

**Exploring the Influence of International Social Work Practicums
on Career Choices and Practice Approaches**

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**This dissertation was submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a
PhD in Philosophy of Social Work**

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Abstract

Globalization has created a need and opportunity for social work education to prepare students for social work with cross-cultural and international groups, both domestically and in international settings. International field practicums are a response to this need as they provide opportunities for students to complete a field practicum abroad.

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of social workers who studied abroad. The purpose of this study is to understand the significant experiences within international field practicums and their impact upon the participants. Questions addressed in this study include:

- What do participants perceive as the most significant experiences within their international field practicums?
- How do participants describe these significant experiences?
- How do participants perceive that their international practicum and related experiences influenced them, their career choices and practice approaches since their practicum?
- Based on their experiences, how do participants view cross-cultural and/or international social work practice?

Findings of the study reveal three key analytical themes related to significant experiences during participants' international practicum: 1) the interplay between reference points, 2) experiences with comfort and discomfort, and 3) the elusive nature of immersion. Once participants returned home and became practicing professionals, key themes related to their practice approaches include: 1) a focus on relationship building over theoretical applications, 2) a move from a more objective to subjective view of culture, 3) development of cultural humility, 4) new understandings of privilege, power and oppression, and 5) the application of anti-oppressive practice perspectives.

This qualitative study identifies benefits of international practicums, recommendations for the development of future programs, and further research opportunities. Based on the

analysis of participants' significant experiences, recommendations for the development of future programs include the organization of: meaningful orientation and debriefing experiences, a practicum learning environment that aligns with the community's needs and is anti-oppressive in nature, and communication between the sending institution and host program that provides support for the student through organized oasis experiences that move students towards further immersion.

When organized to maximize the benefits, international practicum experiences provide an opportunity for global social work education that will contribute not only participants' future practice, but also the communities served through these international partnerships.

Acknowledgments

I want to first thank those that provided my first study abroad experience, Dorothy Tarrant, Karen Boyd, and Dr. Roberta Bustin. Thank you for providing the experience and also contributing to my continual involvement in study abroad and international social work. You saw something in me that I did not see in myself, which motivated me to pursue beyond what I thought I was capable of pursuing. I would also like to thank my Romanian friends and colleagues for inviting me to be a part of their team to work alongside them to impact the community of Sighisoara in a much greater way than we could have done on our own.

Thank you to my Malone colleagues and students, NACSW colleagues, and Veritas board members who have encouraged and supported me in my PhD studies, teaching, research, and continual international involvement. You have all inspired me to do beyond what I could do on my own! Thank you, Dr. Jane Hoyt-Oliver, Dr. Kenneth Stoltzfus, Becky Albertson, Dr. Malcolm Gold, and Dr. Karen Slovak for being such understanding and helpful colleagues, providing administrative support, making sacrifices and giving me space to work on my PhD while teaching at Malone University.

I'd like to thank my family for your love and support. To my wonderful parents, Marilyn and Peter Patterson and sister Jennifer- Thank you for raising me in a home where we were encouraged to grow in our faith to know and follow Christ and his calling to serve the world and pursue Isaiah 61. I would not be the person I am today without your encouragement and love. Thank you God for your guidance in completing this project. To my husband, Dr. Charles Roe, who came along while I was working on my PhD. Your love, dedication, sacrifices made, and encouragement have been such a blessing. Thank you to the Roe family for also being such an encouragement as I have joined your family.

Many thanks to the faculty at Memorial University for providing a teaching-learning environment that helped me to develop my critical thoughts and skills in research and writing. Thank you, Dr. Ross Klein for being such a remarkably dedicated advisor- for your understanding support and patience, honest feedback, and quick turnaround through the dissertation process. Thank you also to my committee members Dr. Catherine de Boer and Dr. Deborah Jacobson for your thoughtful reflections, feedback and support towards the completion of my dissertation. I also must thank my fabulous PhD Cohort, Christina, Debashis, Isabel, and Jason, Lynn, Sean, Sheri, and Tina, for becoming such great friends and supporters as we have pursued this PhD journey. I have learned so much from you and value the friendships we have developed.

I'd also like to thank those that offer themselves in service to students to provide study abroad opportunities that impact their lives in meaningful ways. Thank you to those who chose to leave their comfort zone and study abroad. Finally, I thank my participants for your willingness to share your stories with me, which developed into this study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

International practicums are an opportunity for global learning in an international setting. Globalization and its effect on social work have made global learning within social work education more important than in times past (Engstrom & Jones, 2007; Gammonley, Smith Rotabi & Gamble, 2007; Lager et al., 2010). Both the U.S. and Canadian social work accreditation standards promote increased education on global issues (CASWE, 2013; CSWE, 2008). Both accrediting bodies recognize field practicum education as a primary component of social work education as it offers students the opportunity to both observe and practice the knowledge, values and skills of the profession. In fact, the Council of Social Work Education describes field practicum work as the “signature pedagogy” of social work education. There is much anecdotal evidence that international field practicums abroad can be a valuable opportunity for social work students to join hands-on global learning with practical experience; however, empirical studies on the outcomes of international practicums are limited and small in scale and do not report the long term outcomes of such experiences (Greenfield, Davis, & Fedor, 2012; Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers, & Cox, 2010; 2010; Lough, 2009; Nagy & Falk, 2000; Pawar, Hannah, & Sheridan, 2004; Tesoriero, 2006). The lack of research combined with the noted importance of field practicum experiences and global learning led to the development of following research questions: What are the significant experiences within international field practicums and how do field practicums abroad impact social workers’ career choices and practice approaches?

