be their desire to rebel against the traditional roles assigned to them by the patriarchal Russian society: mothers, wives, etc. As one of the participants observed, Russian women are still “in the process of asserting themselves,” and that the way they are asserting themselves is very different from the way American women chose to. This participant believes that Russians understand the concept of feminism differently from Americans. Russian women, for example, want to look confident and act independent, yet, they “would never allow their feminists to take [away] their right to wear high heels” (Stephanie). This participant admires Russian women for their elegant looks and feminine behavior and concludes that she doesn’t see “why being a feminist means you can’t have men buy you dinner” (Stephanie).

A male participant in the study noted that the feminist movement influenced the way the contemporary American society perceives gender. According to him, gender is “buried” in the American consciousness, and many Americans are reluctant to talk about it openly: “Gender is a kinda buried in the American consciousness, and whether it’s through political correctness or because of the history of the feminist movement, there’s I think a certain reluctance to talk about it” (Jason). Russians, in his opinion, have not been influenced by the feminist movement to such extent.

Unlike in the days of the Soviet Union, the feminist movement is very active in contemporary Russia. The Soviet Women’s Committee was the only women’s organization that existed in the Soviet Union. In the middle of the nineties, only a decade later, hundreds of women’s groups, clubs, initiatives, and projects were officially registered and operated in Russia (Sperling 15). By early 1994, Russia’s Ministry of Justice had officially registered over 300 women’s groups (Sperling 18). These organizations ranged both in size and the types of feminist activities they were involved in. Thus, by the end of 1995, four separate networks of women’s organizations appeared

in Moscow: the Independent Women's Forum (IWF), the Women's League, the Union of Russia's Women (URW), and the US-NIS Consortium (a joint organization between the United States and the former Soviet Union). Sperling argues that such an increase in the activities of the Russian feminist movement was spurred by the political and economic transitions that began in the late 1980s.

All these women's organizations had different purposes and concerns: some concentrated on employment issues, others supported mothers and children, yet others developed women's crisis services, including hot lines for victims of rape and domestic violence. Even though the spectrum of these women's organizations was quite extensive, they could still be roughly subdivided into two overlapping categories: practical groups and strategic groups (Sperling 28). While practical groups were occupied with addressing women's immediate needs, strategic groups focused on the long-term goals of fighting against women's discrimination and sexism. When talking about the feminist movement in contemporary Russia, one has to keep in mind that even though it is gradually gaining more and more popularity, the majority of Russians do not know much about the movement's activities. As Pellegrino Aveni puts it, in Russia "Feminists are considered suspect, even by most women, which surprises many Americans" (80).

Another participant in the study was surprised to see many young Russian women going out with elderly American men:

... but I really did see a lot of older American men with young Russian [women]... like going out to eat and stuff like that, and obviously I don't know what the real situation is... it might have been, you know, the whole Russian bride sorta thing going on, so I was surprised to see that, I didn't expect to see that [laughs] (Rita).

It seems that not all Russian women choose to be emancipated and independent, or at least many of them want to combine emancipation with the traditional roles assigned to them by the society, i.e., wives and mothers. They want to have partners and husbands who will take care of financial matters and provide for the family. And since there is a common belief in Russia is that non-Russian men are wealthier and more responsible than Russian men, in their search for a partner or husband, many Russian women prefer dating and marrying foreigners.

In her book *Dreaming of a Mail-Order Husband: Russian-American Internet Romance*, Ericka Johnson argues that many Russian women seeking to marry a foreigner are doing it for the following two reasons: 1) they are no longer attractive to local men because of their age; and 2) they want to get away from political and economic instability of contemporary Russia (8, 15). As for the age factor, Johnson believes that when she was interviewing the participants in her study at the beginning in the nineties, in provincial Russian towns, women were expected to get married by approximately the age of twenty-three. The chances that single women past this age will be officially proposed were very slim (8). Olson and Matskovsky when comparing the median age of first marriage in the United States and Soviet Union, note that at the beginning of the nineties, it was twenty-six years for men and 23.5 years for women in the United States and twenty-three years for men and 21.7 years for women in the Soviet Union. They conclude that in the past thirty years the United States witnessed a definite upward trend in marital age, while in the Soviet Union this trend was barely noticeable (21).

In connection with looking for political and economic stability (and one could argue that, in some way, it is looking for the relative financial stability of a family), Johnson quotes the answer she received from one of her interviewees: “Like most women, I want to have a family, a loving husband, believe in tomorrow and know that

my fate depends on me, and not on the political and economical situation of my country” (15). The idea of searching for stability in the West and the United States was stressed by the majority of the participants in Johnson’s research.

According to Johnson, the stereotypical image of Russian mail-order brides both in Russia and in the West is the economically desperate woman who will do anything to migrate to the West. Her unfortunate circumstances “either make her an easy victim of unscrupulous men or create a gold digger who uses her beauty and charms on an unsuspecting husband” (19). This is a very unflattering image, especially if we take into consideration the fact that many women find the whole experience of Internet romance rather humiliating to begin with. Yet, Russian women are willing to sacrifice their pride and honor for the sake of getting an opportunity to start a new, better life outside of Russia.

As for the attitude towards women in Russia, all the participants in the study regardless of their own gender believed that there is gender prejudice in Russia. Some of the participants thought that gender prejudice is so rooted in the Russian minds that Russians are not even conscious of it, yet, being Americans, they noticed it immediately. As one of the female interviewees put it: “...maybe it’s not considered that [gender prejudice] in Russia, but with my American mentality the way I was brought up, and the way I see women’s roles here in the states, I absolutely think there’s... it’s like prejudice towards women” (Bella). Like any type of prejudice, gender prejudice is sometimes hard to identify and evaluate because it is intricately embedded in the mentality and its expressions are often hidden or covert.

Another participant in the study described gender prejudice and inequality in Russia as largely accepted: “...definitely inequality, but what surprised me and a lot of other Americans I think is that it’s largely accepted and is not questioned too much”

(Anthony). It maybe that gender prejudice and inequality are so largely accepted by Russians because, as was mentioned above, the majority of them are not even aware that it exists in the Russian society, and that they personally promote or experience it on a daily basis.

Several female participants noticed that unequal gender treatment gives women certain advantages: it is easier to get into clubs and negotiate prices at the market, women get lower taxi fares, and of course, the restaurant and bar tabs are “always paid by the men.” While these participants believed that gender inequality is bad, they themselves enjoyed the benefits of gender inequality to the full extent and didn’t think there was anything wrong with it.

Some participants hypothesized that Russian women get physically abused by Russian men. Even though they didn’t witness a single instance of physical abuse of Russian women, they were sure that Russian women “get hit”:

I know that women get hit and stuff, and ... sometimes a kinda publicly, and they both might push each other [], they have a ... I don’t know, it’s just... I definitely noticed a big difference in the way I was treated too (Veronica).

According to Zabelina, many women living in post-Soviet Russia have become victims of sexual and domestic violence. Zabelina argues that the roots of domestic violence “must be sought in the family and, given the general level of stress, moral disorientation and material difficulty in which people live, in many families violence has become commonplace” (177). Zabelina believes that patriarchal traditions of the Russian family may also provoke violence against women because they “predispose the head of the family to maintaining ‘order’ in the family by all means” (177). Citing statistics provided by Proekt. Doklad o Vypolnenii v Rossiiskoi Federatsii Konventsii o Likvidatsii

Vsekh Form Diskriminatsii v Otnoshenii Zhenshchin, Zabelina notes that in 1993 alone 56, 400 women received serious injuries at the hands of their husbands and 14, 500 died. Unfortunately, many Russian women prefer to tolerate incidents of domestic violence for two reasons 1) they subconsciously accept it as the cross they must bear; and 2) they have no escape, i.e., they have nowhere to go, have no money, etc. (Zabelina 177-78).

Johnson also notes that in the decade since the fall of communism in Russia, battery against women has become a more salient issue (J. E. Johnson 153). Domestic violence against women takes different forms and could be expressed through psychological and emotional torture, as well as through beating and sexual violence (153-54). Gondolf and Shestakov, in their turn, report that women in Russia may be two-and-one-half times more likely to be killed by their spouses or lovers than their counterparts in the United States (63). Thus, the principal reasons for the physical abuse of women exhibited by Russian men are the presence of conservative gender-related stereotypes in the Russian society and the general stress related to the country's political and economic instability.

ARE RUSSIAN MEN DIFFERENT FROM AMERICAN MEN?

Several female participants in the study said that they were not impressed by the way Russian men looked. These participants were surprised by the sharp contrast between Russian women who looked, as one of them described it, "so put together" and Russian men, who did not seem to care about their appearance. One female participant noted that because she didn't like Russian men, she didn't want to interact with them. "My impression of Russian men was not all that great, I never wanted to go over and talk to a Russian man to ask for directions" (Katherine). Pellegrino Aveni argues that the physical appearance of others is directly linked to the issues of trustworthiness and safety

(73). We tend to trust more those who we find physically attractive than those who do not appeal to us physically. Avoiding individuals whom we don't trust is only natural, especially in a new linguistic and cultural environment; however, the result of such avoidance is the missed opportunity to practice target language skills and learn more about target culture.

Not everyone agreed that Russian men ignore their own dress style. One of the female participants thought that, like Russian women, Russian men tend to dress up, because dressing up is a “normal European thing.” She also observed that being or not being dressed up is relative. “...but a lot of the men dress up too, and I think that's very European you know, if we dress up as we do in America wearing flip flops and things like that, anywhere would be underdressed” (Rita). In other words, if we take a stereotypical average American outfit – a t-shirt, jeans and sneakers — and use it as a measuring stick for evaluating somebody's dress style, than wearing a pair of slacks and a shirt would be considered to be dressed up for a man.

When analyzing the way Americans dress in work situations, Storti comments that generally they dress less formally than people in other countries (Americans at Work 178). However, the way a particular American would dress for work will largely depend on the following three factors: 1) his or her position; 2) the organization he or she works for; and 3) the region of the country he or she lives in. Storti believes that the more contact a person has with the general public, the more formally he or she will dress. Dress codes tend to be more casual in smaller companies than in large multinational corporations. Finally, “people tend to dress more formally on the East coast, in the Midwest, and in the South (though not in Florida) than they do in the West and the Southwest” (Americans at Work 178). Thus, when talking about such subjective constructs as somebody's dress style, it is important to take into consideration the larger

socio-cultural context, including the socio-cultural background of the individuals involved in the interaction.

When discussing how Russian men act, some female participants characterized them as more forward and aggressive than American men. It seems that they referred to the courting behavior exhibited by Russian men. In connection with the courting rituals, one female student observed that in order to avoid overt sexual harassment, women have to be careful flirting with Russian men. Another female participant said that women who like to act like victims must feel uncomfortable in the Russian culture because Russian men are very open in expressing their feelings. Yet, one female participant in the study found a positive side in Russian men's forwardness in courting. She believed that because of this personality trait, Russian men are more open in expressing their affection towards women and are not afraid to buy gifts and flowers for them.

Such forwardness in the behavior of Russian men that many American women notice immediately could be explained by the fact that the concept of sexual harassment has a different interpretation in the Russian and American cultures. The concept of sexual harassment is relatively new for the Russian society. Before the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of perestroika, and democratic reforms, few people in Russia knew and talked about sexual harassment. Americans, on the other hand, seem to be better informed about sexual harassment and its consequences. They are more aware than Russian that being too forward with a representative of the opposite gender maybe viewed as an act of sexual harassment with all the unpleasant consequences it might trigger. Zippel argues that the United States was the first country in the world to recognize sexual harassment as sex discrimination and probably has the most sophisticated legal and institutional apparatus to handle sexual harassment complaints (42). The public awareness of sexual

harassment in the United States is heightened by multiple law suits dealing with overt gender discrimination.

