

ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

**NOW THAT I'M HOME, WHO AM I?
NATIONAL IDENTITY NEGOTIATION
AMONG U.S. STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS**

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To its supporters study abroad among U.S. undergraduate students is an unquestioned good, providing unparalleled opportunities for language acquisition, cross-cultural competence and improved self-efficacy. As part of this experience, international education professionals acknowledge the need to prepare students for both acculturation to the host culture and re-acculturation to the home culture. Few scholars directly address how these students negotiate their sense of national identity during or after their international experience. The limited relevant literature suggests that U.S. study abroad students adopt a variant of cosmopolitan identity, distinguishing themselves from a particularistic sense of national identity. This dissertation seeks to fill the gap in the literature on national identity and U.S. undergraduate study abroad experiences by examining how returned U.S. American undergraduate study abroad students who have participated in a significant international education experience negotiate their sense of U.S. American national identity upon their return. Using a grounded theoretical approach with a

representative group of university students, this dissertation uses semi-structured interviews to explore the participants' relationship to their conceptualization of U.S. American national identity before and after their international experience. Prior to their departure, study participants demonstrate both a lack of preparation for and unrealistic expectations of their upcoming experience. However, after their return, the study shows that, instead of a cosmopolitan identity, participants maintain a particularistic U.S. American identity. Moreover, they adopt a more analytically critical sense of their role within contemporary pluralistic U.S. society. They gain a greater understanding of the role of U.S. popular culture as a global popular culture, as well as their role as representatives of that culture overseas.