1.1.1 History of International Education

International learning has been a part of social work practice and education since the beginning of the profession (Addams, 1910; Bilton, 2006), offering great opportunities for

learning to take place as social work developed globally. Although international education has been a part of social work for a century, there has been an increase in international travel opportunities for social work students over the last fifteen to twenty years (Asamoah, 2003; Gore, 2005; Lindsey, 2005; Lough, 2009). Opportunities for international social work practice and study abroad experiences have increased with globalization.

1.1.2 Globalization and Social Work Education Today

Globalization, defined as an increase in information, technology, and cultural areas, compared to times past, has increased at an exponential rate since the 1990's (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008; Ife, 2000; Wells, 2001). The impact of globalization on social work can be seen in an increased awareness of global issues abroad and domestically. International social work practice areas that relate to globalization trends include international development opportunities abroad and domestic practice in the areas of immigration, refugee resettlement, and human trafficking (Dominelli, 2004b; Ife, 2000; Payne & Askeland, 2008). Globalization has also opened doors for international study and mutual exchange opportunities for social work students and educators (Healy, 2008). Both the CASWE and CSWE have responded to the effects of globalization on social work practice by recognizing the influence of global trends on social work curriculum (CASWE, 2010; CSWE, 2008).

1.1.3 International Social Work Education

Social work educational institutions are responding to this need through a variety of global learning strategies, including integrating course content into standard courses, specialized courses in international social work and study abroad endeavors (Asamoah, 2003; Gore, 2005; Lindsey, 2005; Lough, 2009). Jackson and Nyoni (2012) suggest:

Social work practitioners cannot be global practitioners without international exposure. Social workers must have knowledge of international policies, foreign affairs, and

development issues. They will be expected to understand migration, labor mobility, and multinational corporate influences in addition to national practices (p. 203).

Travel courses and study abroad opportunities can help students acquire a depth of understanding that is difficult to obtain through academic reading and classroom experiences alone (Engstrom & Jones, 2007; Gilin & Young, 2009; Lindsey, 2005). Semester or longer international practicums also offer opportunity for global learning to take place in a more intense environment than short term trips (Nagy & Falk, 2000).

Field practicum education, both informal and formal, has been seen as an important aspect of social work education. It is an opportunity for students to join theory and social work practice together under the supervision of experienced social workers. With field practicum education considered the “signature pedagogy” of social work, there has been increased pressure for field practicum opportunities that effectively give students opportunities to practice their learned social work competencies. International practicums can be a valuable opportunity for social work students to experience hands-on global learning (Lager et al., 2010). International practicums combine these two important competencies of social work accrediting bodies in North America: global learning and field practicum education (CASWE, 2013; CSWE, 2008).

Much of the literature on the importance of international curriculum and study abroad in social work education is anecdotal in nature. There is little empirical research examining the impact of study abroad and international practicum experiences on student outcomes (Wehbi, 2009; Pawar, 2004). There is some research on how students’ international experiences influence their cultural awareness and sensitivity; however, no research specifically focuses on how international practicum experiences impact participants’ career choices and practice approaches once they are practicing social workers. This study explores gaps in this research.

1.2 Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the significant experiences within international field practicums in social work and their impact upon the participants. Questions addressed in this study include:

- What do participants perceive as the most significant experiences within their international field practicums?
- How do participants describe these significant experiences?
- How do participants perceive that their international practicum and related experiences influenced them, their career choices and practice approaches since their practicum?
- Based on their experiences, how do participants view cross-cultural and/or international social work practice?

Interviews were conducted with eighteen social workers who studied abroad for a semester during their social work studies. The study includes fourteen female participants and four male participants. Participants completed their study abroad between one month and sixteen years prior to the interview and are now working in diverse social service settings. Participants had studied at several different universities and participated in study abroad programs with a variety of program models within 11 different countries, including developed and developing nations.

Gubrium and Holstein (1997) describe the value of combining both the “what” and “how” questions in qualitative research in order to “focus qualitative inquiry on both the interpretive process of a constructed social world and the substantive meanings, contexts, and conditions that shape its inhabitants’ actions” (p. 15). By placing value on the participants’ perspectives, this research explores what participants perceived to be significant experiences and how they developed meaning from these experiences. In keeping with qualitative methodologies (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006), the intent of this research is not to look for a causal relationship between field practicum experiences and subsequent career choices and practice approaches but rather to discover the ways in which these elements conjoined.

This research is grounded within the interpretivist, post-positivist and critical paradigms. This research also considers developmental theory as many of the participants were in the psychosocial developmental stage of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006), which is characterized by the development of personal worldviews, career choices and practice approaches.

As the participants in this study spent their semesters abroad, they interacted with the community through their practicum experiences and other living experiences; therefore they were both influencing the communities through their work and seeing how the agencies' staff impacted the communities. Due to the practice nature of their experiences and outcomes of their experiences, this type of study should not ignore the learning that took place through engagement with the community (Wehbi, 2009). Marsiglia and Kulis (2015) suggest:

When social workers are working across social, economic, and cultural boundaries, their worldviews, beliefs, and values strongly influence the type of relationship and comfort level they experience with clients...If unchecked, the social worker's privilege can be a barrier to empathy and an obstacle to culturally grounded practice (p. 23).