In the opening paragraph of her book, The Politics of Sexual Harassment: a Comparative Study of the United States, the European Union, and Germany, Kathrin Zippel quotes a German employee talking about workplace policies against sexual harassment: “Sexual harassment is a cultural problem in the United States, but we don’t have that here... We are in Germany and the Americans are in America” (ix). Zippel explains that this person expressed the opinion shared by many Germans and other Europeans: Europeans do not have a problem with “sexual harassment” -- it’s an American problem. According to Zippel, in situations like this, it is tempting to look for individual and cultural explanations, such as “American women are just oversensitive to sexual harassment” or “Europeans are just more relaxed and sophisticated in sexual matters” (ix). Yet, such explanations are too general and even stereotypical. The differences in the reactions to instances of sexual harassment in the US or Europe cannot be explained by individuals reactions or cultural norms, because they are not sufficiently uniform (Zippel x).

One female participant voiced the opinion that Russian men are “promiscuous”: “I head a lot of things about men being promiscuous and women not so much” (Marianne). Pellegrino Aveni reports getting similar opinions from the female participants in her research. As one of her research subjects described it: “I stay away from the guys because I have a boyfriend and I know things are different here and you can’t really be friends with them because they think you want to have sex them or something” (81). We could hypothesize that because statistically women outnumber men in Russia, Russian men are spoiled by all the attention they get on the part of Russian women and believe that they can get away with having multiple partners. This perceived

sexual freedom or promiscuity of Russian men could also be the result of certain culture-specific gender stereotypes: mainly, that men are different from women in respect to allowed sexual freedom, and that they are permitted to be unfaithful and promiscuous. According to Boss and Gurko, in general men engage in sexual activity outside of their primary relationships more often than women. They use the so-called “double-standard” in regard to extramarital sex to their advantage (57). A study providing information on extramarital sexual relations was conducted in the early 80s in Moscow. The results of the study revealed that about 60 percent of the men and about 30 percent of the women reported an involvement in an extramarital affair. For men, the primary reasons for engaging in such affairs were: sexual needs, long absence from wife, alcohol intoxication, love for the other woman, and curiosity (Boss and Gurko 58-59).

Two female students found Russian men to be protective of “their” women. The general opinion expressed by these participants is that Russian men take good care of their women. Russian men are attentive to their female partners’ needs – both financial and emotional—and do their best to satisfy their demands.

...and so as far as the workplace goes... there is some gender inequality, but I don’t think that in the way that most Russian men treat women, at least in the treatment that I received from Russian men, that Russian men view women as inferiors and stuff like that, I think they view women as something that naturally needs to be protected, and taken care of, and something that needs to be respected as well (Stephanie).

As a common Russian belief goes, women are the weak gender and they need to be protected. This belief, however, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, protection

provides security. On the other hand, it gives men their superior status. One female participant made it very clear in her interview: Russian men are considered to be superior to Russian women and this perceived superiority allows Russian men to act dominantly both in family affairs and in work situations. “The first thing that comes to my mind is how far more like superior males are considered... in every way... intellects, work, everything” (Bella).

Such seemingly contradictory remarks expressed by the participants in the study in regard to Russian men (they are aggressive and dominant; yet they are also affectionate and protective) reveal that, in the eyes of young American women, Russian men successfully combine a protective role with the physical abuse they employ to control their women’s demands and to limit their freedom.

DO RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN COURTING RITUALS DIFFER?

Russian courting rituals became a very popular topic among the participants in the study. Several female participants commented that Russian courting rituals are different from American courting rituals. According to them, Russian men do a lot of open staring and are not afraid of catcalling: “...men would just stare and keep on staring, it wouldn’t be like smile and let me try to flirt with you kind of a thing... or anything like that but just like have a normal face... and keep on staring for ten minutes, it was OK, it was normal, I thought it was interesting” (Veronica). A possible explanation for such intense staring could be a tradition of more forward courting behavior. As the same participant explained, while staring all by itself may not be that big of a deal, it is usually followed by other types of unwanted attention, especially if: “...you don’t know what those men have on their minds or what their intentions are” (Veronica).

As for catcalling situations, two female participants commented that they are used to being catcalled at home in the United States, and that being catcalled in Russia was not a new experience for them: “It doesn’t really bother me, I just brush it off, because you get as much of that stuff here if you go down to Sixth Street... you know on a Saturday night or something like that” (Bella).

I have had that happen to me in Latin America too, and you can have it happen in the United States too if you walk by a construction site, so it wasn’t like being in Russia made me feel even more uncomfortable. I felt just as uncomfortable in Russia being catcalled as I do when I am catcalled in the United States too (Stephanie).

Two female participants believed that catcalling is done primarily not by ethnic Russians but by individuals of other nationalities living in Russia: “It really wasn’t more Russian so much as it was like Azerbaidzhani maybe or people from more foreigners, not Russian [] so much, but especially I felt maybe Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaidzhanies [*sic*]” (Bella). The only Muslim female in the group believed she was catcalled by Muslim men (in other words, not by ethnic Russians) because of her ethnicity and religion:

I only got it [catcalling] when I’d go to the markets, when there is a lot of Central Asian workers, and I think they realized that I was Muslim, and a lot of them were Muslim, and so... it was weird because when I go there, a group of us would go there, they’d only target me because... I was Asian, obviously Asian-looking (Rita).

Several female participants noted that catcalling is more typical of big cities like Moscow and New York. It could be that bigger cities have more representatives of other cultures where catcalling is a norm in courting rituals. It could also be that in bigger cities people are more relaxed addressing strangers. In connection with the size of the city hosting the study abroad program, it should be noted that, in general, big cities make people coming from smaller places feel insecure. Constantly being in a crowd of strangers and being unable to guard one's personal space, may make one feel more threatened. Moreover, some strangers in the crowd may look suspicious and not very safe to be around.

However, not everyone in the group was uncomfortable visiting such a big city as Moscow. A female participant observed that she was able to enjoy Moscow even late at night:

I was perfectly comfortable riding the metro alone late at night, I was perfectly comfortable walking streets of Moscow very late at night alone, because everything was well lit and I generally felt safe, and I saw the militsiya walking around, so I felt like... there were people keeping an eye on things, there really was not an activity I guess that I chose not to do that was presented to me because of my gender (Stephanie).

It seems that this student is talking about being comfortable walking around the downtown area of Moscow. Moscow is well-known for its busy nightlife style, and certain central parts of the city (for example, the area around the Red Square and the Tverskaya Street) are crowded, well-lit and constantly patrolled by the militia even late at night. These popular areas of the city are, however, in sharp contrast to other parts of

Moscow. The suburbs of Moscow that are often called by Muscovites “spal’nye rayony” (sleeping neighborhoods) usually do not have a large concentration of restaurants, bars, clubs and supermarkets that are open during the late night hours. These neighborhoods become desolate and dark at night and, therefore, not exactly safe to walk around on your own, especially if you are a young female.

Another courting behavior exhibited by some Russian men that got a lot of comments from the participants in the study was instant marriage proposals. Two female students in the group got proposals from Russian men.

Once I went to see this phone store to get minutes put on my card, or for my cell phone, and I didn’t know how to do it, so the lady called over a man, the manager or something, and you know he told me what to do and then he is like “Oh are you married?” or something like that, and I was like “No...” and he was like “Oh are you interested?” and I was like “No! I am not!” [laughs] and I was like “I am Muslim”, and he is like “I am Muslim too”... and you know they’d do things like that with just me if they realized that I was Muslim, do you understand what I am saying? (Rita).

I got some marriage proposals, which seems to be the way to pick up women there, I had a guy come up to me and he [imitates thick Russian accent] “Oh you are very beautiful, I am looking for a wife, a very beautiful wife,” I am like “Thanks, guy, but you know”... I don’t know... that marriage thing to them seems to be a big deal with ensnaring a woman, because I got a few marriage proposals (Marianne).

It is possible that marriage proposals are a popular courting strategy used by Russian men because many young Russian women are single and in search of a husband. By promising a long-term relationship instead of a one night stand, Russian men might have a better chance to find a female partner.

As was mentioned above, several participants commented that Russian men are always eager to take care of the bills in the restaurants and bars. In other words, women going out in the company of Russian men do not have to worry about expenses.

Russian men are really sweet in dating or expense term, they will pay for everything, they take care of you, they are really sweet, they are really kind in all those ways, but I can see as the relationships progresses it turns the other way around, where the woman picks up all the slack (Veronica).

I have never had to pay for anything, it's not like you are milking off a bit like you would be seen in the United States doing, it's like before you even know the bill is there, all the girlfriends, girlfriends of girlfriends are taken care of, and that was very nice and I think they are respectful (Veronica).

This participant's assumption that allowing somebody else to pay the bill is not considered to be "milking off" in Russia may be too general and even erroneous. First, it is evident that not every Russian man believes that he has to pay for his girlfriend's or female friend's expenses. Second, there is no guarantee that those Russian men who choose to pay their women's bills do not anticipate some kind of a reward or reimbursement in the future. On the contrary, anticipating a non-financial reimbursement for financial expenses seems to be only natural under such circumstances.

In terms of inter-gender behavior, one of the two male participants in the study admitted that he was unsure how to behave around Russian women. He knew that there was a difference in Russian and American courting standards and was afraid to make a socially-inappropriate step: “There was a certain discomfort dealing with... I was out with a woman, and you know “Do I open the door? Do I...” there was a certain uncertainty exactly what was proper and what wasn’t proper” (Jason). It seems that this participant was aware about the thin line between being just a well-mannered gentleman who pays the bills and opens the doors and a man looking for an affair. Because of the lack of information on the culturally appropriate courting and non-courting behaviors around women, he was afraid to make a faux pas and create the wrong impression.

GENDER WITHIN RUSSIAN FAMILY

None of the participants in the study commented directly on the unequal status of women within the Russian family. Yet, some of them stated that they believe women are responsible for doing all the housework in the family and that men are the primary breadwinners. In other words, these participants found that the status of men and women within Russian family is unequal in relation to the kind of work they are expected to do. Even though women are traditionally thought of as the core of the family in Russia, they don’t necessarily enjoy the advantage of their position, because this advantage is rather ephemeral. Being the core of the family is different from being the head of it (the position traditionally assigned to men in Russia). The first status implies only symbolic respect, while the second status presumes the ability to control the family matters and the right to say the last word in decision making. Boss and Gurko note that the opportunity to make major decisions is an example of marital power. They quote Maxine Szinovacz, who argues that gender role socialization, economic dependence, responsibility for

childrearing, and discrimination in education and employment all act as background factors that reduce the decision-making power of women in marriage (48-49).

A female participant in the study gave the following example of Russian men being primary breadwinners in the family. “I have two friends that just got married, and he, of course, is making more money, and he, of course, just got her a car, and he is the man now, and he is taking care of everything” (Bella). The patriarchal nature of Russian society assigns women a domesticated role: their primary responsibility is to take care of the family and the house; work (and consequently an income of one’s own) is secondary to the family and could be sacrificed if the family situation requires it to happen. Hence, it comes as no surprise that since the beginning of the 1990s (or after the collapse of the Soviet Union with its system of the obligatory work enforcement), the unemployment rate in Russia has been higher for women than for men (Bridger and Kay 21).

One of the male participants in the study believed that Russian women are supposed to do all the housework. He admitted that his opinion was influenced by several second-hand stories that he heard from his friends who had been to Russia before and stayed with host families. He was also convinced that Russian women accepted their responsibility for doing all the cleaning and cooking around the house and were reluctant to allow anyone to help them with their chores: “The woman will do all the cleaning, and the sister even will do all the making of beds and cleaning and cooking and etc., and it was expected of them, and when my friend tried to... help out around the house, they just were sort of like “No, no, this is not for you to do, this is for us to do...” (Anthony). The opinion voiced by this participant in the study reflects the real state of affairs in the contemporary Russian family. Koval argues that in Russia “domestic labor mainly falls on the shoulders of mothers and wives... Men are making no move toward sharing

domestic duties. This real inequality in the discharge of domestic duties often leads to serious conflicts between spouses” (31).

