

Queer: Will Travel

The Impact of Experiential Study Abroad

on Sexual Identity Development for LGBTQ-Identifying College Students

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Research Question

How do new cultural realities experienced through experiential study abroad programs influence LGBTQ-identifying participants in their sexual identity development, and how can higher education professionals best utilize this knowledge in designing programming supportive of students and host communities?

Data Results Summary

Introduction

Data collected through this study included quantitative and qualitative measures of the influences on LGBTQ sexual identity experienced abroad. In this section the data results from surveys, individual interviews and artifact analysis are summarized and presented according to theme. These themes include: respondent demographics, preparation pre-departure, in-country experience, influences in-country on sexual identity development, supports in-country for sexual identity development, and developmental outcomes.

Survey and Interview Respondents' Demographics

A brief summary of the survey and interview respondents' demographic characteristics most relevant to the purposes of this study is useful in framing the data collected through these two methods.

Survey. Forty-three alumni/ae of the Casa program responded to the survey, with forty having studied abroad in El Salvador, and five having studied abroad in the Philippines. Two of the respondents studied abroad in both El Salvador and the Philippines. Unfortunately there were no survey respondents from the GESI program. Survey respondents participated in the program as early as 2001, and as recently as 2014. Figure 3 shows the years that respondents studied abroad.

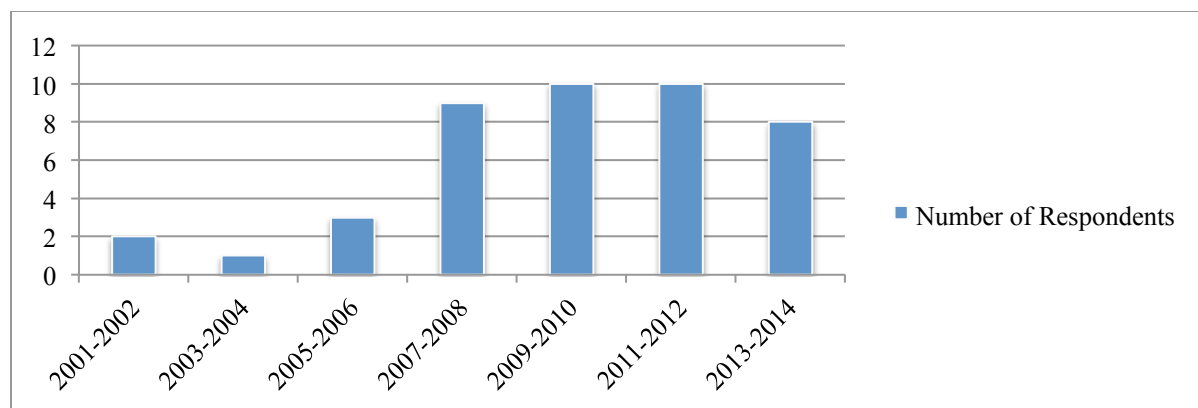


Figure 3: Years survey respondents studied abroad. Each respondent studied abroad for one semester during the two-year time-period represented by each bar.

Forty-two of the survey participants completed the demographic questions requesting information on their gender, sexual identity pre-study abroad, and sexual identity at the time of this study. Their responses to these questions are reflected in Figures 4, 5, and 6, respectively.

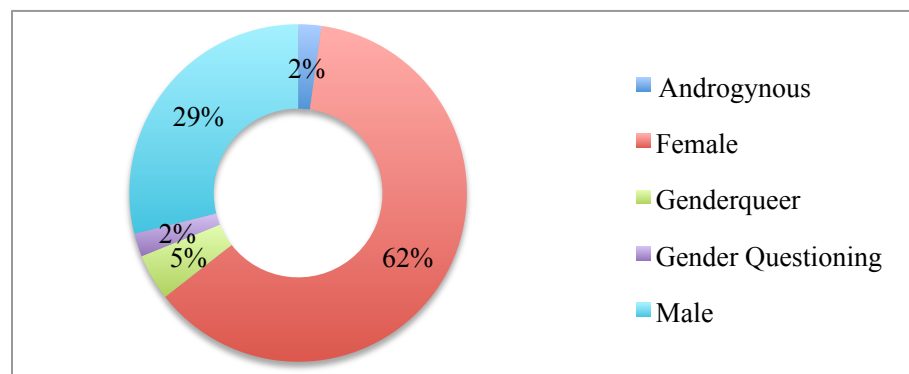


Figure 4: Survey respondents' gender identity at time of study.

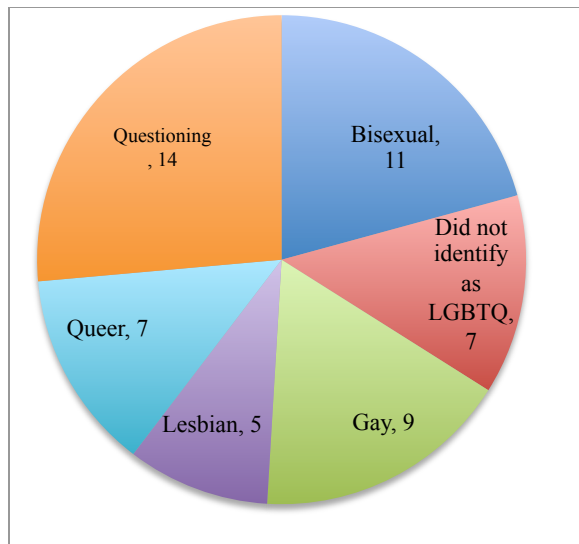


Figure 5: Survey respondents' sexual identity pre-departure.

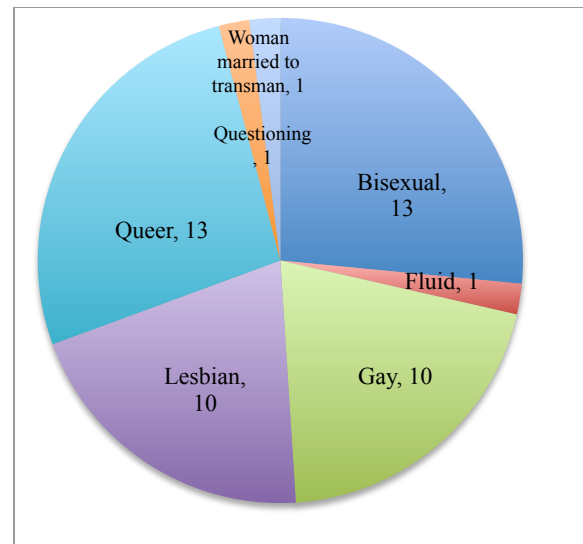


Figure 6: Survey respondents' sexual identity at time of survey.

Seven survey respondents did not identify as LGBTQ pre-departure and fourteen participants responded that they identified as questioning pre-departure, while only one identified as questioning at the time this research was conducted. Also notable is the number of respondents who identify as queer nearly doubled from pre-departure to the time this research was conducted, from seven to thirteen.