Due to this concern, an anti-oppressive practice perspective is utilized as a theoretical framework for this study. Anti-oppressive practice, grounded in critical theory, recognizes the power differentials that can occur in international social work practice and the unintentional oppression that often exists in such practice (Carataga & Sanchez, 2002; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2015).

1.3 The Researcher's Experience in Context

This study grew out of my experiences and interests in study abroad, international practicums and international social work practice. I was studying social work at a Christian university and felt motivated to use my faith and social work education to serve others in an international setting, possibly long term. I was told about an opportunity to complete my practicum through a faith-based study abroad program in Romania. As I had taken two short international trips, I felt that this opportunity to complete an international practicum was the next

step in my growth and learning. My personal experience of studying abroad has had a significant impact, including long term effects on my career choices, practice approaches, and research interests.

After completing my MSW, I returned to Romania to coordinate social services for an international NGO and supervised North American undergraduate and graduate studies in semester long practicums. During supervision periods, I not only discussed with students their current practicum tasks and every day experiences in the culture and adjustment to the culture, but also discussed the student's future career direction. We discussed how their experiences were impacting them at the moment; sometimes students wondered how the experience would contribute to their future practice in a different setting, hoping they had made the right decision to study abroad. Most of these students returned to the U.S. after their experience to work as professional social workers in their home country. I was curious how they perceived their practicum abroad experiences had prepared them for their future practice.

When returning to the U.S. I acted as the liaison for the same study abroad program, developing relationships with sending universities and coordinating the application process for students preparing to study abroad. I interacted with faculty and administration who desired meaningful practicum placements for their students where they would fulfill their educational requirements in a safe environment. I also talked with students as they were in the process of deciding if they should study abroad or at home. They often wondered which experience would best prepare them for their future. I am now the field practicum coordinator at Malone University and help place BA level social work students in field practicums every year. Most students do internships in the U.S., but those who consider studying abroad often ask similar questions about

the impact of the internship on their future careers before determining whether to do their practicum in the U.S. or abroad.

My work with students, faculty and administrators in organizing study abroad programs, has helped me to understand the complexity, as well as opportunity that field practicums abroad provide for social work education. These experiences have motivated my interest in formally exploring the experiences of participants in international practicums and the impact of the experiences on their development as practicing professionals.

1.4 Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the scholarly knowledge base of social work study abroad experiences in international field practicums by going beyond immediate short term outcomes – the limiting focus of most other studies – and focusing on how these experiences impact participants and their career choices and practice approaches. This study has implications for the development and organization of international practicum experiences in order to maximize the positive aspects and minimize any negative aspects of experiences for all those who are involved including: 1) the student participants, 2) the administrators of the program, and 3) the international community in which they are doing their field practicum.

This research is beneficial to social work students as they consider a field practicum abroad and how it will impact their future practice and career opportunities. This study can benefit field supervisors who supervise students in international settings, so that they can best support their students, their immersion experience, and their learning outcomes. This study will also help social work educators, administrators, and accreditation bodies as they consider promoting current programs. It also contributes to the development and design of new study abroad opportunities that are beneficial to students and meet accreditation standards. Although

this study's main focus is not the impact of the communities served, when facilitating social work educational and practice opportunities it is important to consider how the study abroad programs affect the community in which they reside. The outcomes of this study may also help facilitate further research in this area, as well as support the development of models of study abroad that are not only effective learning experiences for students and their sending universities, but also effective anti-oppressive models of practice for the community and learning for the student participants.

1.5 Chapter Overviews

The first chapter gives a general overview of the research study starting with an introduction to the history of international education, current issues in international education and study abroad experiences, including gaps in the literature justifying the need for further research. The purpose and rationale for this study are described, including the research questions. Finally, the importance of this study as it contributes to the scholarly base of knowledge is presented to further justify the value of this study.

Chapter two presents a more in-depth literature review, beginning with a description of study abroad and international practicums in social work. Diverse models of international field practicums are described, including key components of international practicums that are often a part of, and basis for, significant experiences within study abroad. Based on this review of the literature, outcomes of international field experiences are discussed, as well as gaps in the literature and other areas to explore. Anti-Oppressive practice perspectives are also described as a theoretical base for cross-cultural practice, and this research study.

Chapter three begins with the theoretical framework for the study, and then describes the rationale for the design of this qualitative study. Next, the procedures utilized for recruitment and

interviewing participants are presented. Then, the data analysis is discussed followed by human subjects and ethical issues, including a brief description of the approval process by two research boards. Limitations to the study are discussed, including an exploration of potential research bias. This chapter concludes with a description of the steps followed to increase the rigor of the study.

Chapter four describes the process for interviewing the participants and gives an overview of demographic information about the participants in order to review the similarities and differences of participants interviewed. Next, is a discussion of each participants' study abroad experience and the outcomes of their experience, giving the reader an opportunity to understand each participant's own lived experience.