Olson and Matskovsky argue that in respect to gender inequality in sharing household chores, Russian and American families are similar in a lot of important ways (9). Both Russian and American families face similar problems that among others include gender role changes, conflictual sexual mores, intergenerational conflicts, divorce, and care of dependent family members (11). In relation to gender roles in the family, Olson and Matskovsky note that “both Soviet and American families have moved from a more authoritarian to a more democratic style of functioning... In both societies, younger husbands are gradually becoming more involved in household tasks, reflecting increased cooperation between spouses regarding household duties” (19-20). In a study conducted at the end of the eighties in Moscow, 33 percent of the respondents stated that both spouses participated equally in housework; and 45 percent reported that wives were doing housework and husbands were “helping” them. According to some studies from the beginning of the nineties, almost 85 percent of American couples agree that child care should be shared; however, fewer than 40 percent agree that housework should be shared (20). Thus, the problem with sharing household duties exists both in Russia and the United States.

The other male participant in the study noted that Russian women combine “domestic mentality” with excellent work skills. In other words, they might be excellent workers and employees, yet in family relationships they are still “number two.” Below is his description of his language tutor, a young married Russian woman in her early twenties:

Here's this woman a year or two younger than myself, and she speaks English just spot on marvelously, and she was always very punctual and very precise, and she did everything that was expected of her, and I just thought she had a very mature comportment, but at the same time there was a certain... things that she would bring up, and discussing her husband, her and her husband's trip to the countryside...she was a kinda just the number two in that relationship, even though I found her being very mature person, there was a certain role assigned to her, that either her work was a little less important than men's work... or somewhat to that effect (Jason).

According to Perevedentsev, the traditional Russian family is "patriarchal, with the oldest male, either the husband or his father, assuming indisputable supremacy" (78). Perevedentsev believes that even though, in the recent times, such "traditional family" order transitioned to the "contemporary family" order, in which the husband's and wife's functions overlap, this transition is not yet complete, i.e., the majority of Russian families are still more traditional rather than contemporary.

GENDER IN WORK SITUATIONS

One participant in the study hypothesized that men have advantage in getting hired in Russia: "I know that ... if there is a job opening and two people are equally qualified, I sort of have a feeling that the man would get hired" (Bella). Another participant commented that there is a belief in Russia that women are not as capable as men in work situations: "I couldn't say with accuracy, but my impression is that certainly in the commercial and business world, in the professional world to a certain degree, I think there is a conception that women are a little less capable" (Jason). According to the

research on Russian women's attitudes towards economic reforms, conducted by Rzhantsyna in 1991, Russian women are greatly dissatisfied with their labor conditions, and this dissatisfaction is due not only to low wages levels. 44.1 percent of working women who participated in the research "recognized labor conditions as the most discriminatory factor in their work life... Another 42.3 percent believed unequal pay to be the most discriminatory factor; 27 percent thought it was unequal opportunities; 20 percent saw it as lack of promotion opportunities" (38). In summation, it seems that both the degrading attitudes towards women in work situations and the actual gender discrimination at work (including cases of hiring and promoting) are a fact of life for many working women in contemporary Russia.

A female participant believed that women are not in the positions of power in the business world in Russia, and that sexual harassment in work situations is a common practice there:

From what I read in the Russian media... from what I heard from some of the Russians, women are still not seen in positions of power very much in the corporate world, I didn't hear of a single CEO of a company in Russia [], of course I may be just ignorant because I wasn't looking out for lists of CEOs but it just...I never heard of a woman in advertising, of a woman in industry being an executive, or a president, or a CEO, I always thought they would be talked about in the context of being an office girl or being a secretary (Stephanie).

When I read this book about Moscow they gave us before coming to Russia, they mention that it's very normal for secretaries to sort of flirt with their bosses, and

for the bosses to sort of flirt back and to pinch the secretary and sort of like hug them or something, and how if the secretary doesn't experience this she feels that her bosses don't like her (Stephanie).

According to Bodrova, women in the former USSR are “insufficiently represented in the bodies of power, particularly in the uppermost echelons” (180). Olson and Matskovsky, in their turn, argue that even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, at the end of the eighties, Russian women's pay and career advancement opportunities were significantly restricted by gender discrimination. The results of their survey reveal that women comprised more than half of all Soviet laborers, office employees, and farm workers. In contrast, the share of women among high-ranking officials is only 5.6% (19). Olson and Matskovsky also note that the position of working women in the United States was not that much better than the position of Soviet women. At the beginning of the nineties, the majority of employed women in the US had the so-called “pink-collar” jobs that pay relatively low wages; and only 10% of women held managerial positions (19).

GENDER IN TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Some of the interviewees noted that since they spent so much time in their language classrooms (approximately five hours a day, four days a week), many of their examples of gender prejudice in Russia come from their classroom experiences. Several participants in the study noticed that one of their male university professors was making sexist comments on a regular basis.

...just about how we [women] have to ... you know how to keep our men happy and things like that, how to cook for them, clean for them, and how men are better cooks, but the women cook, and if we want good food we should [laughs] have our men cook for us or whatever, he would say strange things like that, or if a

policemen pulls you over, it's probably because he wants to get your number, and things like you know (Rita).

There was one instance that stands out in my mind, when we were in class, and a female teacher came in and asked our teacher to help her find a TV, or like there wasn't a TV in her room and she was teaching of the video for "Live from Moscow," and Andrei smiles and looks at us and said something to the effect of [imitates his voice] "Oh you know women always come and ask you for help when they can't do something, and men would just [imitates his voice] go and do it themselves here," something kinda macho like that (Jason).

Both of these examples illustrate the popular in Russia gender stereotype that women belong to the domestic sphere: their job is to do such house chores as cooking and cleaning (and they are not always good at it either); if they get pulled over by a policeman, it is because on the road, they continue to be only women, not drivers; and finally, in work-related situations, women are afraid to use the initiative and cannot perform even a basic task on their own. Since gender-related stereotypes are so finely ingrained into everyday communication, they often go unnoticed or disregarded by the participants in the interactions. Moreover, even the individuals making statements that promote gender stereotypes, are not necessarily aware of their prejudice. It is still surprising, however, that such overtly sexist statements come from a university professor in a classroom context.

In her book on sexual harassment in academic life, Pickering Francis argues that according to the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs, generalized sexist remarks and behavior are considered gender harassment – the mildest

type of sexual harassment (5). Gender harassment (unlike other types of sexual harassment) does not presuppose overt sexual interest. For this reason, Holmes believes that gender harassment is more like “sex harassment” rather than “sexual harassment” (185). This fact, however, does not diminish the seriousness of the offense: “But it should be stressed that harassment isn’t necessarily less serious just because it isn’t *sexual* harassment, or less serious just because it may be misperceived as sexual harassment when it is not” (186).

Overt sexism as an example of gender or even sexual harassment is particularly unwanted in an educational setting. Education is supposed to encourage learning, and the aim of the university should be to foster the conditions under which that can best take place. Any type of harassment, including sexism, jeopardizes the conditions under which learning can take place (Holmes 187).

One of the female participants characterized her male Russian professor as very “gentlemanly” and “affectionate” in a good sense of the word:

... and Vladimir was always very gentlemanly towards me, but not... much more affectionate than any male professor or high school teacher has ever been to me in the United States, and not in a bad way, like... the last day I saw Vladimir, he hugged me good buy and said “Oh you were a good student I really had good time with you,” and in the United States a male teacher would never dream of hugging his female student, like he would honestly think he would offend her (Stephanie).

Such overt expression of affection towards a student is rather unusual for a university professor in Russia. In the Russian system of higher education, there is a substantial social distance between professors and students, yet, the expressions of

favoritism or, on the contrary, bias are not uncommon in student-teacher interactions at the university level. It seems that Russian university professors working with foreign students are more willing to get over the existing social status gap. The general atmosphere of language classes for foreign students is more relaxed and informal than the atmosphere of regular university classes. The professors teaching courses for study abroad students are aware of the short duration of the students' stay and want the students to have a favorable impression of their visit to Russia. Thus, an expression of friendliness and fondness towards foreign students (both females and males) is probably not a rare occurrence among university professors.

In the United States, on the other hand, in order to avoid accusations of sexual offense or harassment, both university and secondary school professors have to be more careful expressing any type of affection towards their students. As a result, the relations between students and teachers or professors in the United States are usually official or formal.

One of the male participants in the study noticed that the male professors were in general "nicer" to female students and "harder" on male students:

A lot of times I felt like the worst student in the class, because it was myself and two other girls, who were both very proficient in Russian, and I think I realized I might have been a step behind, but I wasn't as far behind as the teacher was making out me to be. And within the first week I realized that the needling was playful, to a certain extent maybe expectations were a little higher, but at the same time that's their teaching style so (Jason).

It is possible due to the existing gender stereotypes, these professors had different sets of expectations for male and female students. These professors assumed that male students are more capable than female students and that therefore they should be able to handle certain challenges.

One of the participants noticed that female professors exhibited motherly behavior towards all the students regardless of their gender. As was mentioned above, foreign students are traditionally nurtured by Russian university professors because of the special circumstances of their stay. Female professors in particular tend to treat foreign students as their own children learning to speak a new language. As a result of this nurturing or protective attitude, the demands for foreign students' work are lower, their work is graded more liberally, and they often receive better grades than would Russian students under similar circumstances.

Chapter VI: Ethnicity Analysis

ETHNICITY IN RUSSIA VS. ETHNICITY IN THE US

Understanding ethnicity. Ethnic discrimination.

All the participants in the research agreed that Russians and Americans interpret ethnic prejudice and discrimination differently. The overall opinion shared by all the interviewees was that certain attitudes, language and behaviors that are not viewed in Russia as ethnic prejudice or discrimination would definitely be treated as such in the United States. When talking about ethnic prejudice and discrimination in the United States, several participants in the study observed that ethnic prejudice and discrimination exist in contemporary America; however, unlike in Russia, they are largely “underlying,” “institutionalized,” and “non-blatant.” One participant voiced the opinion that the open racism that is characteristic of Russia now, exists only in “small towns” in the United States. One could argue that such broad, non-specific generalizations related to ethnic prejudice and discrimination are not necessarily informed or accurate. However, the opinions voiced by the participants in the study illustrate how American students visiting Russia for the first time react to what they believe is overt ethnic prejudice and racial discrimination and how they compare ethnic prejudice and discrimination in Russia and in the contemporary United States.

In his book Racism without Racists, Bonilla-Silva terms subtle, institutional, and apparently non-racial type of racism characteristic of contemporary United States “racism lite.”

Compared to Jim Crow racism, the ideology of color blindness seem like “racism lite.” Instead of relying on name calling (niggers, Spics, Chinks), color-blind

racism otherizes softly (“these people are human, too”); instead of proclaiming God placed minorities in the world in a servile position, it suggests they are behind because they do not work hard enough; instead of viewing interracial marriage as wrong on a straight racial basis, it regards it as “problematic” because of concerns over the children, location, or the extra burden it places on couples (3).

“Racism lite” is based on the ideology of color blindness: very few whites in the United States claim to be “racist” nowadays; these people believe that they “don’t see any color, just people.” This so-called color blind racism started acquiring its dominance in the 1960s and succeeded Jim Crow racism which explained black people’s social standing as the result of their biological and moral inferiority. Color blind racism avoids such straightforward and harsh statements; instead it views racial inequality as an “outcome of nonracial dynamics” (2). In other words, ethnic minorities’ disadvantaged social status is a result of their life styles and cultural peculiarities.