Interviews. Ten survey respondents also volunteered to be interviewed. All ten of the interviewees studied abroad in El Salvador, and one also studied abroad in the Philippines. Each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym. Demographic information on each interviewee is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Interviewees Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Year Studied Abroad	Gender	Sexual Identity Pre-Departure	Sexual Identity at Time of Interview
Addie	2006	Female	Questioning	Queer
Allison	2007	Female	Gay/Lesbian	Lesbian/Queer
Emma Jane	2001	Female	Non-LGBTQ	Queer
Heloise	2008	Female	Queer	Woman married to transman
Ian	2014	Male	Bisexual/Queer	Bisexual/Queer
Ida	2010	Female	Bisexual	Lesbian
Lucy	2011	Female/ Genderqueer/ Androgynous	Queer/ Questioning	Queer
Otto	2009	Male	Gay	Gay/Queer
Rebekka	2009	Female	Bisexual	Lesbian
Reggie	2007	Male	Heterosexual/ Questioning/ Bisexual	Gay

Ian is the only interviewee whose sexual identity did not shift from study abroad pre-departure to the time of this study, and he is also the interviewee who studied abroad most recently— in 2014.

Preparation Pre-Departure

A theme that emerged in both the surveys and interviews was levels of preparation pre-departure. The findings from the artifact analysis are salient to this theme, as the artifact analysis was an examination of the resources that participants would encounter before going abroad.

Artifact analysis. Promotional and pre-departure materials for both the GESI program and the Casa program were analyzed, assessing references to both sexual identity and other

personal identity dimensions, such as religion and race. While the GESI program's brochure makes no references to sexual identity or any other identity-based issues, the website does reference racial identity (GESI website). Racial identity is addressed in terms of diversity of the participants in the program, and not related to the experience of race as a dimension of one's identity while abroad. As part of the GESI program application process all students are invited to an individual interview, and are sent in advance of the interview a list of special considerations that they are welcome to discuss or ask questions about in the interview conversation. An analysis of the list found that it includes considerations related to LGBTQ identity, race and ethnicity, religion and spirituality, disability, and mental and physical health. The list notes that conversations related to these topics will not affect admissions decisions.

The Casa de la Solidaridad (El Salvador) website does not make any references to identity-based issues (Casa de la Solidaridad Website). The Casa Bayanihan (the Philippines) website references religious identity and intellectual ability identity related to the diversity of a Filipino population in a particular praxis site (Casa Bayanihan Website). It also notes students are welcome regardless of faith tradition or background. Casa Bayanihan offers a course titled "Sociology of Gender, Class & Ethnicity in the Philippines," which an analysis of the course syllabi found focuses on inequalities and marginalization related to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and intersectionality of marginalized identities (Porio & Claudio, 2014). One current student's profile notes, "One of the first things that drew me to Casa, other than the opportunity to come back to the PI, is that this community openly welcomes me as an LGBT woman and as a Filipino American" (Casa Bayanihan Website)

Figure 7 represents the numbers of direct references to sexual identity and issues related to sexual identity in GESI and Casa program pre-departure handbooks.

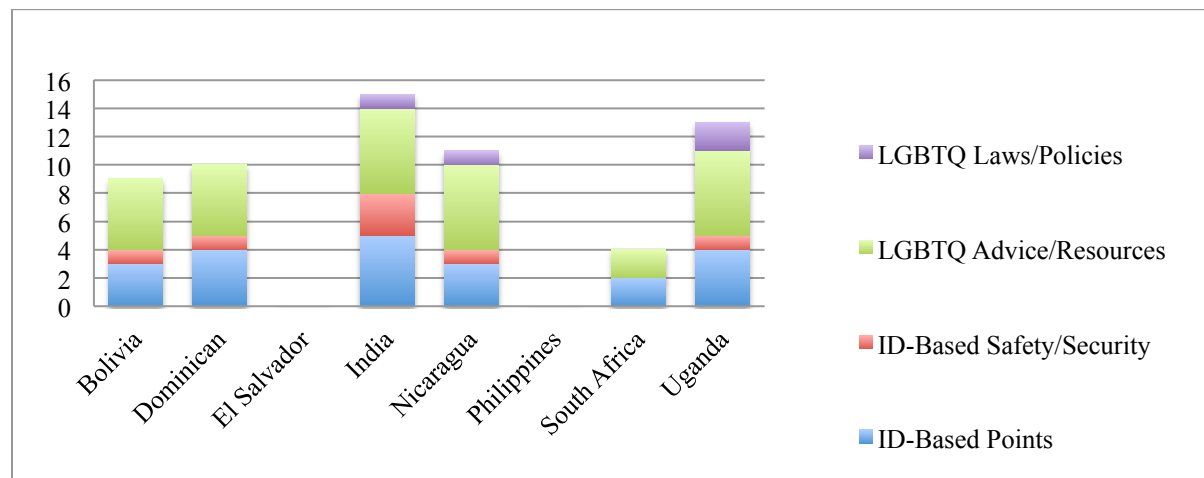


Figure 7: GESI and Casa Network program handbook references. The purple line indicates the number of references to anti-LGBTQ laws and policies in destination countries. The green line indicates the number of incidences of advice or reference to other resources that the program provides related to LGBTQ sexual identity. The red line indicates the number of references to safety and security based on dimensions of personal identity other than sexual identity. The blue line indicates the number of references to personal identity generally, be that racial, religious, or another dimension of identity other than sexual identity.

The pre-departure handbook for the Casa program in El Salvador did not make any references to identity-based issues (Santa Clara University International Programs Office), and there is no pre-departure handbook for the Casa program in the Philippines available online. All of the GESI programs—in the rest of the countries represented in Figure 7—made reference to identity-based issues in their pre-departure packets (GESI Website).

Surveys and interviews. When asked in the survey about level of preparation pre-departure for the experience of being LGBTQ-identifying in a new cultural context, one person replied that they felt very prepared, 35% of survey participants responded that they felt somewhat prepared, and the remaining 62% responded that they did not feel prepared. 71% of respondents were unaware of any resources pre-departure addressing cultural differences related to LGBTQ-sexual identity and thus did not access them. Table 3 provides examples of survey responses related to pre-departure resources.

Table 3

Pre-Departure Resources

Helpful Resources	Lack of Helpful Resources
One-on-one conversation with someone living in the destination country [were most helpful] because she was able to give me a better idea of what it had been like for her, using personal stories and both calming my nerves and giving me advice and what to do and not to do. She coached me through some of the cultural differences pertaining particularly to LGBTQ persons (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).	None of the resources I accessed were site specific. I would have liked more information, but was too afraid to seek it out (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
Brief conversations with friends who identified on the LGBTQ spectrum who had lived in the destination country....were most helpful because it convinced me that I was safe, it helped me feel "normal," it encouraged me that I could be comfortable in a questioning identity and that I would have space to continue to process. I also appreciated the knowledge that even if it were more taboo: queer spaces, conversations, and relationships existed in El Salvador (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).	I don't think I was prepped on how much my sexual identity would impact my experience (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

For the 23% of respondents who were aware of resources and sought them out, the resources that were most useful were one-on-one conversations with someone who had lived or studied in the destination country (5 respondents), and the least useful were one-on-one conversations with a program administrator (1), program-specific orientation (1), and program-specific handbook or pre-departure packet (1).