Chapter five aggregates the data from these stories to describe key themes related to participants' experiences and learning outcomes, laying out an overall analysis of the data. These themes related to participants' experiences are: 1) the interplay between reference points, 2) experiences with comfort compared to discomfort, and 3) experience with immersion and the oasis of safety away from their immersion experience. Next, themes related to the outcomes of their experiences are described. These are: 1) relationship building as practice method, 2) an objective to subjective understanding of culture, 3) development of cultural humility, 4) a new understanding of privilege and power vs. oppression, and 4) anti-oppressive practice perspectives.

Chapter six presents a discussion of the findings based on the research questions, drawing out themes that can maximize the positive outcomes of international practicums and minimize the negative outcomes. Next implications of the study are discussed followed by recommendations related to the key players involved in international practicums: 1) the

administrators of study abroad programs, 3) the students experiencing international practicums, and 3) the international host setting. Finally, limitations are presented followed by recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In order to fully explore a topic of research it is important to begin with a review of the literature. This chapter explores relevant research related to the research question: how do social work graduates perceive their study abroad experiences to have influenced them after the experience? The literature review begins with a historical background and justification for the study, then a description of international field practicum education within social work, including models of education and unique aspects of international field practicums that impact participants' experiences during their international practicum. Next outcomes of student experiences are explored, followed by a discussion of the negative aspects of study abroad including the risk for oppressive practices that affect the community served. Also discussed are suggested anti-oppressive strategies for study abroad programs. Finally, strengths, weaknesses and gaps in the literature are explored.

2.1 Study Abroad Described

According to Asamoah (2003), one of the most common forms of international collaboration is study abroad. Study abroad activities can range from classes facilitated on trips led by instructors from one's home institution, brief travel tours, study experiences at universities abroad and international field practicum experiences for credit (Lowe et al., 2008; McKeown, 2009). This literature review focuses on international education through travel abroad, most specifically on semester or longer social work field practicums. In order to understand the development of study abroad practicums, it is important to place current events in the context of the history of international social work education.

2.2 History of International Education

In North America, in particular, global social work education and practice have been important due to the diversity of populations throughout history and in current times. Wealthy North American students have had opportunities to study abroad since colonial times (Garraty, 1969) and there has been interest in international education and exchange since the beginning of social work practice in the early 1900's (Patterson, 2012). For example, Jane Addams' early settlement house work and social reform efforts were motivated through her travel and international learning abroad (Addams, 1910; Bilton, 2006). These international exchanges of social work knowledge contributed to educational models that were duplicated across developing nations. It also led to the International Conferences of Social Work creating an International Committee of Schools of Social Work (ICSSW), now called the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). According to Kniephoff-Knebel and Seibel's (2008) research, in 1929 the International Committee of Schools of Social Work in Berlin encouraged the formation of "short international courses" to provide training to both teachers and students (in Alice Solomon Archives, 2006). During this time the ICSSW contributed to new exchanges and collaboration between schools of social work. It has been documented that Alice Soloman and her colleagues developed principles for social work training with the understanding that one international model should not be developed, but mutual exchange and learning would create multiple models that could be implemented in culturally appropriate ways in each location of study (Kneiphoff-Knebel & Seibel, 2008).

After the second world war, the United States, as well as the UK and Canada, continued to contribute to social work education's internationalization, moving beyond European and North American exchange into developing nations. According to Caragata and Sanchez (2002), North

American models of social work education and practice, mostly from the U.S., were “exported” to these nations without being mindful of the differences in “culture, social structures, economic conditions, education, social policies and underlying community values” (p. 220). The exported practices reflected more individualistic values than the communal cultural values that permeated cultures outside North America. Individualistic values continue to be reflected in some aspects of current international social work practice and education; however, efforts are being made to move beyond this by providing critical reflection on historical practices in order to improve and create more culturally sensitive educational opportunities. This change provides beneficial opportunities for education and global impact on social work practice (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Gammonley, Smith Rotabi, & Gamble, 2007; Healy, 2008; Nagy & Falk, 2000). Even though there still can be barriers for some students due to the extra fees that some study abroad programs require¹, what was considered an opportunity for only the elite (Garraty, 1969) has become more commonplace as opportunities for global education through study abroad are increasingly available to a greater number of students.

Increased globalization has influenced the spread of ideas internationally and increased opportunities for international social work practice and study abroad opportunities globally. Although international education has been a part of social work for a century, there has been a significant increase in global opportunities for study over the last fifteen years due to globalization trends (Asamoah, 2003; Gore, 2005; Lindsey, 2005; Lough, 2009).

¹ Along with extra fees for some study abroad programs, students who complete international practicums are typically not able to work for pay during their time abroad, presenting an additional financial challenge to studying abroad. Therefore opportunities for international practicums are still limited today to those with a certain level of financial resource.

2.3 Globalization and Social Work Education Today

Globalization has increased at an exponential rate since the 1990's (Ife, 2000; Wells, 2001). Modern day globalization is defined as a greater breakthrough in the information, technology, and cultural areas as compared to previous decades (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008), creating the notion of an increasingly smaller world. Social problems, such as human trafficking, global health epidemics, and poverty have had a borderless effect, making global issues local and local issues global (Dominelli, 2004b; Ife, 2000; Payne & Askeland, 2008). Agbenyiga and Huang's (2014) research on globalization in social work literature suggest there is "an urgent need for greater international awareness and perspectives in American social work education, research, and practice" (p. 290).