Whether white Americans want to admit it or not, racial and ethnic inequality are still a fact of life in modern United States:

Black and dark-skinned racial minorities lag well behind whites in virtually every area of social life; they are about three times more likely to be poor than whites, earn about 40 percent less than whites, and have about an eighth of the net worth that whites have... They also receive an inferior education compared to whites, even when they attend integrated institutions... Finally, blacks and dark-skinned Latinos are the targets of racial profiling by the police that, combined with the highly racialized criminal court system, guarantees their overrepresentation

among those arrested, prosecuted, incarcerated, and if charged for a capital crime (Bonilla-Silva 2).

Even though color-blind or cultural racism is less offensive and insulting, the end result of it is the same as the end result of open biological racism – tremendous social and economic disadvantages.

Almost all the participants in the study believed that Russians are less tolerant towards ethnic minorities than Americans. Out of eight interviewees, only one participant believed that Russians are probably more tolerant towards ethnic minorities than Americans. This participant, who identified herself as Cuban American, said that she was anxious before her trip to Russia because of her ethnicity and because she would not be able to blend in. She was afraid that with her brown eyes and very dark hair, she would be considered a representative of an ethnic minority and treated with a bias or prejudice. However, once in Russia, she realized that even though her appearance made her stand out among Russians, she did not claim to experience any ethnic prejudice or discrimination. This student believed that such relative tolerance towards ethnic minorities stems from “curiosity and openness to ethnicities” that many Russians exhibit. According to her, Russians are also not as “ignorant” about ethnicity as Americans. To illustrate how ignorant Americans can be about ethnicity and geography, she mentioned that she herself and other members of her family are often asked what part of Mexico Cuba is in:

In the United States when I tell people that my family is from Cuba, their response has been, from educated people in the United States “what part of Mexico is Cuba in?” And when my father was starting a new job, and was being introduced to his coworkers... one of his employees shook his hand, very friendly

and dead seriously asked him “It’s such a pleasure to meet you, although can you please tell me what kind of Mexican you are?” (Stephanie).

Other participants also noted that many Russians are genuinely curious about people of different ethnicities. They thought that Russians are drawn to other ethnicities the way people are drawn to something that is different and novel, something they are not used to seeing all the time.

I think there’s still a sort of orientalist perspective on ethnicity, where there’s something exotic about... you know like they had really nice Central Asian restaurants, and people were dressed up in costumes and things like that, which didn’t seem really authentic, but I know that the majority of people there were you know Slavic descent Russians, and to me it seemed like they are kind of playing off the exoticism (Rita).

I don’t think they are... not tolerant, but I think they are very much unaware, definitely see it as a different sort of thing, I think with most of them it’s not hatred as much as it’s kinda questioning, like “What is this new thing?” As most of us are with new things we don’t grow up with, anything that’s you know we aren’t used to, but I felt like especially with African Americans that was more of a case (Veronica).

Two things need to be noted in connection with the previous point of view: 1) not all Russians are curious about representatives of other ethnicities; and 2) not all the ethnicities are fascinating and exotic for those Russians who are curious. For example, representatives of the former southern Soviet republics such as Georgia, Armenia, and

Azerbaijans are not that rare in Russia, especially in bigger cities like Moscow and Saint Petersburg. According to the statistics provided by the Russian State Committee of Statistics (Goskomstat), in 1997 the inflow of migrants from the Caucasus region exceeded 68,000 people. According to Malashenko, 1997 was the 'slowest' year for the migration from the Caucasus, besides this statistics includes only officially registered migrants (12). The increased number of migrants combined with the presence of certain cultural peculiarities in the behavior of representatives of that region that many Russians openly dislike and criticize (such as frequent involvement in the criminal activities and a denigrating attitude towards Russian women), rules out any feeling of fascination towards representatives of these ethnicities.

According to Malashenko, the primary target of xeno- and ethnophobia in contemporary Russia are representatives of the Caucasus region. Malashenko identifies this type of xenophobia as "Kavkazophobia" (12). He mentions the following reasons for prevalence of this phenomenon in Russia. First, people coming from this region are good at trading and selling goods and therefore, are quick to make financial profit in the conditions of the new market economy (while many ethnic Russians are jobless and broke). Second, people from this region are usually united; they tend to value personal connections and are eager to help each other when needed. Unable to penetrate these close familial ties among "Kavkaztsy" (people of the Caucasus region), many Russians feel offended and irritated. Third, as common belief goes, "kavkaztsy" often express humiliating attitudes towards Russian women. Fourth, being only temporary visitors on the Russian territory, in their business operations "kavkaztsy" often get involved in criminal activities. Finally, the war in Chechnya played a significant role in promoting negative attitudes towards people from the region among Russians (12-13).

The mass media play crucial role in spreading ethnic xenophobia in Russia. In her large-scale study of ethnic prejudice through the prism of the mass media, Mal'kova analyzes the language of Moscow newspapers in relation to the different issues connected with ethnically non-Russians residing in Moscow. She comes to the conclusion that such widely read newspapers as 'Moskovskii Komsomolets', 'Moskovskaya Pravda' and 'Argumenty i Fakty' may encourage ethnic intolerance in its various forms (67-68). According to Mal'kova, newspapers and other forms of mass media play a significant role in the formation of opinions and attitudes, and it comes as no surprise that so many Muscovites openly dislike and criticize ethnic minorities.

Hellberg-Hirn explains that a reaction to somebody's ethnicity is subjective and irrational. This reaction is hardly concerned with history, sociology or ethnography. It is concerned primarily with feelings: "to understand ethnicity as a vital social force one has to consider subjective feelings related to group belonging more than to objective cultural criteria (qtd. from Ethnic Identity 1995, 12-13)" (160). In connection with this, Hellberg-Hirn argues that the ethnic identity of Russians (or any other nationality, for that matter) consists of their subjective, symbolic, or emblematic use of any aspect of Russian culture. Language is probably one of the most powerful attributes of one's ethnic identity, but even very basic cultural attributes, such as clothing style and food, can easily become national emblems for "they show others who one is by one's origins and to what group and territory one's loyalty belongs" (161). If someone displays a preference for an unusual, untraditional clothing style or food, let alone if he or she speaks a different language, the natural feeling of bonding because of the belonging to the same group is often disrupted.

One of the participants in the study noted that she was surprised not to observe what she termed "interracial mixing" in Russia. She felt that in certain situations, non-

Russians were literally segregated from Russians. She mentioned that when she went to a Georgian restaurant, she noticed that ethnic Georgians did not mix with ethnic Russians. She even believed that there could have been signs on the walls endorsing segregation, but her Russian was not good enough to read and understand them.

Unlike “Kavkaztsy” and visitors from other former southern Soviet republics, black people in Russia might sometimes be treated with genuine curiosity. There are few black people in Russia, and they seem to be particularly “interesting” for some Russians. A female interviewee told a personal story in which she witnessed a group of Nigerian students on the metro in Saint Petersburg refusing to be photographed by several Russian teenagers who thought they looked and dressed “cool.” The story revealed how a seemingly harmless curiosity on the part of the Russian teenagers really offended and embarrassed the Nigerian students. As another participant noted, Russians might find people of other ethnicities and nationalities romantic, but that does not necessarily mean they would treat them as equal. To put it in simple terms, romantic attitude towards ethnic minorities does not necessarily presuppose their equal social status. And as the story with the Nigerian students on the metro illustrates, plain curiosity can be perceived as a rude and offensive behavior, especially by someone who already feels singled out by his or her physical appearance.

Out of eight participants in the study, only two females identified themselves ethnically as non-Caucasian or white. Both of these students clearly stated that they did not experience any unusual treatment on the part of Russians because of their ethnicity. They reported feeling anxious and insecure before their trip to Russia, mainly because of the stories on ethnic intolerance they read or heard about. However, when they finally found themselves in Moscow, their fear of being constantly racially profiled slowly dissipated.

Other interviewees who identified themselves as white, or Caucasian Americans, did not claim to experience any discrimination in Russia. However, they all believed that if they looked ethnically different in Russia they would have experienced prejudice and discrimination. These interviewees assumed that they were lucky to be able to blend in. As one of the participants put it: “I feel fortunate... I never felt any sort of problems because of my skin color... I think if I had been another ethnicity I absolutely would have become more aware of it” (Bella). The same participant mentioned the following benefits of being able to blend it ethnically: “I am sure that benefits although not seen were the fact that I wasn’t harassed, and the fact that I wasn’t sort of cold shouldered, or I wasn’t treated rudely, so... those probably are benefits, although I didn’t realize they were benefits at that time” (Bella). Thus, both the students who identified themselves as ethnic minorities and the students who did not were fully aware of the existence of certain preconceived notions against ethnic minorities that many Russians possess. Moreover, non-ethnic minority participants in the study (who could have experienced bias only hypothetically) tended to view the situation with ethnic prejudice in more exaggerated terms than ethnic minority participants.

Being able to successfully blend in or pass for a native is often mentioned as a desirable goal by participants in study abroad programs. It seems that in an unfamiliar cultural environment where performing even a basic task can be challenging and stressful, it is psychologically comforting to look like everyone else. Yet, the goal of mixing in with the natives is not always easy to achieve even for study abroad participants whose physical appearance does not single them out in the crowd of natives. As one of the interviewees explained, even if you do not belong to an ethnic minority, you still stand out as a foreigner.

As an American you stand out... even if you attempt to dress to blend in, you still stand out like a sore thumb, especially when you take out your camera and start taking photographs... I experienced a lot of... I don't know a sort of separation, noticed that you are so much different as American in Russia, but just a lot of that was language barrier and I was obviously American (Anthony).

After more than seventy years of cultural isolation under the Soviet regime, many Russians still treat foreigners with curiosity and even suspicion. Despite the new political arrangement in the world, the mass consciousness of the Russian public is not ready to give up on the stereotypical thinking of the cold-war period (Levashov 3)

Perceptions of ethnic homogeneity

Several interviewees commented on how ethnically homogenous Russia was in comparison to the United States. According to the participants who mentioned it, Russia's relative ethnical homogeneity is one of the principal sources of Russia's ethnic intolerance.

The participants who mentioned Russia's ethnic homogeneity were particularly struck by the absence of black people:

There it's a largely Caucasian population almost everywhere we went, and... when we saw an African American or, not African American, a black person there, it was like wow... as they really stood out because and you don't necessarily realize that there weren't that many minorities until you saw a few that were there (Anthony).

One of the participants offered a logical explanation to the fact that many Americans view Russia as an ethnically homogenous country, when in reality it is not. She thought that Americans view the concept of ethnic diversity differently from Russians. They try to transfer their American interpretation of ethnic diversity to the Russian situation and erroneously conclude that Russia is not diverse at all.

I think it's a completely different framework, because when I came back a lot of people would ask me about the diversity there, and here the conception of diversity is having people from all different areas of the world, all over the place, from Latin America, Africa, East Asia, South Asia, over there it seemed I felt like it was a very diverse place but in a different way, ethnic diversity was... sort of limited to Central Asia, or different areas of Russia, because Russia is so expanse, but I still see that as diversity and think Russians see that as diversity too (Rita).