Recommendations for pre-departure resources. Recommendations from interviewees and survey respondents for more helpful pre-departure resources included visibility for LGBTQ-issues in literature, such as promotional materials and the pre-departure handbook, and

orientation resources, such as discussions in general study abroad orientations and in-country orientations about LGBTQ issues. Examples of some of these recommendations are represented in Table 4.

Table 4

Recommendations for Pre-Departure Resources

Literature Resources	Orientation Resources
<p>I think that if there's anything I would have very easily enjoyed more it would have been reading more, about like what are the experiences of a person being out or in a relationship with a same sex person in El Salvador (Lucy, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p> <p>Even if it was just like on our application, like a question. I think, I don't know I probably would have been too scared to answer honestly. But I think it could have been helpful if there was a question of just like "we will do everything in our power to inform you and keep you safe and to be transparent about embodying different experiences than our Salvadoran partners" like one way that is manifested is through sexual and gender identity. "If you'd like to talk more, pre-program like check this box here or shoot us an email" (Lucy, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p> <p>The program doesn't really actually in its literature, in their initial pamphlets, while being abroad- it doesn't place a value on like being LGBTQ-identified (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p>	<p>In that phase it would have been nice to just have conversations in general about it. Not even sexuality focused, although that would be good. But just talk about identity in general, all the different facets, focusing on race, north American privilege, a lot of different things that could have been touched on (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p> <p>I don't know if it was explicitly said, but it certainly was felt that queer identities were definitely supported and safe. And if it wasn't specifically said I guess that could be a space where there could be room for improvement. From the get go at orientation or whatever it is (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p>

A more frequent recommendation was to connect incoming students with LGBTQ-identifying alumni/ae to hear first-hand from their experience. 6 out of 10 of the interviewees suggested that the Casa program establish a network of LGBTQ-identifying alums, so that those

alums can serve as a resource for incoming students. One interviewee stated, “it would be nice if there were some sort of queer Casa alum network or something, and like those students who are jumping into that experience as queer students to then reach out to that space.”

Pre-departure concerns. Concerns that respondents had pre-departure related to their sexual identity are reflected in Figure 8.

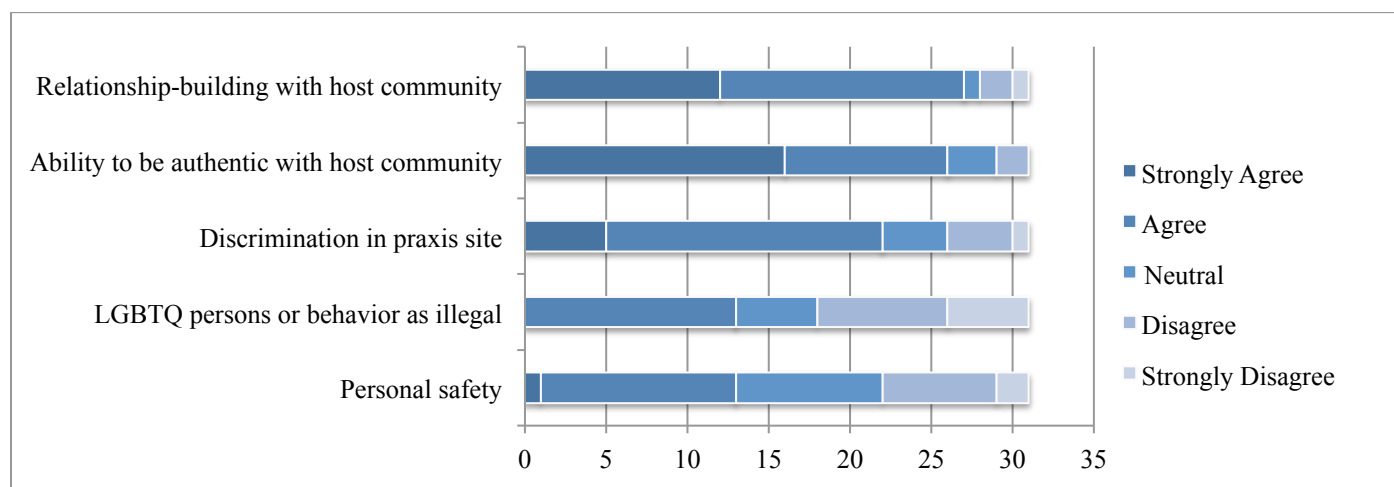


Figure 8: Pre-departure concerns related to sexual identity. This figure represents the number of survey respondents who strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed, or were neutral regarding particular concerns experienced pre-departure.

The option with which respondents most frequently strongly agreed was the concern that they would not be able to be their authentic selves with their host family or community because of their sexual identity, followed by the concern of an impact that their sexual identity may have on relationship-building with individuals in their host community.

In-Country Experience

The survey asked respondents to assess whether they experienced certain incidents because of their sexual identity while in-country, and that list mirrors the list of pre-departure concerns they were asked to assess. Figure 9 reflects their responses.

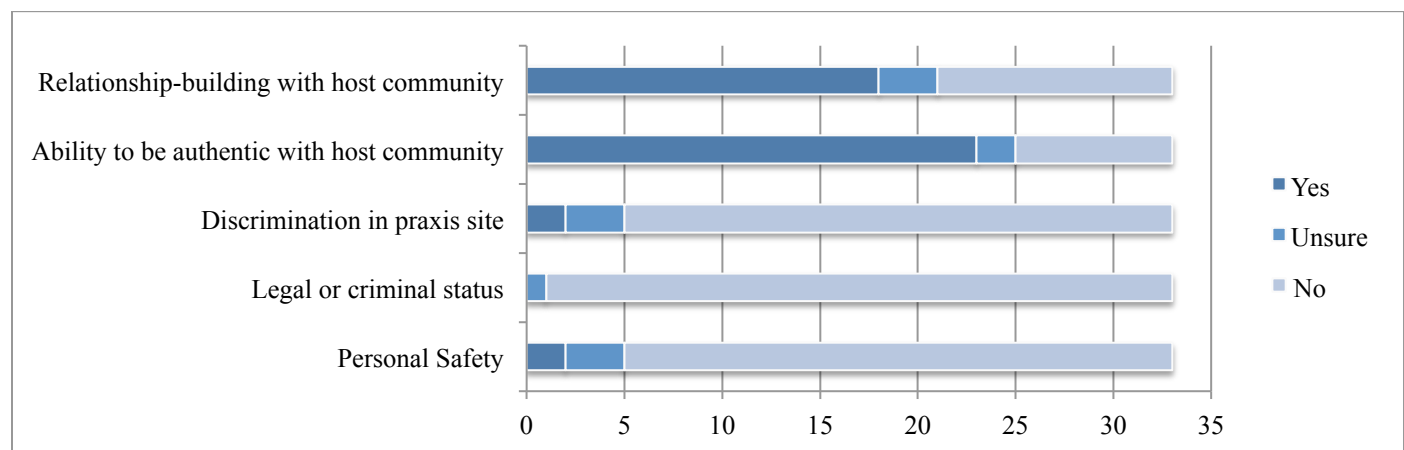


Figure 9: In-Country experience related to sexual identity. This figure represents the number of survey respondents who responded they did (Yes), did not (No), or were unsure if they experienced certain incidents related to sexual identity while abroad.