Payne and Askeland (2008) ascertain that:

Social workers need an understanding of international social work as part of the profession. Even if they are not international social workers themselves, their daily practices and the needs and problems users of their services face will be affected by international social trends (p. 6).

Due to the effects of globalization, international issues are also local or domestic issues. Examples include the current effects of the global economy on local workforces, refugees, immigration and asylum seekers, and human trafficking. If the social work profession overlooks the effects of globalization, as some scholars believe it does, it runs the risk of ignoring the current changes in society that effect local social work practice. Social workers cannot ignore the effect these changes have on their own communities and social problems, and the complexity within these problems. New groups of immigrants and refugees migrate to North America on a regular basis. Social workers play important roles in the resettlement of refugees, individuals who are displaced from their country of origin related to persecution or fear of persecution due to nationality, race, religion, political opinion or other group membership (Department of

Homeland Security, 2015). If a social worker is working in a community with new groups of refugees they have not worked with before, it is important for them to have both the ability to cross-culturally adapt their practice methods, as well as to understand related policies that affect their clients and their practice. If social workers are to embrace the effects of globalization, older models are not always relevant; new models for working with such populations need to be developed and implemented (Healy, 2008; Jones et al., 2007). Nagy and Falk (2000) propose:

These processes (of globalization) are having a dramatic impact on the social work profession and on the educational needs of students preparing for that profession. Clearly, this requires some reformulation of social work knowledge, approaches, roles and methods. Social Work educational programmes need to include more international and cross-cultural content, both across the curriculum, within specific courses, and in specialized programs (Nagy & Falk, p, 49).

These current global realities have created a need, as well as the opportunity within higher education to prepare students for the impact of globalization on social work practice (Asamoah, 2003; Hockenstad & Midgley, 2004; Tesoriero, 2006). Marsiglia and Kulis (2015) state that “social work is going through it’s own process of globalization in order to respond to the needs of a transcultural client base” (p.352). Leaders in social work education are responding to this need. The May 2010 CASWE Accreditation Task force concluded that current global trends should influence Canada’s social work educational standards (CASWE, 2010). The U.S. Council of Social Work Education’s new standards (CSWE, 2008) similarly include a core competency addressing global issues that states: “social workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights” (p.5).

International social work education combines international education in one’s home institution with study abroad. Although this review will focus mostly on international social work education that takes place abroad, it is helpful to discuss the overall need for international

content in social work curriculum. Linked to current trends of globalization, Asamoah, Healy, & Mayadas (1997) suggest there needs to be an end to the “international-domestic dichotomy” of social work education, and in its place, a move towards a global perspective of practice. They encourage the need to incorporate international content throughout the curriculum rather than only in separate specialized international courses. They also believe that although cross-cultural competence has been widely taught, it needs to be broadened to include competence with international populations, particularly immigrants.

Asamoah, Healy, and Mayadas (1997) believe that if international and cross-cultural education is integrated throughout social work curriculum in the classroom at the home institution, it will benefit the learning experience of international travel exchanges. In *Models of International Collaboration in Social work*, Healy, Asamoah and Hockenstad (2003) discuss how faculty and students are enriched through international exchanges and collaborative work through these opportunities. These experiences can also help to enrich global content in the classroom. Along with an increased emphasis on globalized social work education, field practicum education has increased in importance as a signature pedagogy of social work practice.

2.4 Field Practicum Practicums as the Signature Pedagogy

Applied experiential learning through field practicum experiences is considered a universal aspect of social work education worldwide (Skolnik, Wayne & Raskin, 1999). All accredited social work programs in the U.S., Canada and Australia mandate intensive practicum or field placement experiences as a part of the educational experience (AASW, 2012; CASWE, 2013; CSWE, 2008). In 2008, the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) stated that field practicums are the signature pedagogy. According to CSWE (2008):

Signature pedagogy represents the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students to perform the role of practitioner.... The intent of field

education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting...Field education is systematically designed, supervised, coordinated, and evaluated based on criteria by which students demonstrate the achievement of program competencies (p. 8).

The need for a globalized social work curriculum, combined with the increased emphasis on field practicums in social work education, is at the foundation of the rationale for international field practicums. The literature on international field practicum education will now be explored.

2.5 International Field Practicums

Marsiglia and Kulis (2015) believe “there is no substitute for international experiences” that “broaden students’ and faculty members’ perspectives regarding professional roles at the international level” (p. 352). Panos, Pettys, Cox & Jones-Hart (2004) define an international practicum as “any placement within another country, other than the United States,² that met the practicum requirement for the degree, including receiving college credit” (p. 269). As semester or longer experiences abroad can be challenging to finance and arrange (Gilin & Young, 2009), many social work programs have organized short-term, one to three week experiences, where students either engage in coursework, experiential learning through practicum experiences, or both. Much of the research reported in the literature is focused on such experiences; therefore many of the studies in this literature review are based on short term experiences (Barbera, 2006; Boyle et al., 1999; Dominelli & Bernard, 2003; Fairland; 2006; Lindsey, 2005; Gilin & Young, 2009; Fairchild et al., 2006). Mapp, McFarland and Newell’s (2007) research reports similar perceived changes in short term trips as compared to longer term international study experiences. Their work is a foundation for this study.