Generalizing about the ethnic composition of Russia is a major if not impossible task. Since the participants in the present study spent the majority of their time in Moscow, it makes sense to limit analysis to the ethnic situation in the capital of Russia. In her book Multiethnic Moscow at the Beginning of a New Millennium, Mal'kova notes that, according to the 2002 Census, only 84 percent of Muscovites are ethnically Russian. Out of 16 percent of ethnically non-Russians currently living in Moscow, Ukrainians and Byelorussians comprise approximately 3 percent (10). Since these two ethnicities are, like Russians, of east Slavic descent we could hypothesize that, at least as far as physical appearance is concerned, Ukrainians and Byelorussians cannot be easily distinguished from ethnic Russians. The rest 13 percent of ethnic minorities include tartars, Jews and the so-called representatives of the former southern Soviet republics, i.e., Armenians,

Azerbaijani, Georgians, Tajiki, etc. The following question arises in connection with these statistics: Given that 16 percent of Moscow residents are not ethnically Russian, can we still consider Moscow an ethnically homogenous city? The easiest answer to this question would be the ambiguous “maybe.” It is not ethnically homogenous, because after all 16 percent of the city’s population is ethnically different. At the same time, it is ethnically homogenous, especially if we take into consideration the ethnic composition of the university in the United States where all the participants in the research currently study. Several of the interviewees compared Moscow’s ethnic makeup to the university’s campus and concluded that Moscow is relatively ethnically homogenous.

It seemed like everybody was [laughs] was Caucasian sometimes, I mean... there were a couple of times when I was on the metro with a friend, and we would see a black person walk by, and it would be like “Wow that might be the first black person I have seen in Russia,” and we’d been there for a month, so that... was... strange to me because I am used to being in a very multiethnic setting, and university is very multiethnic, and there after a while ... it quickly becomes... it’s the norm, but there were a couple of instances where I a kinda stepped back and said “Wow this is a very homogenous country ...” (Jason).

...but growing up in the United... I mean another part of my growing up was in the United States, and I’ve gotten very much used to [diversity]... especially in UT being such a diverse campus, I’ve gotten used to seeing all the colorful wonderful faces and [in Russia] it was just like...this looks strange... it felt strange (Veronica).

According to the statistics in 2007 (a year after the interviews were completed), only 55.1 percent of the students in the participants' home university identified themselves as "White," 15.6 percent identified themselves as "Hispanic," 15 percent identified themselves as "Asian," 4.2 percent identified themselves as "African American," and 9.1 percent identified themselves as "foreign." The ethnic composition of the participants' home university reveals that the university is very ethnically diverse. The ethnic composition of the majority of Russian cities, including Moscow, will seem to be much more ethnically homogenous in comparison to that campus.

If some American undergraduates coming to Moscow for a short visit perceive the city as ethnically homogenous, the majority of people permanently residing in Moscow would probably disagree with this opinion. According to Mal'kova two popular (and somewhat opposing) views related to Moscow's ethnic composition that are shared by many Muscovites and promoted by the local newspapers are: 1) Moscow is a multiethnic city and it should stay that way: the city needs migrants, and Muscovites must accept them and learn how to live next to them. 2) Even though people of different nationalities and religions live in Moscow, Moscow is the city of Russian culture and it should stay that way (67-68). Both of these statements, as different as they are, emphasize that in the eyes of Muscovites, Moscow is a multiethnic rather than an ethnically homogenous city.

ETHNIC DESCRIPTORS USED BY RUSSIANS

Out of multiple ethnic descriptors used by Russians to refer to non-Caucasian-looking individuals, I chose to concentrate on the words "*chernyi*" [black, m] and "*negr*" [an individual of African descent], as well as on derived words with the same roots – "chern-", "negr-". I did it for the following two reasons: 1) the high frequency of their

usage; and 2) the confusion non-native speakers of Russian often experience when interpreting their meaning.

According to Elistratov's Dictionary of Russian Argot, the word "*chernyi*" [black, m] has the following three meanings 1) an individual of African descent 2) a resident of Caucasus, the near-Caucasus region and Central Asia; 3) opium. Other entries related to "*chernyi*" mentioned in the dictionary include:

1. "*chernota*" [darkies pl., collective]: residents of the southern republics, usually Caucasus and Central Asia;
2. "*chernozhopyi / chernomazyi*" [the one that has black ass/face, m.]: 1) an individual of African descent 2) an individual of southern nationality (from Caucasus or Central Asia);
3. "*chernozhopya*" [the land of black asses]: southern republics (usually about Caucasus and Central Asia).

The same dictionary offers the following definition of the word "*negr*" [an individual of African descent]: 1) a person who works a lot for others; 2) a soldier or an engineer of a sapper company. The dictionary also includes a related term "*negritosiya*" [the land of the individuals of African descent], i.e., Africa.

Other race- or ethnicity-related terms that are listed in the dictionary are:

1. "*tsvetnoi*" [colored, m] used to refer to the individuals of Caucasus nationalities;
2. "*chumazyi*" [mucky, m]: a resident of Caucasus, the near-Caucasus region and Central Asia;
3. "*churka*" [blockhead]: a resident of Caucasus, the near-Caucasus region and Central Asia; also a dumb person.

Even though argot is a specialized idiomatic vocabulary peculiar to a particular class or group of people and devised for private communication and identification, these

entries from the Elistratov's dictionary reveal the racial and ethnic bias that exists in contemporary Russia. They also demonstrate how this bias is reflected in the Russian language. The following general conclusions could be drawn on the basis of these several dictionary entries: 1) the word "*chernyi*" could be used both to refer to the individuals of African descent and to the residents of the Caucasus and Central Asia; however, 2) the derived words with the root "chern-" ("*chernota*", "*chernozhopyi*", "*chernozhopya*") are used to refer only to the residents of Caucasus and Central Asia; 3) the word "*chernyi*" and the derived words with the root "chern-" have a strong derogative connotation; 4) the word "*chernyi*" is much more derogative than the word "*negr*"; and 5) contemporary Russian has developed an extensive derogative vocabulary to refer to the individuals from two specific regions: the Caucasus and Central Asia.

According to Malashenko, such an extensive list of derogative nicknames to refer to the individuals coming from the Caucasus and Central Asia is an example of Russian ethnophobia (8). Russian ethnophobia is not a new phenomenon in any way; it goes back to the Soviet days. However, unlike in contemporary Russia, in the Soviet Union ethnophobia existed in its 'latent' form. The perestroika process that eventually resulted in the disintegration of the Soviet Union allowed people to express their opinions more freely and therefore, triggered the appearance of a more open form of ethnophobia (9). Malashenko also argues that frequently exaggerated ethnophobia can be found in specific social and professional spheres. For example, an extremely negative attitude towards individuals coming from Central Asia could be identified in the Soviet Army. It was related to the fact that the vast majority of the draftees from this region did not know Russian well enough to perform their military duties efficiently (8).

Even though the word "*chernyi*" has a dual meaning in the Russian language, based on the reality of contemporary Russian socio-political situation, one could

hypothesize that Russians use it primarily to refer to the individuals from the Caucasus and Central Asia, i.e., to the individuals that have a dark complexion but are not of African descent. This usage often confuses native speakers of English who are used to applying the English term “black” only to the individuals of African descent. Out of all participants in the study, only one commented on the usage of the word “*chernyi*.” She found the way Russians use the term “*chernyi*” in relation to ethnic minorities “weird” and “strange.” Being a bilingual English/Spanish speaker, she thought that Russian parallels both English and Spanish in that it reserves the term “black” (*chernyi*) only for people of African decent. She was sincerely surprised to find out that the majority of Russians use this term to refer to the individuals of non-Russian ethnicities from the regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus. She also believed that Russians started to use this term for non-Africans because there are virtually no Africans in Russia. As a learner of Russian at the novice level of language proficiency (she completed only one semester of Russian before her study abroad trip to Russia), she was unaware that Russian primarily uses the term “negr” to refer to the individuals of African decent.

When I heard the word “*chernaya*,” and I heard it in reference to people from Azerbaijan or people from the Middle East... never it was used in reference to people from Africa, but that wasn't ... what the word was originally devised to describe, because Russians never encountered them, and in my six weeks of being in Russia, I saw at the outmost three African people... and that was just amazing, like Russia isn't very homogenously white country (Stephanie).

When the researcher explained to this participant that most Russians use the word “*negr*” (not “*chernyi*”) to refer to the individuals of African decent, and that the word

does not have a strong derogative connotation many native speakers of English tend to attribute to it, she was able to resolve her terminological confusion.

Like the word “*chernyi*,” the word “*negr*” is a rather ambiguous term for native speakers of English who tend to interpret this word as a clearly racist term when it is not. Forgetting about the Latin root of this word (Latin “*niger*” for black), English-speaking learners of Russian associate it with the English “*negro*” and even with the extremely racist “n-word” used in reference to African Americans. Thus, the Russian word “*negr*” is a cultural false cognate for native speakers of English who, even at the advanced level of language proficiency in Russian, tend to avoid using it because of its “racist” connotation. Instead they prefer to say “*chernyi*” which is currently used in a different context by the majority of Russians.

The term “*chernyi*” when used to refer to someone who is visibly ethnically non-Russian, i.e., has a darker complexion, brown eyes, black hair and non-Slavic features, is much more racist than the term “*negr*” when used to refer to an African individual. Unlike “*negr*,” the word “*chernyi*” is culturally loaded, or in other words, evokes a strong emotional reaction in some native speakers of Russian. The relative neutrality of the word “*negr*” could have the following explanations: 1) there are few African people in Russia, i.e., the annoying presence factor typical of the situations of ethnic intolerance is virtually non-existent; and 2) Russia has never been involved in a military, political or economic confrontation with any of the African countries, i.e., on a large scale, no Russians suffered because or were killed by African individuals.

The neutrality of the term “*negr*” is ambiguous. Black people are still considered by many Russians an inferior race. Some parts of Moscow, for example, the neighborhood surrounding The University of People’s Friendship has a large concentration of African population. This university was established in 1960 for the

purpose of the training of the inhabitants of the formerly colonized countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and was a part of the Soviet Union's initiative to strengthen its ties with the communist regimes in the African region. This large concentration of visitors from a variety of African countries is often disapproved of by ethnic Russians residing or working in the area around the university who may feel ethnically threatened and often believe that the crime situation in the area is only worsened by the presence of so many black people. This situation is what Bonilla-Silva would call a cultural racism in action: "Thus, Europeans may no longer believe Africans, Arabs, Asian Indians, or blacks from the West Indies are biologically inferior, but they assail them for their presumed lack of hygiene, family disorganization, and lack of morality" (40).

When talking about "blackness" or "Africanness" in the Russian context, one cannot avoid mentioning Russia's greatest writer and poet Alexander Pushkin whose African origin is often purposefully overlooked or ignored. As Nepomnyashchy and Trigos argue, "If Pushkin's African lineage was common knowledge among his contemporaries, it was consigned to silence by those writers and critics in the poet's own lifetime and in the succeeding years of the nineteenth century who were to become the canonical ideologists of Pushkin as Russia's national poet" (18). These people were interested in Pushkin's "Russianness," not in his African roots. Pushkin biographers and scholars, on the other hand, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, remained fascinated with his Africanness. In Soviet times, Pushkin's African origins were frequently emphasized by the Soviet authorities as a means of propagandizing the lack of racism in Soviet society. Yet, as Nepomnyashchy and Trigos note, it is Pushkin's Africanness that is fascinating, not his blackness (20). His Africanness is exotic; his blackness is, at best, unimportant.

A SKINHEAD STORY

Three participants in the study (Anthony, Veronica, and Marianne) became witnesses of an incident illustrating how ethnic intolerance can be expressed on the streets of Moscow. These three participants witnessed a physical fight that was initiated by what they referred to as a group of “skinheads” against a group of “Asian-looking” individuals. I decided to include the narrative in my data analysis for the following three reasons: 1) according to the recent publications in the Russian media, incidents of this kind are becoming more and more frequent in large Russian cities, in particular, Moscow and St Petersburg; 2) such incidents illustrate the rising negative attitude among some groups of the Russian population towards ethnic minorities visiting Russia or residing in Russia permanently, and finally, 3) these three participants in the study expressed a very strong emotional reaction towards the incident they witnessed.