Far fewer respondents actually experienced incidences where their sexual identity impacted their personal safety or legal/criminal status in-country than the number of participants who acknowledged pre-departure concerns related to personal safety or legal/criminal status. Likewise, though 22 respondents had a pre-departure fear about discrimination in their praxis sites, only two participants experienced discrimination, while three were unsure if they experienced it or not. The experiences that respondents did have most frequently related to their sexual identity echo the experiences they were concerned pre-departure they would have—that their sexual identity would both impact their ability to be their authentic selves with their host community and impact relationships formed with members of the host community.

Whereas only one survey respondent expected pre-departure that they would disclose their sexual identity to members of the host community, seven people actually did disclose their LGBTQ identity to at least one member of the host community. As represented in Table 5, the experiences of respondents who disclosed their sexual identity to members of the host community were mixed. The majority of respondents—nearly 79%, never disclosed their sexual identity to anyone in their host communities.

Table 5

Experience Disclosing Sexual Identity to Members of Host Community

Positive or Neutral	Mixed Positive and Negative
The fellow Salvadoran students that I lived with were surprisingly and radically accepting of who I am...I was welcomed warmly without discrimination (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).	[I talked] about it with one of the staff members who is Salvadoran. Again, curiosity, kind of nervousness, not really a lot of understanding. So it was more questions (Reggie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).
I came out to a few people in El Salvador who were not associated with the Casa, but who were already in queer Salvadoran communities. This experience was liberating, exciting, and helpful (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).	Some were extremely hesitant and not sure how to respond. I had one close friend who asked me a lot of questions about my relationships and my faith in terms of being gay. For the most part I was welcomed, but it was difficult for some (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
I think with three friends—three Salvadoran friends— I would kind of test the waters and say like, “do you know anyone who is gay?” And twice that resulted in me being like, “oh, well I’m gay.” And kind of a non-event, they were just like, “oh that’s nice. That’s good, thanks for telling me. I’m glad to hear that” (Lucy, personal communication, March 29, 2015).	I had some very, very positive experiences. Conversations that were clearly important learning moments for both parties, opportunities to grow significantly closer to member’s of the community and build on the trust that we had already established. I also had some pretty negative experiences (one in particular) that had negative consequences for relationships with the person I told and others in the community who he in turn told (without my permission) (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
Those that I did tell were loving and brave in their responses (Addie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	After the initial conversation no one brought it up again because of discomfort (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

Of the ten former Casa participants interviewed, two were questioning their sexual identity while in El Salvador and did not disclose their questioning identity, eight disclosed their sexual identity to members of the North American student and staff community only, and three—Addie, Lucy and Reggie, also disclosed their sexual identity to at least one Salvadoran.

Influences In-Country on Sexual Identity Development

Survey and interview respondents identified several influences in-country on sexual identity development and decisions of whether to disclose sexual identity to members of the host community. Those influences include a shift in environment, cultural values and differences, *machismo*, religion, language differences, and anxieties and concerns.

Environmental shift. Four interviewees and six survey respondents referenced the significance of a physical and cultural environmental shift on sexual identity development. Some references to the influence of environmental shift are represented in Table 6.

Table 6

Experience of Environmental Shift

Data Source: Interviews	Data Source: Surveys
Studying abroad, being around a group of people who didn't know me, who didn't have any expectations of who I was, and being in a new culture where a lot of the rigid orders that I used to live within—a lot of my identity was just gone (Addie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	Since coming out in high school, I haven't really critically thought about my sexual identity, or how I express it because I haven't needed to think about it. Being in a place where deviations from sexual norms are a huge deal forced me to think about the ways in which I present/label myself (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
I think being in a completely different culture, different country, different environment really, like, made it more possible for me to like think, be more honest with myself (Emma Jane, personal communication, April 15, 2015).	Gave me the opportunity to start over in a new environment where I decided I didn't want to hide my sexual orientation anymore (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
	I came out partially to the freedom I experienced outside of the U.S. (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
	I did not expect to feel more comfortable while abroad, however it gave me a chance to start fresh (Anonymous survey respondent, April, 2015).
	It made me 150% more aware of my identity in a different cultural context (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

For some, a different cultural context heightened salience of sexual identity, whereas for others it was simply the reality of a clean slate.

Cultural values and cultural differences. Interviewees were asked to identify the most significant cultural values they perceived in El Salvador, and their responses are represented in Figure 10.

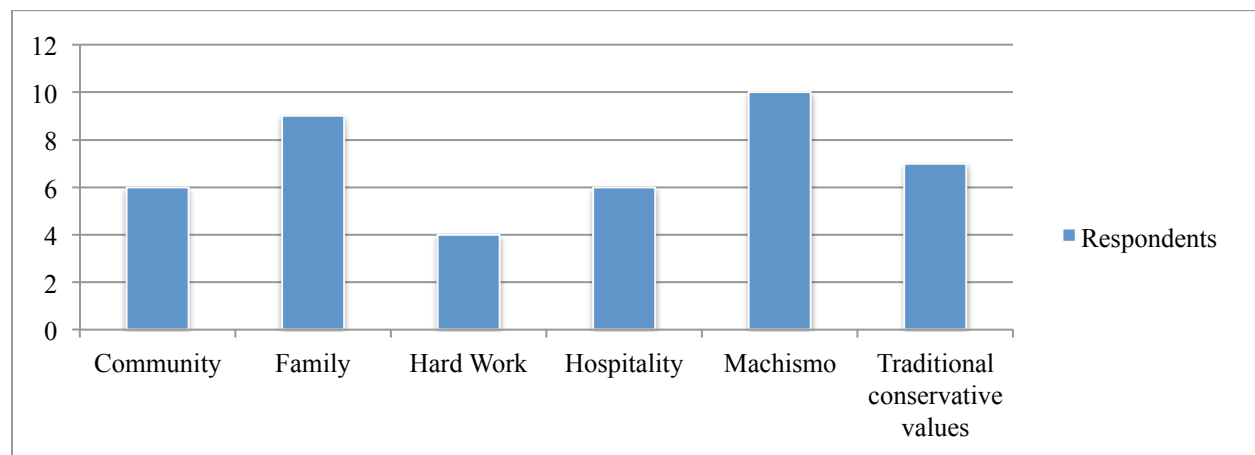


Figure 10: Most central cultural values. Each bar represents the number of respondents out of ten who identified that particular cultural value.

The most frequently cited cultural value was *machismo*, which will be discussed in the next section. Other cultural values that were mentioned less frequently and are not represented in Figure 10 include resilience, capitalism, a slower pace of life, the matriarchy, curiosity, and what Allison called “*la lucha*, the very slow struggle for liberation...this capital S struggle” (personal communication, March 13, 2015).