Lough (2009) distinguishes international experiential learning into three categories: volunteering, service learning, and practicum experiences. He reports that field practicums

² Of course, if the student was not from the United States. The “United States” would be replaced with their country of origin.

provide the highest potential for social action, intensity in opportunity and learning. Semester-long academic experiences are more likely than short, time-limited exposure to give students time to process their experiences. Added supervisory support during this process can help to facilitate the guided reflection needed for greater growth and development. In addition, when students are able to serve in a social work role as an intern, they offer professional service while being more intentionally focused on professional learning, which tends to provide a greater reciprocity of learning, benefiting both the student and the community served.

Furthermore, a longer academic experience has a significant impact on student learning. Tesoriero (2006) believes that developing cross cultural awareness, understanding and empathy “commonly requires living in another culture for an extended time” (p. 138), justifying the value of the semester experience as opposed to a shorter term experience. These experiences offer a greater degree of immersion within the host country (Jackson & Nyoni, 2012).

A study of U.S. schools of social work (Panos, Pettys, Cox & Jones-Hart, 2004) report that 21.1 percent of accredited social work programs placed master’s or bachelor’s level students in international field practicum placements between 1997 and 2002. According to this study, students have been placed in 55 different countries. Hunter and Hollis (2013) conducted a similar study to Panos et al.’s (2004) study,³ and reported that 22 percent of programs conduct international field practicums. This study reported practicum placements in sixty countries. Neither of these studies report the overall number of students who have completed field practicums abroad, so although the number of programs that have international practicums has remained similar, other studies suggest that both the participation and interest in education abroad, including international practicums, is increasing (Greenfield et al., 2012; Lough, McBride, & Sharraden, 2012). Lager et al. (2010) suggest that more new programs are

³ However Hunter & Hollis only had a 47% response rate.

developing as interest in study abroad has increased; therefore the numbers of opportunities continue to grow for international practicums. There are a number of ways that these international practicum experiences are administered and designed.

2.5.1 Models of International Field Practicums in Social Work

Researchers have developed models to describe various types of international practicum experiences⁴ that relate to the types of programs participants in this study experienced. Rai (2004) describes two models of overseas field practicums: foreign students studying in the U.S. that make arrangements to do field practicums in their home countries and U.S. students traveling abroad to do field practicums in a foreign country. The first model gives students the opportunity to apply their learning in their home country while completing their studies. Most of the students from both groups in the study had international interest or connections prior to their experience abroad. Rai's (2004) study also reports two main patterns for how students were placed in foreign settings: a social work faculty member has interest and initiates opportunities for students in a foreign location, or the university develops an off campus center in another country where larger number of students can study at the same time.

Pettys, Panos, Cox and Oosthuysen (2009) break down types of practicums abroad into four models of international field practicums based on a previous study by Earle (1998) of 53 U.S. schools of social work that placed students in international settings. These practicum placement types are: Independent/one time placements, neighbor country models, on-site models, and exchange models. The independent/one time placements are normally initiated by students or faculty who discovered a unique placement opportunity with an agency abroad. In

⁴ This research refers to international practicums as practicums that take place in a different country than the student's university. If the student is an international student at the university and completes a practicum in their home country it is considered an international placement. No participants in this study completed a practicum in their home country.

this type placement supervision is normally provided by the host agency staff. In Hunter and Hollis's (2013) study, that examined participation in these models, 27 percent of programs placed students in an independent/one time placement. The second model identified was the neighbor-country model. These are usually long-term placement relationships with agencies in bordering countries to the university. Most often students who participate in these practicum placements are from the neighboring country where they did their practicum. Hunter and Hollis's (2013) study report that almost 20 percent of programs placed students in this type of placement. The third model is the on-site model, where an on-site adjunct faculty member acted as supervisor. Students typically attend field practicum seminars and supervision with the on-site faculty member. Field practicum directors report that this model provided greater security and greater outcomes of learning. Hunter and Hollis's (2013) study report no program using this model in their 2013 study. The final model presented by Pettys et al. (2009) is the exchange model, "considered the most intensive and demanding on the home university" (p. 286). In this model, the institution in the host country is typically a foreign university or agency with affiliation to the home university. Students are placed in a variety of agencies in the host country. Ideally, the home university sends faculty to the host university abroad and welcomes faculty and students to come to the university in the U.S. Hunter and Hollis (2013) report this to be the most popular with 53 percent of programs reporting using this model. Seventeen percent were arranged "faculty to agency" (p.8) and 37 percent "university-to-university" (p.8). Eighty-nine percent placed students in these programs annually; however many respondents reported that due to financial challenges many of the students from abroad have not been able to participate in U.S. practicums. No matter the model of the study abroad program, participants in these programs experience cross-cultural adjustment as part of their experience.

No participants in this research study studied abroad in their home country. Participants participated in a range of types of programs, including independent/one time placements, neighbor country models, and on-site models as reflected in the literature. No participants mentioned that the program was an exchange program specifically, although some did express university partnerships, which may offer an exchange.

2.5.2 Cross-Cultural Adjustment during Study Abroad

When students study abroad they go through a period of cross-cultural adjustment; some call this “culture shock” (Bennet, 1998). There are various models of cross-cultural adjustment presented in the literature. Sobre-Denton and Hart’s (2008) research identifies the most common theories of adjustment that can explain study abroad participants’ experiences with cultural adjustment: The U-Curve Model, Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Model, Transition Model, and the Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model.