It seems that the participants who witnessed the incident referred to the group who initiated the fight as “skinheads” because of the certain aspects of their physical appearance, primarily very shortly cut or even shaved hair. According to the statistics cited by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as many as twenty thousand young Russians may be currently members of the skinhead movement in Russia. Like other types of sub-cultural movements (for example, punks or bikers), the skinhead movement was transferred to Russia from the West. The first skinheads appeared in Russia at the beginning of the 1990s. The cities of Moscow, St Petersburg and Nizhnii Novgorod became the centers of the skinhead movement in Russia. “An analysis of the events linked with Russian skinheads' acts show that the periodical riots, beatings and murders they commit are usually targeted at people from the Caucasus and Asians... skinheads themselves think that they are thus trying to counteract immigrants into Russia who bring their cultures with them ("Skinheads in Russia: Who Are They?")”

The incident described by the participants in the study occurred on the subway at around seven or eight o'clock in the evening. According to the students, while waiting on the platform for a train, a group of skinheads spotted a group of Asian-looking individuals who were also waiting for a train. The skinheads started yelling what one of the participants in the study described as "racial slurs." Even though the students who witnessed this incident were unable to understand all the words directed towards the group of Asians, they all observed that the general tone of the message was very aggressive. When the train approached the platform, the group of skinheads and the group of Asian-looking individuals got in the same car. Because of the hostile atmosphere developing around the two groups involved in the incident, the students decided to move to a different car. As the train started moving, a physical fight "erupted" between the two fighting groups, as one of the participants put it "...we saw these legs flying and stuff, they started a fight, they started to beat up these... Asian men, just because they were Asian, and they were very Hitleresque in their actions" (Marianne). When the train approached the next station, the police were waiting on the platform. They broke up the fight, yet, no one got detained or arrested.

The three students who witnessed the fight expressed a very strong emotional reaction towards what they saw. It seems that, at the time of the incident, they were all genuinely scared and curious at the same time. They decided that it would be safer to move to a different train car but continued watching the confrontation from a distance. When reflecting on the outcome of the incident during their interviews, the participants voiced the following opinions. One of them was very disappointed because, even though the police showed up, the skinheads did not get arrested and were able to get away with what they did:

They didn't get arrested, there was no any kind of a push like at least put them in jail for a couple hours, they just a kinda let them go, like [] them up a little bit and let them go, and I was very disappointed about that, nothing is very much being done to try and get things to change in that way (Veronica).

When commenting on the fact that no one was arrested, the second observer of the incident noted that she was pleased that at least the police were not on the side of the skinheads: "...but when we got to the next station there were police on it right away, so I think that's probably beneficial that at least the police are not on the side of these skinheads, although I am sure it happens sometimes that that is the case" (Marianne). It is unclear why in a situation like this no one was held responsible for initiating a fight in a public place. It could be that incidents of ethnic tolerance in which no one gets badly hurt are treated "lightly" by Moscow police who have to deal with much more serious crimes on a daily basis. It is also theoretically possible that Moscow police are not on the side of ethnic minorities being prosecuted by Russian nationalists, skinheads and neo-Nazis (just to name a few). Thus, when the police have orders to follow and are forced to interfere, they do as little as possible to protect representatives of ethnic minorities from militant and ethnically intolerant individuals.

One of the participants noted that the people who were in the same train car where the incident took place got involved in the fight, and that these people were on the side of the Asian-looking individuals, not the skinheads. The fact that the people who witnessed the incident were on the side of the prosecuted group is very reassuring: it shows that the overall view that "all Russians" are prejudiced against ethnic minorities held by many visitors to Russia is too generalized and not always true. As the incident illustrates, not only some Russians are ethnically tolerant, they also do not want to stay indifferent when

incidents of ethnic intolerance happen in front of their eyes. According to a longitudinal study conducted in 1992-1997, residents of Saint Petersburg, for example, are extremely concerned with the negative ethno-psychological climate of the city and are willing to take action to improve it (Sikevich 102).

One of the participants who witnessed the attack was surprised that she witnessed such an incident in a city like Moscow: “I know this kind of stuff happens in the United States too, like in small towns but just seeing it in Moscow” (Veronica). Many American study abroad students (especially the ones that come from smaller cities and towns) assume that large cities like Moscow, Paris, or New York are very cosmopolitan in their attitudes towards ethnic minorities: after all, representatives of different races and ethnicities are living side by side in these cities and have to accept each other’s presence to some extent. Unfortunately, incidents like the one described above reveal that such assumptions do not always coincide with the reality. The problem of ethnic intolerance in large cities is more serious than many uninformed individuals might expect (Sikevich 102).

One of the participants reported feeling more aware of her surroundings as a consequence of witnessing the incident. It seems that by being conscious of her surroundings in crowded public places, this student wanted to avoid getting accidentally involved in similar confrontations:

There were a couple of times, especially after that incident, I just had this heightened awareness, so whenever I was in the metro, I am looking at guys like “Ooh, could be a skinhead! Who is that guy? Is this gonna erupt into something?” I don’t know [laughs] (Marianne).

After they witnessed this incident, all of the participants started feeling more aware of their own ethnicity, or as one of them put it “of my own whiteness.” Being representatives of ethnic majority, these students never felt singled out or threatened on the basis of their ethnicity while in Russia. Moreover, before witnessing the fight on the subway, they took for granted the fact that they were able to blend in with ethnic Russians. After the incident, they started to be more appreciative of the advantages of their ethnicity. Even if they did not start feeling superior in relation to other ethnic groups, they become aware of the superior status other people may assign to them because of their ethnicity.

At the end of her interview, one of the participants who witnessed the skinhead incident noted that belonging to ethnic majority might be an advantage; however, because of this advantage, one fails to observe and experience certain things: “...so you know it [blending in] was a benefit because it was easy, but it was also a disadvantage, because I didn’t get to understand... something...” (Veronica). She explained that she could only hypothesize how hard it must be not to be like everyone else:

I am sure it’s hard, even if everyone is nice and polite, just the fact that you are the only person that looks different from everybody else... color of your skin or the way you look... it’s really a tiny little part of you, but it is something that people notice right away (Veronica).

RITA’S STORY

The ethnicity-related experiences of the two ethnic minority participants in the study are described in detail in the two short stories below. While composing these stories, I wanted to focus on the following questions: 1) How did the participant’s ethnic

and cultural background influence her cultural adaptation in Russia? 2) How did the participant perceive the interpretation of ethnicity in Russia? and 3) How did Russians react to the participant's ethnicity?

Rita is a twenty-two-year-old undergraduate majoring in Russian and a liberal arts honors program. She is a petite, fragile-looking young woman with long dark hair, brown eyes and olive complexion. Her family came to the United States from Pakistan. Rita identifies her ethnicity as South Asian and her religious beliefs as Muslim. She grew up in the US in what she describes as "a bicultural setting." Based on the information from the interview, Rita respects her family's cultural traditions and is very close with her family. At the beginning of her study abroad stay Rita was at the advanced level of language proficiency in Russian.

According to Rita, her bi-cultural or bi-ethnic background made her cultural adaptation in Russia much easier. It seems that Rita approached Russian culture the way she approached other cultures she came in contact with: she tried to separate the authentic elements of the culture from the influences of the world globalization. By doing this she was able to avoid the erroneous impression many study abroad participants who visit Russia get, mainly that Russian culture has been considerably westernized by the process of globalization and consumerism. She was able to concentrate more on the "authentic" elements of the Russian culture, and she probably perceived certain cultural products and practices that other participants in the program failed to perceive.

I come from a family that's from Pakistan, South Asia, and so I think I consider myself bicultural even though bicultural really means bi-ethnic, and I think that also might have affected my opinions and perspectives, because going into it I

was expecting it to be very different, and it just seemed like another experience of “OK, what is American and what’s everything else?”

Rita also found striking similarities between such seemingly different cultures as Far East Asian culture, South Asian culture and Eastern European culture. In her opinion, all these cultures are united by their differences with western or American culture: they are more family-oriented, more open and informal with their friends, and perhaps, less focused on work and financial success.

Basically it seems like a lot of foreign cities and cultures, their differences with the US are the same, so like Far East Asian culture, South Asian culture, Eastern European culture, they share the differences, that they have with maybe the West or America, if that makes sense, so like in terms of being more family-oriented, or being more relaxed and easy-going, and you know enjoying food and friends and things like that, you don’t see that as much here... you know like family-centered atmosphere, and just how friendships work, how communication works, how parties, weddings, things like that work, the difference just seemed similar, so it doesn’t seem that different I guess.

As was previously mentioned, the similarities between some Asian and Eastern European cultures could be explained by their collectivist nature.

Out of all participants in the study, Rita provided perhaps the most elaborate view on how ethnicity is perceived in Russia. Not only she did pay close attention to the way Russians treated representatives of ethnic minorities, she also reflected on what she saw and tried to find the reasons behind certain ethnicity-related attitudes. Rita made the following major points on ethnicity in Russia.

She believed that Russians and Americans use two different frameworks when talking about ethnicity. In her opinion, there are fewer ethnicities in Russia than in the US, and so Russians view ethnic diversity in more limited terms. Because in Russia ethnic diversity is more limited, or rather limited to representatives from fewer areas – primarily the Caucasus Region and Central Asia – Russians seem to be more informed about ethnicities than Americans because they come in contact with representatives of fewer ethnicities than Americans. Rita also noted that many Russians share what she called the Orientalist perspective on race and ethnicity: they are fascinated with the exotic aspects of other cultures and ethnicities. Finally, Rita found that, unlike in the US, ethnic minorities in Russia are more integrated. What she, probably, meant by this statement is that ethnic minorities in Russia do not reside in relatively isolated communities in specific parts of town. However, she noted that the positions occupied by representatives of ethnic minorities in Russia are fixed and often inferior to the positions of ethnic Russians: they work primarily as merchants in the open air markets, or sell food from Shaurma stands. It could be that Rita noticed the denigrating attitude of ethnic Russians towards ethnic minorities working in the markets and on the constructions sites, or handling basic cleaning and maintenance jobs.

When describing how Russians reacted to her ethnicity, Rita made the following remark: “One of our professors did mention that I was a ...you know... a black or whatever.” It is not clear from the context of the interview, why the university professor noted that, because of her physical appearance, Rita may be classified as “black” or “*chernaya*” by some Russians. It seems that Rita is referring to the same professor who talked elaborately about ethnicity and religion in Russia. What is clear from the interview, however, is that Rita interpreted many of this professor’s statements as jokes

and humor. She did not sense any negativity in his opinions on race and ethnicity, and therefore, she did not feel threatened or offended in any way.

Rita mentioned that during her stay in Russia she became the target of only one ethnic remark. As the episode described below illustrates, it was probably not just Rita's ethnicity, but her ethnicity combined with an unusual dress style, in particular, her wearing a scarf, that made her the target of a comment that could be considered offensive or even insulting:

There was an instance when I left one of the mosques, and I was wearing a scarf, and some guy said something about Yaser Arafat to me, and I was just like "OK ... [laughs] that was, that directed towards me"... and that was like one instance I can think of... but there was also like another Russian guy near me and he was just "Oh don't pay attention to him, he is just drunk" or something like that, and that happens here I think more often [laughs].

The last phrase in this quote from the interview reveals that in dealing with ethnic intolerance, Rita keeps reminding herself that it is not something specifically Russian and that it is universal and can be found everywhere. In general, Rita creates an impression of a very mature and composed individual. She is able to distinguish open ethnic hostility from the blubbering of a drunken man whose attention was caught by her unusual appearance and her scarf. Rita's reaction to this episode also reveals that she approaches some of her cultural encounters with a sense of humor. The fact that another Russian was on her side helped her keep a positive attitude towards the episode.