Machismo and homophobia. All ten interviewees and many survey respondents also spoke frequently to the value of *machismo*, defined as “an attitude, quality, or way of behaving that agrees with traditional ideas about men being very strong and aggressive.” (Machismo, Merriam-Webster) Some of these responses are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Experience of Machismo in Host Culture

Survey and Interview Respondents on <i>Machismo</i>
<p>The most abrupt thing for me at the beginning was dealing with <i>machismo</i>. In its various forms. So, sexism in the way that you see it and feel it in El Salvador. And that was difficult and continued to be difficult (Addie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p> <p>There were much more—I don't necessarily think rigid is the right word, but there much more defined things of like, this is what women say and do, and wear, and how they act, and where they are and this what men say and do (Heloise, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p> <p>I could definitely tell off the bat there were kind of approved ways of expression. Especially with the men, the boys, and also the women (Ian, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p> <p>There was definitely in El Salvador the perception of the woman in the house, and you know there were the stereotypical roles that each person played in a family (Ida, personal communication, March 14, 2015).</p> <p>The idea of going to a more <i>machista</i>, conservative culture, like how is my sexual identity going to mix with that? (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p> <p>Everything is compulsory heterosexuality...If you're a young woman you should probably be looking for a male partner. If you are a man you can do whatever you want (Rebekka, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p> <p>El Salvador still has a huge <i>machismo</i> culture, which I expected. I did find that some Salvadorans were accepting of other sexualities (Anonymous survey respondent, April, 2015).</p> <p>There were often homophobic remarks about people in the news or members of the community that did not fit in masculine or feminine roles (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).</p> <p>Boys/men were embarrassed or shamed for deviating from gender norms...I was questioned about anything I did that did not fit into the stereotype of a typical man (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).</p>

Related to *machismo* in participant's responses were ideas of a gender binary, traditional gender roles, heteronormativity and homophobia, and silence around issues of sexuality generally.

Religion. While there were no interview questions that specifically asked for participants to reflect on the role of religion and spirituality in their cultural immersion and sexual identity development, 9 out of 10 interviewees did mention the influence of religion and/or spirituality during their experience abroad. There were nineteen references to religion and spirituality in the survey responses as well. Examples of responses are reflected in Table 8.

Table 8

The Influence of Religion While Abroad

Positive Influence of Religion	Negative Influence of Religion
I think the cultural presence of Oscar Romero and the Jesuit martyrs, and the words and beliefs and identities that they had in terms of aligning with the poor and having that be an active form of struggle and resistance and a path to liberation, is still a part of my identity (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	In both El Salvador and the Philippines I mainly saw religion as a big barrier for the most part. I think there was especially in El Salvador, I just never thought it would ever be a topic of conversation, because of the religion, so I just never would ever bring it up, regardless (Ida, personal communication, March 14, 2015). I think one thing that I do think about a lot that was a little bit challenging was like the heavy religion...I know that it's a really important part of what's going on and how students make connections with their communities, but I also think that its very exclusive, and there's no way that you can undo all of the messed up things that religion does, especially to LGBT people and questioning people. You just can't undo that in four months (Rebekka, personal communication, March 13, 2015).
Our exposure to progressive ideas about Catholicism...seeing that it was possible to identify as Catholic but also have a different sexual identity and how those two things didn't necessarily have to contradict- I think that was a really important thing for me (Emma Jane, personal communication, April 15, 2015).	Due to the heavy Catholic influence on the country, I was concerned about the community at large (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
Though it continues to be a struggle, El Salvador was the platform in which I began to integrate my Catholic and sexual identity (Anonymous survey respondent, April, 2015).	

Language barriers. As with religion, there were no questions specifically referencing language differences, yet it was a frequently referenced subject for interviewees and survey respondents. Examples of experience related to language for both interviewees and survey respondents are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Experience of Language Difference

Data Source: Interviews	Data Source: Surveys
<p>Language is obviously a big factor. In not having a language fluently—creates a lot of interesting dynamics around not, ya know, not as easily being able to move in a culture and society (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p> <p>Especially in El Salvador, I just never thought that it would be a topic of conversation...part of that is not being able to speak the language to my liking. And not being able to express myself very well on this topic in English let alone in Spanish (Ida, personal communication, March 14, 2015).</p> <p>Language was so much more a factor, honestly. Certainly not so much from what I was expressing, but from how I was receiving and processing things, my sexuality was super at the forefront (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p> <p>It was a really cool opportunity to learn other ways to communicate, and I really thrived. I felt I was more my authentic self with non-verbal communication (Rebekka, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p> <p>It was this kind of like—I didn't really know the answers, and again language barriers. So this is like a kindergartener coming out (Reggie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p>	<p>I never actually came out to any of the Salvadorans I interacted with A) because of the language barrier and B) I didn't feel comfortable enough to explain my sexuality (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).</p> <p>Language barriers made it difficult to discuss basic things, so I wasn't prepared to discuss sexual identity! (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).</p> <p>I did not really have the Spanish ability to disclose my sexual identity in the way that I would have wanted (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).</p>

6 out of 10 interviewees mentioned language differences as a barrier in communication with members of the host community, and 1 other interviewee mentioned it as a learning opportunity related to identity development. Ten survey respondents mentioned language differences as a barrier to disclosing sexual identity to members of the host community.

Anxieties and concerns. Interviewees were asked to identify memorable experiences abroad related to their sexual identity, as well as what resources they might implement to support Salvadorans in better welcoming LGBTQ-identifying students. Though neither question

specifically asked about concerns or anxieties related to sexual identity while abroad, all 10 respondents referenced at least one experience of fear, concern or anxiety, as represented in Figure 11.

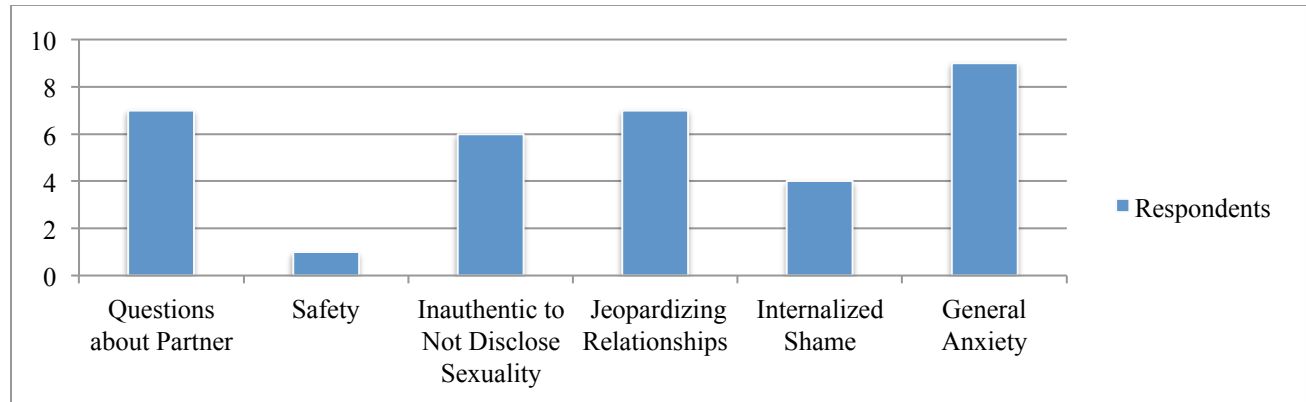


Figure 11: Concerns and anxieties experienced in-country. The number of interviewees who mentioned a particular concern are represented in each bar.