The most common is the U-Curve Model, which was later developed into the W curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2008). In this model the emotions that one goes through when moving abroad are explained. The 5 stages in the U-Curve model are: 1) honeymoon stage or euphoric stage; 2) culture shock or disorientation; 3) feeling hostile towards the culture; 4) initial adaptation/autonomy with host culture; and 5) assimilation leading to a sense of belonging. The W-curve version of this model describes the reverse culture shock many experience when returning to their home country where they go through a reculturation process. Reverse culture shock can be the most difficult for those who assimilated into the new culture. Once home, students discover they have developed a new paradigm of thinking and living. Critics of this model suggest that it is oversimplified, where many experience more of a roller coaster than a true U or W Curve (Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2008).

The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Model recognizes that students will go through a period of anxiety and uncertainty which leaves them feeling out of control in the host country and culture (Gudykunst, 1998). This model suggests that a degree of uncertainty and anxiety is an important part of the adjustment process; however too much anxiety can be detrimental to the adjustment process. When those engaging in cross-cultural adaptation are mindful of their anxiety and can manage it, they can adapt to the new culture more easily.

The Transition Model recognizes the uniqueness of each individual in their cultural adaptation process; however those adjusting to a new culture typically have a “fight” or “flight” response as they adjust. The fight response comes from uncomfortable experiences engaging in the new culture that challenge one’s worldview. People have a tendency to either jump into immersion quickly or hold back, observe and even retreat into experiences of safety with those from one’s own culture before they are willing to embrace the immersion experience (Bennett, 1998). The more self-aware, but non-judgmental one is, the more likely they are to give up defending their own worldview and “flex” their own point of view, in which they adapt their own perspectives. This model suggests that orientation trainings should be catered to the individual’s personality in a given situation (Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2008).

The Stress-Adaptation Growth Model introduced by Kim (2001, 2005) takes language and social relationships into consideration. The 3-stage steps from stress, adaption, to growth lead to a greater functional fit in the host environment. The process from stress to growth is facilitated or impeded through communication adaptability, which includes one’s own personal background, language and cultural learning, and interaction and involvement with the host culture.

Each of these models can help us to understand aspects of cross-cultural adjustment that participants in international practicums may experience. They can also help us to determine how components of participants study abroad experiences can support participants' cultural adjustment and immersion experience towards adaptation, growth and learning both within and beyond the international experience. Unique components of international practicums and study abroad experiences will now be discussed.

2.5.3 Unique Aspects of International Practicums

International practicums have components that are unique as compared to domestic practicums. Unlike domestic practicums, students experience an immersive cross-cultural living experience in a foreign community, while also doing a practicum to meet their educational requirements. The unique aspects of international field practicums are considered not only as practical aspects of organizing international placements for the student participants, but also relate to their impact on the community of the practicum and on student learning outcomes (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007). The following review will look at important components of international study experiences relevant to this study. These components acted as a guide to developing prompts for the interview questions (See Appendix G).

2.5.3.1 Orientation

Much literature notes the importance of pre-departure orientation and preparation as a valuable aspect of any international educational experience (Barlow et al. , 2010; Boyle, Nackerudd & Kilpatrick, 1999; Lager et al., 2010; Panos et al., 2004; Pawar, Hannah & Sheridan, 2004; Rai, 2004). In Hunter and Hollis's (2013) study, 83 percent of programs offered some degree of orientation to their students participating in international practicums. Sixty-eight percent of orientation was in the home country and 28.6 percent took place in the host country.

Fifty percent of the social work programs provided the orientation, 26.9 percent of orientation programs were conducted by the host agency and 7.7 percent by the host university.

Orientation ranges from formal classes, informal preparation arranged by the sending university, or independent student learning of the language, culture and field of practice (Rai, 2004). Adequate orientation can contribute to how well received the student(s) is into the culture and field practicum experience (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007) and can minimize the culture shock of landing in a strange country. Orientation can also assist students in knowing how they can maximize their experience in order to have the greatest outcomes.

Lager et al. (2010) suggest that orientation should help students with their general readiness, but also their ability to understand their role as an ambassador of their university and social work program. They also suggest orientation can contribute to financial preparedness, cultural competency, physical health preparation, focus and self-discipline, flexibility and understanding of the trip as not a vacation, but an educational opportunity. Although Panos et al.'s (2004) study reveals that many international practicum placements are in countries where English is the primary language, there are still a large number of students who are placed in countries where English is not the primary language. In those cases, students should study the language and culture of their host culture as a part of their field practicum orientation (Lager et al.; 2010; Rai, 2004).

Students should also take responsibility for personal preparation beyond formal orientation as this preparation has the potential to impact their experience. For example, students need to be prepared emotionally for what they are going to experience, such as extreme poverty in certain placements. Students can also prepare themselves physically if they are going to need to walk long distances. They should also have knowledge of supplies they need for living and

carrying out their field practicum responsibilities (Pawar et al., 2004). Along with preparation for the host country and culture, key aspects that shape their experience are housing and supervision and support.