Rita expressed an opinion that Russians were friendly to her because 1) she looked exotic and they could not instantly identify where she was from; 2) she spoke Russian to them; and 3) she looked fragile and non-threatening.

But you know everyone wants to kinda place me and figure out where I am from, and where I was born, and things like that... and I don't know I think they are more amused by it than anything else, and I don't think it's common to see there like someone from South Asia as much, who speaks English [laughs], and speaks Russian with a bad accent, so... [laughs] I think they found that amusing rather than anything, and it might be that I am like a little girl, if I was you know... a big guy... it might be different but I think, I think people are just interested.

Rita's exotic appearance made it easier for her to start conversations and participate in basic everyday interactions, such as buying groceries, or purchasing a metro ticket. It is possible that Russians used Rita's unusual by Russian standards appearance as a doorway to initiating a small talk with her while she was making a purchase. Non-ethnic Russian merchants at the markets were bonding with her as well because of her ethnicity. What needs to be noted is that she seemed to be happy to engage in those small-talk conversations, and that it was her friendly disposition and extreme politeness that helped her in those interactions as well.

People were really interested, people were really nice to me, and people at the shops they'd give me bigger discounts and stuff [laughs], and you know it was a lot more easier for me to bargain, I know people would come with me and they would say "Rita can help us bargain [laughs]," especially when the shopkeepers themselves were... you know from somewhere other than Moscow or Saint

Petersburg, but yes, they were really interested, I used to get free food sometimes too and things like that, it was ... more of a benefit than a drawback I think.

STEPHANIE'S STORY

Like Rita's story, Stephanie's story is built around the following questions: 1) How did the participant's ethnic and cultural background influence her cultural adaptation in Russia?; 2) How did the participant perceive the interpretation of ethnicity in Russia?; and 3) How did Russians react to the participant's ethnicity?

At the time of her trip to Russia, Stephanie was a twenty-one-year-old majoring in Communication. Stephanie creates the impression of an active and independent individual. She is tall, full-figured and has a pretty face with prominent features and large brown eyes. She comes from a Cuban-American background; she is fluent in Spanish and English. It becomes clear from the interview that Stephanie is close to her family and that she is very proud of her Cuban identity. She mentioned that she is quite familiar with the Latin American culture and that she traveled extensively around the region. She also made a point that she really missed speaking Spanish during her study abroad trip and that she was looking for every opportunity to find Spanish speakers in Russia. At the beginning of her study abroad stay Stephanie was at the novice level of language proficiency in Russian.

Stephanie believed that her Cuban background, the knowledge of Latin American culture, and extensive traveling experiences around Latin America were very beneficial for her cultural adaptation in Russia. She found striking similarities between Russian and Latin American cultural traditions. When describing how she perceived Russian people, she used such expressions as "very concerned with their friends and family" and "concerned with treating guests well." She noted that Latin American cultures are the

same way: familial and hospitable. She observed that both Russians and Latin American are big on food and drinking. These similarities in cultural traditions made Stephanie feel very comfortable socializing with Russians. Unlike many participants in study abroad programs who are scared of communicating with the native speakers of the target language because of the lack of the linguistic and cultural knowledge, Stephanie was actively looking for opportunities to interact with Russians. The following two statements demonstrate that, because of her cultural background, she preferred to be around Russians rather than Americans, including other participants in her study abroad program:

I chose to hang out with different groups, like Russians as opposed to Americans, because of my ethnicity and what my culture... just being used to... I felt more comfortable with the Russians than with the Americans.

I wanted to go with the Russians and play dominos, because Cubans play dominos too and drink vodka and discuss life, instead of just sitting with the Americans who are just like so [], just to get drunk for as little rubles as possible.

If at the beginning of her stay, Stephanie was concerned that her visibly non-Russian ethnic background might impede her cultural adaptation and even make her feel uncomfortable when interacting with Russians. At the end of her trip, she was persuaded that her ethnicity and cultural background not only helped her understand Russian culture better but also establish a good rapport with many Russians.

The following statements taken from the interview illustrate Stephanie's opinion on how Russians perceive ethnicity:

I just thought the way Russians view (?) races is interesting... and that there was very much... inawareness that because Russia is so homogenous and so white ...

anyone who is thought or seen as of a slightly different ethnicity, will stand out more... and be more examined and sort of classified by the Russians.

I would think that Russians are actually probably more tolerant [towards ethnic minorities], but this tolerance stems from more knowledge of ethnicities or at least more openness to, more curiosity and openness to ethnicities.

Stephanie's opinion on how Russians view race and ethnicity seems to be contradictory at first sight. On the one hand, like some other participants in the study, she thinks that Russia is relatively homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity, and that because of that many Russians 1) are unaware of other ethnicities; and 2) approach other ethnicities with curiosity. On the other hand, she believes that Russians are more knowledgeable about other ethnicities than Americans because they express openness and curiosity towards representatives of other ethnicities. This knowledge of ethnicities could make Russians more tolerant of ethnic minorities. Stephanie was the only participant in the study who found Russians to be more tolerant than Americans in that respect. It seems that the contradiction in Stephanie's view stems from the fact that large, unspecific generalizations about race and ethnicity (and attitudes towards them) almost never hold true. It is close to impossible to put all Russians in one group and conclude that this is how they interpret race and ethnicity.

Stephanie also noted that Russians seem to know world geography better than Americans. To illustrate her point she mentioned that many Americans still do not know where Cuba is: "In the United States when I tell people that my family is from Cuba, their response has been from educated people in the United States: What part of Mexico is Cuba in?" While all the Russians she talked to during her trip not only knew the location of her native country but also provided her with information she did not know before:

I had Russian people telling me things about Cuba that I didn't know, because of the interaction between the two governments... so I didn't have Russians asking me what part of Mexico Cuba is in, Russians seemed to know their geography better, and they are more aware of the differences between the different parts of the world than Americans are.

Stephanie's belief that Russians are better at world geography than Americans could also have influenced her opinion that Russians are more ethnically tolerant: this tolerance comes both from their better knowledge of ethnicities and their better knowledge of geography.

When talking about how Russians reacted to her ethnicity, Stephanie noted that she got a very warm reception from Russians. She also emphasized that while in Russia she presented herself as Cuban rather than American or Cuban-American. She believed that this fact made her interactions with Russians very positive: "I think I got a much better reception from people that I met, when I told them I was Cuban instead of that I was American. I think that definitely made a difference."

What I found out when I was in Russia, I would tell people that my family is from Cuba, they would start telling me anecdotes "Well, I heard that Moscow is filled with Cubans, and "Oh, you Cubans are such great people, and we do trust you, and you were such a great ally of Russia," and I've got a much more private response... as a foreigner... from Cuba as opposed to being a foreigner from America.

It could be that Stephanie chose to identify herself as Cuban rather than American while in Russia for the following two reasons: 1) she was proud of her Cuban identity and

wanted to emphasize that her ethnic identity is more important to her than her national identity; and 2) she was aware of the anti-American attitude that is currently widespread in Europe and Russia. An anti-American attitude that could be roughly described as expressing opposition or hostility to the people, culture and policies of the United States has increased in Europe and other parts of the world since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Moreover, according to Levashov, Russia's current anti-American sentiment has very deep roots: it goes back to the period of cold war and confrontation, when the United States and NATO were the main strategic military opponents of the Soviet Union (30). Many Russians (especially the ones belonging to the older generations who lived through the cold war) still do not trust the United States. For example, the results of a survey conducted in Russia in 2004 reveal that only 12 percent of the respondents when asked the question: Is the United States a country that is friendly toward Russia? gave an affirmative reply (Levashov 32).

Even though Stephanie's ethnic experiences in Russia were generally positive, she was very aware of her ethnicity during her study abroad stay. She kept wondering how Russians classified her ethnicity based on her appearance.

So even I with my skin tone, and I had my hair dyed a very dark black when I was in Russia, and I have dark eyes and sort of darkishly toned than most Russians, so I felt... like I definitely stood out and I was wondering would they refer to me as "chernaya," honestly wondering in terms of the hierarchy of color... which color technically I fall into, and what sort of descriptor a Russian would put on me.

It seems that Stephanie knew that the general connotation of the term "chernyi" [black, m] in Russian is derogative, and that the term is used in relation to individuals with non-Caucasian features who are not of African decent. She suspected that Russians

viewed her as “*chernaya*” [black, f], even though no one used that term in relation to her. Stephanie’s attempts at trying to understand how Russians perceive her ethnicity reveals her heightened sensitivity that many individuals belonging to ethnic minorities experience.

In general, Stephanie is very informed about how ethnic identity is constructed. She understands that it is temporal and fluid (i.e., highly context-embedded), and that it is closely intertwined with other types of identity for example, social identity:

Because in my country Cuba I’d be considered very very white, and then you’ve got people who are mixed African and white, and they would be called mulato, and they are considered much lighter than people who are only black, and like each person has their own different social role and their social level.

Stephanie’s informed and mature perception of ethnicity made her cultural adaptation in Russia easier and smoother. It helped her get over initial insecurity, make sense of her cultural encounters, and benefit from her study abroad stay to the full extent.

Chapter VII: Conclusions

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY IN RELATION TO ITS INITIAL RESEARCH GOALS

The study addressed the following three research questions:

1. How do American students negotiate their cultural, gender and ethnic identities in the context of a short-term study abroad program in Russia?

2. How do the differences in students' cultural experiences, gender and ethnicity influence the process of identity negotiation?
3. How does the short duration of the stay abroad influence students' cultural, ethnic and gender experiences in Russia?

Research Question 1

Negotiating Cultural Identity

The results of this study reveal that in the process of negotiating their cultural identity in an unfamiliar cultural environment, the participants reflected on the differences and similarities between the native and the target cultures. Cultural comparisons helped the participants in the study make sense of their cultural experiences in Russia. It is important to note that ethnic majority and ethnic minority participants compared cultures from two different angles. Ethnic majority, i.e., Caucasian participants, compared the mainstream American culture to Russian culture, concentrating on the patterns of emerging cultural globalization. Paying attention to the similarities between the two cultures caused by the spread of communications technology, the fast growth of the entertainment industry, and the massive expansion of global consumerism helped these participants go through an easier cultural adaptation. Ethnic minority participants compared Russian culture both to the mainstream American culture and to the cultures they grew up in, i.e., Southeast Asian and Cuban/Latin American cultures. Ethnic minority participants believed that their multicultural background positively influenced their cultural adaptation in Russia.

Negotiating Gender Identity

In the process of negotiating their gender identity in a new cultural environment, the participants in the study used the following reflective and analytic strategies: 1)

reflecting on physical appearance and behavioral patterns of the representatives of the target culture from the point of view of gender roles; 2) analyzing how the interpretation of gender roles in the target culture influenced gender interactions in the following areas: a) family, b) work situations, and c) student-teacher communication; 3) trying to establish a connection between the interpretation of gender roles and gender-related sensitivity in the native and target cultures; and 4) trying to establish a connection between the interpretation of gender roles and attitudes towards feminism in the native and target cultures.

Negotiating Ethnic Identity

In the process of negotiating their ethnic identity in a new cultural environment, the participants in the study used the following strategies: 1) reflecting on their ethnic identity in their native culture; and 2) reflecting on how it could be a different experience to belong to the ethnic majority or minority in the native and target cultures.

At the end of their stay in Russia, all the participants in the study became more aware of their ethnic identity in the United States. They became more conscious of the existing ethnicity- and race-related problems in the United States, as well as of their own position in the ethnic landscape.