These concerns were expressed 3 to 10 times per interview, with a mean of 6.1 references. Survey respondents identified many of the same concerns and anxieties. Examples of the experiences of both interviewees and survey respondents are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Concerns and Anxieties Experienced In-Country

Concern	Data Source: Interviews	Data Source: Surveys
Questions About Partner	Getting really nervous that she was gonna ask me if I was dating someone, which was my response always up until that point, ya know was just like getting really nervous and scared. (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	Whenever conversations around significant others arose, I would let people assume I was heterosexual and not correct anyone when they referenced my need for a boyfriend (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
	He would ask me about going to clubs trying to find girls and asking me if I, like, did that. So it was kind of weird (Ian, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	It was difficult to avoid the questions about having a girlfriend (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

Safety	I can't talk about feeling safe as a queer-identified person without feeling safe as a woman. And so not feeling safe enough to come out is for me pretty intricately tied up with not feeling very safe as a woman (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	I felt unsafe at some points when holding hands with another woman (Anonymous survey respondent, April, 2015). I was called out several different times and in different ways for being gay. In at least one instance, I felt physically threatened (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
Inauthentic to Not Disclose Sexuality	Not really feeling like I could be myself— that was never really addressed because no one brought it up and I wasn't about to (Ida, personal communication, March 14, 2015). I remember feeling kind of I had let myself down and wasn't authentic to myself not coming out to Salvadorans (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).	I never came out to any Salvadorans. So on one hand I continued to feel nervous and inauthentic around Salvadorans, and at the same time, I never experienced any overt homophobia (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
Jeopardizing Relationships	I don't know how people are going to react. I don't want to jeopardize these relationships I'm building (Emma Jane, personal communication, April 15, 2015).	I did not want to jeopardize my praxis experience or relationships with <i>becarios</i> [Salvadoran peers] and Salvadoran Casa staff. (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
Internalized Shame	It was something that I finally admitted to myself I still had a ton of shame around (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	I was in a pretty active state of denial regarding my own LGBT identity. I perceived that most anyone was fairly uncomfortable (as I was) with LGBT people and saw that reflected in my experience in El Salvador (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
General Anxiety	I just was terrified. I literally— trepidation, night sweats, like terror took over (Reggie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	I was still terrified and struggled with respect for local culture (Anonymous survey respondent, April, 2015).

Supports In-Country for Sexual Identity Development

While interviewees and survey respondents identified many cultural differences that for the most part caused concern or anxiety around their sexual identity development, they also identified a number of supports that positively impacted their sexual identity development. These supports included structured space for reflection, the creation of “safe spaces” within their program, the visibility of other LGBTQ-identifying individuals within their program, and the pillar of community within the Casa. Figure 12 represents these in-country concerns and supports.

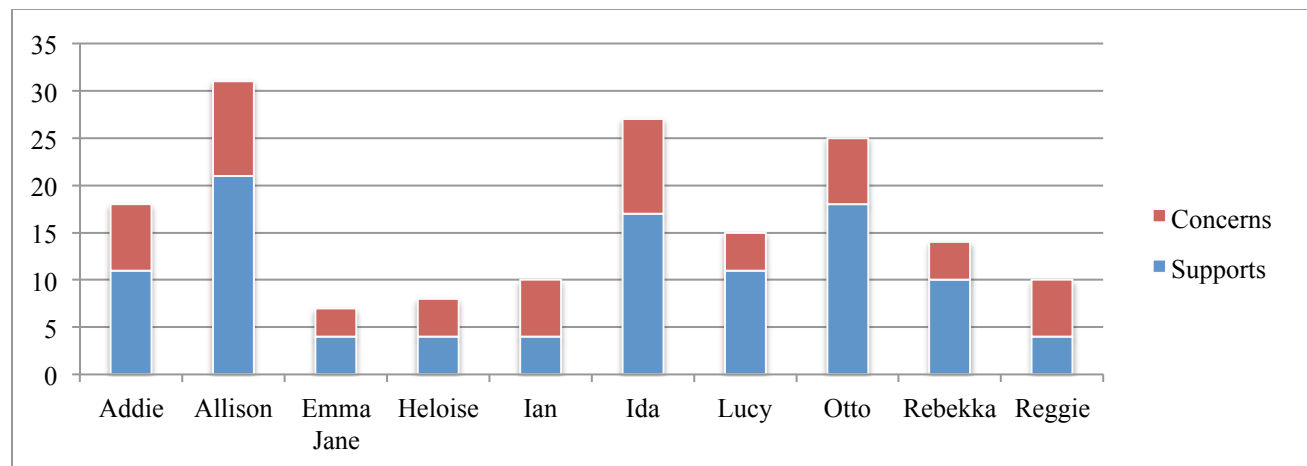


Figure 12: Interviewees’ references to concerns and supports. The number of references that each interviewee made to concerns is represented in red and supports in blue.

Ian and Reggie both referenced more anxiety-inducing influences than positive supports, Heloise made equal reference to both, and the other seven interviewees all referenced supportive influences more than they referenced concerns.

“Safe spaces.” All ten interviewees characterized the Casa as a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ-identifying persons. 8 out of 10 interviewees described the community-living component of the Casa program as a positive influence in their sexual identity

development, and 8 out of 10 of the interviewees mentioned the structures for personal reflection as an integral part of the Casa program. Because these three themes of safe spaces, community, and reflection were usually intertwined in the interviewees' and survey respondents' discussion of them, references to all three are displayed in Table 11.

Table 11

Experience of Safety, Support, Community and Reflection In-Country

Data Source: Interviews	Data Source: Surveys
When I tell my coming story now people here are always shocked that I came out in El Salvador...But that's a direct result of a couple things. One: the Casa program and the way that its organized. It's very, one of its pillars is vulnerability in relationship-building, etc. So it's a safe space to engage with those sorts of questions (Addie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	The reflective time and community living part of the Casa program helped me come to terms with my sexuality, mostly because of the healing nature of being able to talk so freely about yourself and past experiences (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
I felt a genuinely safe space to actively come out to people. And to not just talk about being queer-identified, but actually explore it on like a day-to-day more tangible way (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	During my experience I was welcomed warmly by the Casa community...I felt safe (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
I think I was just really in a space, where I was really open to being really honest and like reflective about my identity (Emma Jane, personal communication, April 15, 2015).	The supportive and vulnerable environment of the casa allowed me to deal with my sexuality as a process of gently, curiously getting to know myself (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
The American students and the staff from the program were incredibly supportive and open and accepting and there was quite a bit of discussion... there was never a moment among the American students where I felt like I wasn't supported or accepted (Heloise, personal communication, March 29, 2015).	The Casa community and program was certainly very affirming of discovering who you are, and as someone still in the process of coming out, I feel that that space and community was ultimately very positive on my sexual identity journey (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).
I think through kind of having all those reflections and just more comfortable sharing of myself and sharing of my sexual identity (Ian, personal communication, March 13, 2015).	My understanding of self—including my sexuality but also more broadly—was informed by the discerning nature of the Casa program's structure (Anonymous survey respondent, April, 2015).
As a student definitely, definitely felt supported. And a lot of that was just through sharing and	I had never before been in such an open and accepting community as Casa My CCs, program

having that open environment in which to do so and feeling like, feeling loved. And I remember my CC was just so excited, just so excited for me and it was just like liberation. And it was really cool to have that. To feel that way instead of having it be like this big scary thing, it was more of just like, she created this environment in the community where it was like, firstly its not a big deal and also, how exciting. So it was really cool. (Ida, personal communication, March 14, 2015). There was just like opportunity for reflection like ten times over. And really safe, really comforting spaces where I could bring like a questioning self, or questions of worth and worthiness. And it was just like totally accepted and not judged (Lucy, personal communication, March 29, 2015). I think the program does have a really strong support, and its certainly possible that my experience, that three out of the three CCs being queer, gave certainly a particularly unique and supportive environment (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015). Its actually probably one of the most important things that could have happened in my whole life. Like, you're in this house and you're gonna live with all women and you're gonna figure it out... I could see that it was okay to question your identity, and it was okay to like have some kind of reflective journey with yourself (Rebekka, personal communication, March 13, 2015). I felt incredibly supported (Reggie, personal communication, March 13, 2015).