When comparing the attitudes towards race and ethnicity in Russia and the United States, Caucasian students felt fortunate to belong to the ethnic majority in both countries, particularly so in Russia which they found more ethnically intolerant than the United States. Ethnic minority students were conscious of the existing ethnic prejudice in both cultures, but they did not believe that Russians were more ethnically intolerant than Americans.

Research Question 2

Identity and Different Cultural Experiences

The results of the study demonstrate that 1) the participants with extensive traveling experiences and prior intercultural contacts and encounters went through a faster and smoother cultural adaptation; and that 2) the participants who had strong ties and connections with cultures other than mainstream American culture were able to achieve an easier cultural assimilation than other students.

In connection with these results, administrators of study abroad programs should be advised to encourage participants with previous traveling experiences to make active use of and share their knowledge in a new cultural environment. The fact that minority students could be in a more favorable position for cultural adaptation than students who are familiar only with mainstream American culture should also be mentioned during study abroad pre-departure orientations.

Identity and Gender Differences

Results of the study show that, unlike the male participants in the study, female participants adopted their behavior in order to cope with the differences in the interpretation of gender roles between the native and target cultures. In order to escape potentially uncomfortable gender-related interactions, some female participants in the study avoided unnecessary contact with Russian men, did not go out late at night, and dressed more conservatively than Russian women. Female participants in the study also used the differences in the interpretation of gender roles to their advantage: they allowed Russian men to pay their restaurant and bar bills, and negotiated prices at the markets and taxi fares. Male participants in the study claimed that they did not experience gender discrimination in Russia but did notice gender discrimination against women.

Identity and Ethnic Differences

The results of the study reveal that, unlike ethnic majority students, the participants in the study who identified themselves as belonging to ethnic minorities 1) experienced ethnicity-related anxiety before and at the beginning of their study abroad stay; 2) anticipated but did not experience any unequal treatment on the part of the natives because of their ethnicity; and 3) believed that their ethnicity made their interactions with the representatives of the target culture smoother and easier.

Research Question 3

Positive Effects of the Short Duration of the Stay

The results of the study reveal the following two positive effects of the short duration of the study abroad stay related to cultural adaptation. 1) The short duration of the program might have been responsible for participants reporting not going through culture shock. It seems that because of the short duration of the trip some of the participants did not move past the initial euphoric period of cultural adaptation. Since the participants did not have time to go through all the stages of culture shock, they believed they did not experience culture shock at all. 2) The short duration of the stay might have positively influenced the participants' attitude towards certain peculiarities of the target culture. The so called "tourist syndrome" or feeling that one's stay in the target country is only temporal and that cultural differences should be taken lightly and not given too much thought, might have helped the participants in the study ignore or disregard the potentially unpleasant cultural encounters.

Negative Effects of the Short Duration of the Stay

The results of the study reveal the following two negative effects of the short duration of the study abroad stay on the cultural adaptation. 1) Even though all the participants in the study reported improved cultural understanding as a result of their

study abroad trip, it is doubtful that they experienced what Stephenson calls “cross-cultural deepening” which grasps the full potential of cultural experiences during study abroad trips (87). Cross-cultural deepening presupposes the ability to encompass two different realities within oneself simultaneously. It can be perceived as a series of developmental stages that range from denial to acceptance, and from frustration to cognitive and behavioral adaptation. Prolonged contact with the target culture is needed in order for the cross-cultural deepening to take place. 2) The brevity of the stay made the program more intense and, therefore, more exhausting (both physically and mentally) for the participants of the study. For that particular reason, several participants in the study wished their stay abroad was longer. It seems that physical and mental exhaustion makes study abroad participants less perceptive and observant in the new language and culture. It can also make them less tolerant with unavoidable cultural differences. Finally, tired or exhausted students may not be willing to take risks in the new language and culture. Such reluctance to experiment with the language and culture eventually limits students’ potential learning opportunities.

UNANTICIPATED RESEARCH FINDINGS

As a researcher, I expected that only female participants in the study, i.e., those participants that were hypothetically at a disadvantaged position because of their gender, would become aware of a different interpretation of gender roles in Russia and the United States. However, the results of the study reveal that both male and female participants became aware of a different interpretation of gender roles in Russia and the United States. The results of the research demonstrate that the two male participants in the study paid close attention to the problems of gender in the target culture and openly voiced their concerns about the unequal treatment of women in Russia.

Another unexpected finding of the research was that the participants in the program who did not belong to ethnic minorities paid close attention to the issues of race and ethnicity while in Russia. In other words, both ethnic majority and ethnic minority participants became aware of a different understanding of race and ethnicity in Russia and the United States. Moreover, unlike the ethnic minority participants in the study who claimed they did not experience any discrimination because of their ethnicity, the ethnic majority participants believed that if they belonged to an ethnic minority they would have received unequal treatment from native Russians.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

When outlining the study's research goals and methodology, I expected it to be a case study of a short-term, Russia-based study abroad program. However, when I started analyzing the data, I soon came to the conclusion that the final shape of the study would be an ethnographic case study focusing primarily on the sociocultural experiences of the participants of the program. This transformation from a case study of a program to a case study of the participants' experiences could be accounted for by certain inconsistencies in the design of the study. For example, detailed questions on how the design and the duration of the program might have affected the participants' sociocultural experiences were absent in the interview template. This change from the focus on the program to the focus on the participants could also be the result of only one data collection method used in the study.

When formulating interview questions for the study, I expected the participants in the study to express elaborate and informed views on some of the major problems related to gender and ethnicity in Post Soviet Russia. What I did not foresee at the onset of the study is that my interviewees would concentrate on the broad social behaviors related to

gender and ethnicity rather than on the root causes of gender and ethnic prejudice. It seems that as a researcher I should have taken into consideration the background of my participants, in particular, their age and life experiences. The fact that the participants in the study were young and single might have had a significant impact on the topics they discussed throughout the interviews. The participants in the study were aware that gender- and ethnicity-related problems exist in Russia, but tended to focus primarily on the surface features of the problem, without going into a deeper analysis of different types of social inequality and its underlying causes. These results of the study reveal its second major limitation – the lack of concentration on the roots of sociocultural inequality in the target culture.

The last limitation of the study is in its overall design. In a qualitative study based on the participants' self-reported perceptions, reactions, and feelings, there is always a possibility that the information received in the process of interviewing was distorted due to the participants' desires to present themselves in a more positive manner. The sensitive nature of some of the focal points of this study, such as gender and ethnicity, might have also influenced the opinions voiced by the participants in the study.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

The results of the study suggest that pre-departure orientations are crucial for successful study abroad experiences. The orientations prepare students for the possible physical and psychological, as well as linguistic challenges associated with living and functioning in a new culture. They also help the participants to readjust their cultural and linguistic expectations when they experience the real world of the host country.

At present time, women statistically outnumber men in study abroad programs administered by American colleges and universities, and the number of ethnic minorities

going abroad is gradually increasing. Pre-departure orientations should explicitly address the specific needs of women and ethnic minorities traveling abroad. This could be achieved through 1) discussing the sociocultural factors that may influence the linguistic outcomes of a study abroad stay (such as an inability to participate in specific interactions because of their biased and even potentially threatening context); 2) acknowledging the existing gender and ethnic inequality in the native and the target cultures; and 3) suggesting strategies for overcoming the existing gender and ethnic prejudice.

When discussing the sociocultural nature of language learning it is important to emphasize that students should approach all language learning experiences as situational and context-embedded. Students should recognize that situational, socially constructed limitations may influence or even impede the learning progress of an individual learner. In his book Teaching Against the Grain, Roger Simon argues that “The basic premise on which most North American education is currently based takes as the focus of educational practice the person as an autonomous being with multiple potential. The task of education is to help that person realize as much of his or her potential as possible” (18). However, what this educational system fails to define is the socially constructed limitations to one’s potential. In his book, Simon mentions the “pedagogy of possibility” where “. . . possibility refers not to what an individual may choose to do but rather those options available in a situation when one simultaneously takes into account both the “coercive encouragement” of particular forms and the limited range of capacities those forms encourage” (21). Discussing Simon’s pedagogy of possibility during pre-departure orientations may help women and ethnic minority participants accept the fact that not everything that is desirable may be achievable in a given study abroad context and that, unfortunately, there is not much that they can do to change the situation.

The following types of strategies could help students overcome the existing gender and ethnic prejudice: 1) linguistic strategies; 2) social strategies; and 3) emotional strategies.

Linguistic strategies could include analyzing specific terms used in the target language to refer to women and ethnic minorities and explaining which of these terms may carry derogative connotations (in case of Russian, for example, that would be the relative neutral connotation of the word “negr”). Another strategy could be to introduce vocabulary and phrases that would help students avoid or interrupt unpleasant interactions (for example, phrases like “Please, leave me alone.” or “Do not bother me.”)

Social strategies could include explaining how to avoid potentially threatening situations or how to react to openly discriminating comments. Emotional strategies could involve preparing students to expect certain comments or questions that they would perceive as rude or offensive in their native culture (for example, questions like “How does it feel to be black in the United States?” or “Are all women feminists in the United States?”)

As the demographics of this study reveals, despite of the growing number of ethnic minority students traveling abroad, they are still disproportionately underrepresented in study abroad programs. Ethnic minority students should be encouraged to find an opportunity to participate in study abroad programs. Providing these students with extra financial, informational, and psychological support could increase their opportunities to become a study abroad participant.

Finally, pre-departure orientations need to include discussion of the benefits and shortcomings of different lengths of study abroad trips. For example, understanding the advantages and disadvantages of a short study abroad stay may help students 1) make

their trip goals more realistic; and 2) think of strategies that will allow them to cope with physical and mental exhaustion caused by the intensity of the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of the study suggest the following practical recommendations for future research:

1. Generational and socioeconomic background of the participants in the study should not be disregarded when designing the study because it has direct influence on the type of data participants in the study produce.
2. More sociocultural research is needed with the focus on the design and duration of the short-term study abroad programs.
3. More sociocultural research is needed with gender- and ethnically-balanced study abroad programs, i.e., with programs that have a comparable number of participants of both genders and participants representing ethnic minorities.
4. More sociocultural research is needed that would use triangulated data collection methods.
5. More sociocultural research is needed with short-term study abroad programs based in regions other than Russia.

Appendix A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Culture

1. Do you think you went through a culture shock during your stay in Russia?
2. What aspects of a culture shock did you experience?
3. How did you deal with the culture shock?
4. Can you describe the most memorable cultural experience of the trip?
5. Do you think you got a better understanding of the Russian culture at the end of your stay?
6. Did you become more accepting of the Russian culture at the end of your stay?

Gender

1. Do you believe that there is gender inequality in Russia? How is it expressed in the Russian culture? Can you give me an example?
2. Do Russians interpret gender roles differently from Americans? Can you give me an example of such a different interpretation of gender roles in Russia?
3. Did you experience any discomfort because of your gender while in Russia? Did you get unwanted attention on the part of the opposite gender?
4. Did you experience any sexual harassment while in Russia?

5. Were you ever denied access to certain types of linguistic and cultural interactions because of your gender while in Russia? (For example, you could not participate in certain types of conversations, could not go to certain places, etc.).
6. Did you experience any benefits because of your gender while in Russia?

Ethnicity

1. Do you think Russians view ethnic prejudice or racism differently from Americans? What is the difference? Are Russians less tolerant (or more tolerant) towards ethnic or racial minorities? Did you witness any instances of 'racial profiling' in Russia?
2. Did you become more aware of your own race/ethnicity while in Russia?
3. Did you experience any discomfort because of your race/ethnicity while in Russia?
4. Did you ever choose not to participate in certain types of cultural and linguistic interactions because of your race/ethnicity while in Russia?
5. Were you ever denied access to certain types of linguistic and cultural interactions because of your race/ethnicity while in Russia?
6. Did you experience any benefits because of your race/ethnicity while in Russia?

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