* CC stands for community coordinator, a leadership staff role similar to a resident assistant. Alums of the program that live with and mentor students fill this role.

Many respondents spoke to both the structural and informal supports and reflective spaces of the Casa.

Visibility of LGBTQ-identifying leadership. In discussing structural and informal supports, 4 out of 10 interviewees and several survey respondents spoke to the importance of

directors, and fellow students created such a safe environment within our group that I felt comfortable opening up. It was there that I finally accepted my sexual identity and actually took pride in it (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

The intentional nature of the program gently pushes each student to grapple with who they are (Anonymous survey respondent, April, 2015).

I did end up coming out to my Casa community of American students and found it the most supportive environment in which to do so (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

My fellow students and community mates as supporters/allies and study abroad program in general was the first intentional safe space I had ever been in, and it confirmed for me that I am a queer woman (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

I had relationships that I perceived to be safe, which allowed me to open up about my sexuality (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).

visibility of other LGBTQ individuals, and specifically about the positive influence of having LGBTQ community coordinators as mentors. Table 12 displays examples of their comments.

Table 12

Influence of LGBTQ Community Coordinators

Survey and Interview Respondents on Influence of LGBTQ Community Coordinators
<p>We had three community coordinators...and they were all queer. And two of them were in a relationship with someone of the same sex— with each other. So that was like all very affirming of who I was a gay man, who I am as a gay man (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).</p> <p>I think the biggest support was meeting people who were really secure with their identities no matter what they were. Since I was with a lesbian community coordinator, just being sort of like on the periphery of her relationship with a woman—which I really don't know that much about. But just seeing that like it was functioning, and there was this kind of intimacy between two people I admired because they were in this position (Rebekka, personal communication, March 13, 2015).</p> <p>Being exposed to awesome LGBTQ identifying individuals who were bravely open such as [my CC]...I felt more in tune with the connections I felt with those individuals (Anonymous survey respondent, March, 2015).</p>

Recommendations for supports and resources for host community. When asked what types of resources they would design to help Salvadorans better welcome LGBTQ-identifying students in their host communities, interviewees made several suggestions, examples of which are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Recommendations for Host Community Supports and Resources

U.S. Staff-led Workshop or Discussion	Salvadoran-led Resources
I could see some kind of like workshop or setting where people felt safe to have like a conversations about LGBT identity in general. In a way that made it super obvious that this isn't some like weird North American thing we're bringing, but that obviously LGBT issues exist everywhere and people identify as gay or lesbian in El Salvador—whether or not its something you or you community have talked about (Emma Jane, personal communication, April 15, 2015).	I think about like <i>Dignas</i> , or <i>Ciudad Mujer</i> , or another organization that already works in supporting queer-identified Salvadorans. I would start there (Lucy, personal communication, March 29, 2015).
I would suggest would be something along the lines of a safe space training program (Heloise, personal communication, March 29, 2015).	It would be ideal if it could be Salvadoran led and initiated (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).
I think a lot of it comes down to having the directors and the student staff being proactive in preparing the communities because I think a lot of it comes down to conversations with trusted people (Ida, personal communication, March 14, 2015).	

Some participants responded that resources for members of the host community can and should be delivered by the U.S. staff, while others responded that the resources should emerge from the host community itself.

Developmental Outcomes

The data collected in this study around the sexual identity developmental outcomes of experiential study abroad is centralized around four themes: awareness of sexual identity, acceptance and confidence in sexual identity, LGBTQ community involvement, and integration of sexual identity into one's overall identity.

Awareness of sexual identity. Several survey participants and interviewees referenced a greater awareness of their sexual identity as a result of their experience abroad. For example, Ian stated, “I think I just became much more aware of it. I don’t think it’s changed a lot. I mean I feel like I came in with kind of identifying as bisexual/queer/male, and I left feeling the same way, but I think I was just very...I guess I thought about it more” (personal communication, March 13, 2015). Five out of ten interviewees recognized their experience abroad as a period of sexual identity awakening. Figure 13 shows how survey respondents feel their experience abroad influenced their awareness of sexual identity.

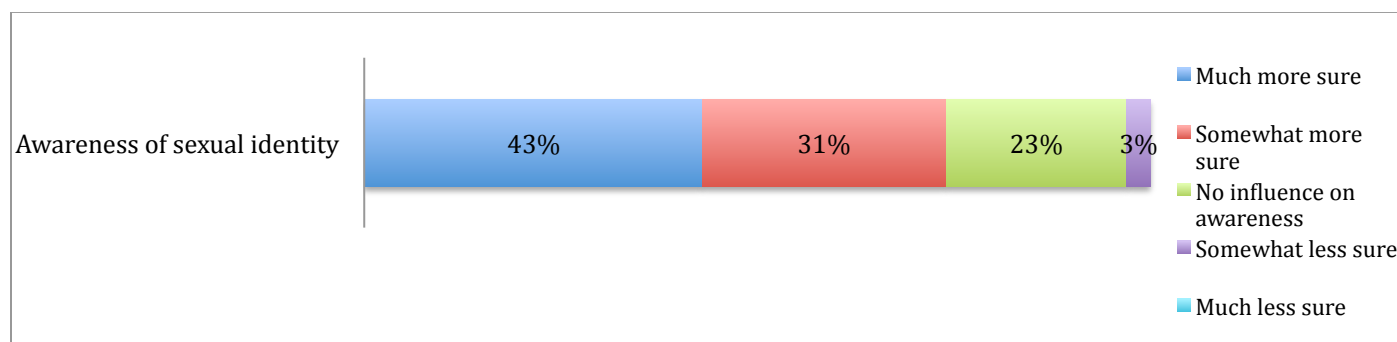


Figure 13: Influence of abroad experience on awareness of LGBTQ sexual identity. This figure represents the percentage of survey respondents who indicated that their abroad experience made them much more sure, somewhat more sure, somewhat less sure, and no influence on their awareness of their sexual identity.

Seventy-four percent of survey respondents stated that their experience abroad directly influenced their awareness of their sexual identity by making them either much more sure or somewhat more sure that they identify as LGBTQ, and only 3% stated a negative correlation.

Acceptance and confidence in sexual identity. As with identity awareness, survey and interview respondents frequently cited their experience abroad as influential in increasing acceptance and confidence in LGBTQ-sexual identity. Six out of ten interviewees referenced a

growth in confidence in their sexual identity as a direct result of their time abroad. Table 14 shows some examples of interviewees' increased confidence.

Table 14

Increased Confidence in Sexual Identity

Data Source: Interviews
It was probably one of the best things that ever happened to me as a queer identified person. I don't know, like, where I would be and how I would have come to build that confidence otherwise (Allison, personal communication, March 13, 2015).
It was the first time I was open. I think that impacted my confidence hugely, just like beginning to voice it for the first time, beginning to take ownership and integrate there (Lucy, personal communication, March 29, 2015).
I know I came out very much more confident in my identity as a gay man, and actually took that on in my last year at school in a very like active political role, very engaging in the queer community at my school trying to push for change (Otto, personal communication, March 29, 2015).

LGBTQ community involvement. As Otto's quote in Table 14 illustrates, increased confidence in sexual identity was for many participants related to increased interest in LGBTQ community social participation and advocacy. Figures 14 and 15 represent survey respondents' views on post-abroad experience interest in LGBTQ social participation and advocacy.

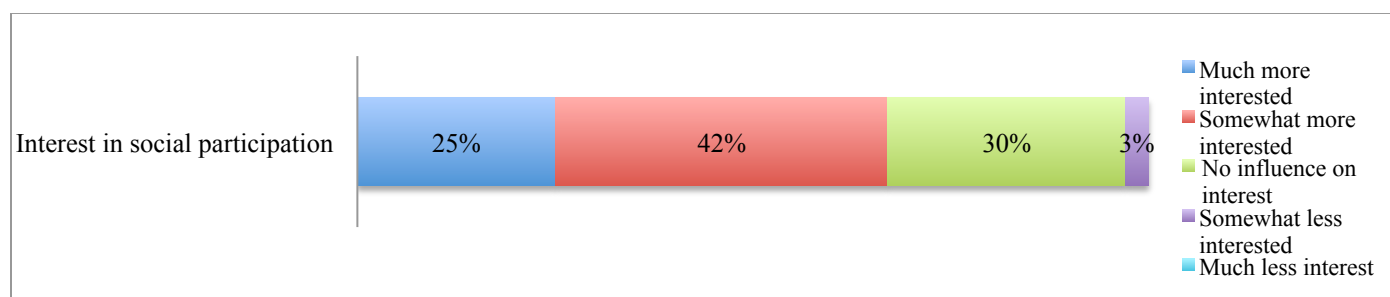


Figure 14: Influence of abroad experience on interest in social participation with LGBTQ community. This figure represents the percentage of survey respondents who indicated that their abroad experience made them much more interested, somewhat more interested, somewhat less interested, and no influence on their interest level in participating socially with the LGBTQ community.

Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents express they were much more or somewhat more interested in social participation with the LGBTQ community as a direct result of their abroad experience, and only 3% expressed a negative correlation.

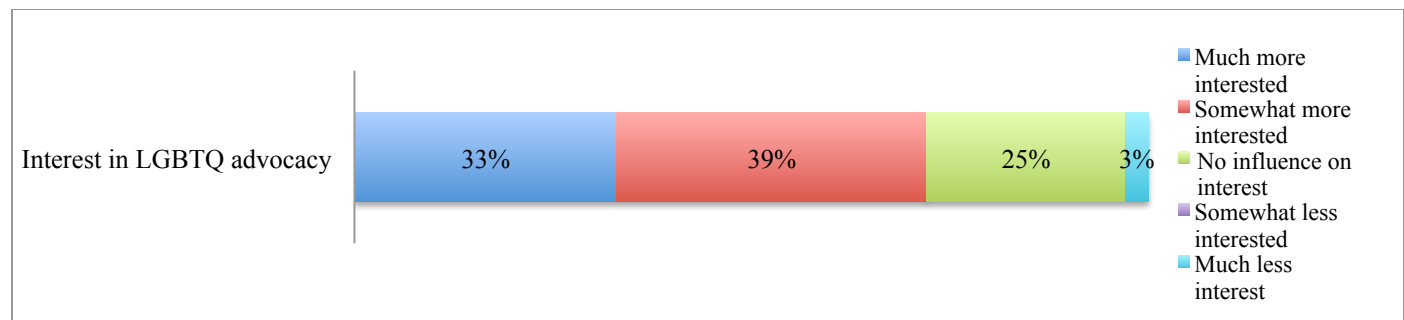


Figure 15: Influence of abroad experience on interest in participation with LGBTQ advocacy. This figure represents the percentage of survey respondents who indicated that their abroad experience made them much more interested, somewhat more interested, much less interested, and no influence on their interest level in LGBTQ advocacy participation.

Seventy-two percent of survey respondents express they were much more or somewhat more interested in participation in LGBTQ advocacy efforts as a direct result of their abroad experience, and only 3% expressed a negative correlation.

Integration of identities. Another developmental outcome this study explored was the influence of experiences abroad on one's integration of sexual identity with other dimensions of identity. Heloise stated, "I definitely...feel much more integrated as a person" (personal communication, March 29, 2015). Survey respondents' perspectives on integration of identity are represented in Figure 16.

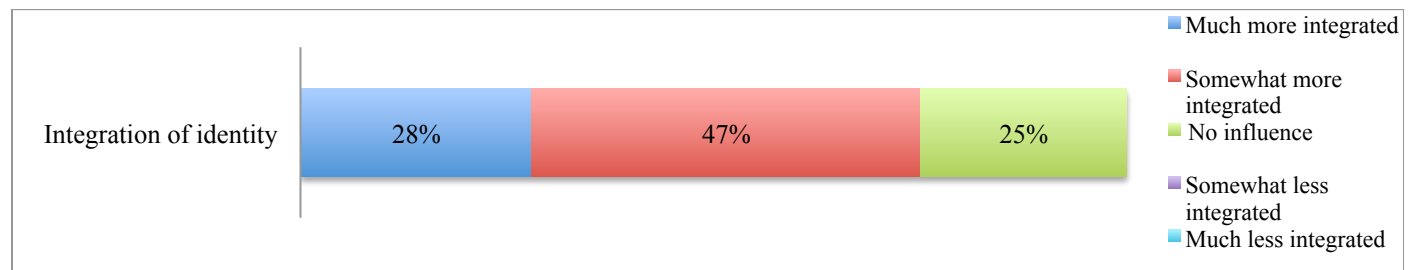


Figure 16: Influence of abroad experience on integration of LGBTQ identity with other dimensions of identity. This figure represents the percentage of survey respondents who indicated that their abroad experience made them much more integrated, somewhat more integrated, and no influence on their level of integration of sexual identity with overall identity.

Seventy-five percent of survey participants responded that their experience abroad had a direct positive influence on integration of sexual identity into one's overall identity. No respondents indicated a negative correlation between study abroad and integration of identities.

Conclusion

The data collected for this study through surveys, individual interviews and artifact analysis offer important indicators for interpretation of the most influential factors in sexual identity development. The emergent themes of respondent demographics, preparation pre-departure, in-country experience, influences in-country on sexual identity development, supports in-country for sexual identity development, and developmental outcomes provide meaningful evidence and context for recommendations for supports for LGBTQ students and host communities abroad.