2.5.3.2 Housing

Living accommodation is also an important aspect of an international field practicum and can influence the student's adjustment and on-going language and cultural learning (Barbera, 2006; Barlow et al., 2010; Gammonley, Smith Rotabi & Gamble, 2007; Rai, 2004). Barlow et al. (2010) suggest that the stress of adapting to the international setting can be reduced if housing is arranged by the host agency prior to the student's arrival.

Living arrangements vary. Most often housing is in a dormitory or apartment with other students – from one's own country, other foreign countries, and/or the host country – or with a local host family. Home stays can be challenging logistically, requiring more detailed organization and connections in the community. Students need to be more independent to navigate transportation or walking through the community, but home stays offer rich opportunities for cultural and language learning (Gammonley et al., 2007) as compared to living with people from the same country of origin (Kelly, 2009). No matter what the housing situation, an international practicum is typically a more immersive experience than a typical domestic practicum in one's own country; therefore the students' supervision and support is a particularly important aspect of their study abroad experience.

2.5.3.3 Supervision and Support

The Council of Social Work Education (2008) requires students have social work supervision for all field practicums that are a part of their educational experience. Supervision and support are important aspects of social work field practicums in general, but especially

important when students are living in a foreign country. While studying abroad, students often need extra support to process their cross-cultural experiences and apply their social work education to their international field practicum experience (Boyle, 2004; Lowe et al., 2008; Lough, 2009). An obstacle to providing international practicum opportunities is the lack of qualified supervisors in foreign settings (Hunter & Harris, 2013; Panos et al., 2004; Tucker Rambally, 1999). The requirements of field practicum supervision vary internationally and are not always consistent with the needs of the home university's requirements, therefore create a potential challenge in meeting the accreditation standards of the sending university (Skolnik et al., 1999; Tucker Rambally, 1999).

Finding adequate supervision includes having a social worker with the appropriate educational background, but also with the ability to help the students with the specific skills they need to learn and practice. Lager et al. (2010) express the challenges of obtaining appropriate student supervision in international settings as supervision can mean something different in a foreign setting compared to the home setting and may not meet the expected needs of the student or the academic needs of the sending university. Furthermore, when expectations are not communicated ahead of time it can jeopardize the relationship with the host setting and create a negative environment for the student.

Although some form of supervision is needed on-site, some programs utilize an off-site social work supervisor, such as a professor from either the students' home university or a university in the location of their international practicum if professional social work supervision is not provided by the host agency. Whether supervision is provided on or off-site, it is important for administrators and supervisors of the international field practicums to have the proper training, support, and understanding of the placement in order to facilitate supervision that will

support the field practicum's learning outcomes goals, which include the requirements of the accrediting bodies and sending university social work programs (Shively, 2010).

A study of field practicums through an EU-Canada social work practicum exchange reveals that the majority of students received satisfactory support in preparing for their trip through obtaining a visa, housing, and linking with other students (Barlow, et al., 2010). One student in this study; however, felt unsure if the work she was doing was professional social work, which supported the researchers' conclusion that there is need for proper support in order to help the students integrate social work learning and practice skills during international field practicums. Barlow et al. (2010) also suggest the need for a clear learning agreement to clarify students' roles and expectations.

Supervision from someone with in-depth cultural understanding supports students in their social work educational and professional learning. The supervisor can serve an important role as cultural broker to the student, helping them to connect their prior social work knowledge to the cultural context they are practicing within (Tesoriero, 2006). Supervision that supports learning goals and has cultural understanding can help students move toward greater self-awareness, cross cultural skills and professional growth.

There are three types of supervisors normally used in an international field practicums. Supervision is generally provided by a social worker with a professional social work degree from 1) the host country, 2) from the student's home country, or 3) from other foreign countries (Boyle et al., 1999). Independent of their country of origin, this supervisor may be an instructor from the student's home university, from a local university in the host country or an agency staff member. All of these options could equally meet accreditation requirements of North American-based schools of social work.

Given the challenge of finding appropriate practicum supervisors, Panos et al. (2002) suggest the use of videoconferencing as a possible alternative to on-site supervision in international practicums. However ethical considerations must be addressed in order to provide quality supervision through videoconferencing. It is important that the technology be dependable and have “sufficient emotional, visual, and auditory content” (Panos et al., 2002, p. 428) for quality supervision to occur. Panos et al. also discuss liability and insurance issues as other important ethical factors in providing appropriate supervision. For example, it is important to determine whether or not the licensure status of the supervisor meets the requirements within the international setting. As the supervisor is not practicing within the host country, it is also important that the supervisor has an understanding of culturally sensitive practice within the culture in order to provide culturally appropriate supervision. Good communication between the practicum supervisor and the practicum liaison at home is essential to effective supervision (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007). Panos et al. (2002) and Mathieson and Lager (2007) both propose a triad model, using videoconferencing including the student, a culturally competent on-site supervisor and the university supervisor who can together offer the richness of support the student needs.

Lager et al. (2010) and Hunter and Harris (2010) also discuss the importance of communication between those involved in the experience, including the student, administrators, and host setting. A lack of communication can impact the students’ sense of support throughout the international experience and create a barrier to successful outcomes. It is important to have clearly defined roles and expectations between the various stakeholders, in order to support both students’ learning and his/her relationship with the practicum site. Barlow et al.’s (2010) research supports the importance of communication between all partners in the international

practicum placement, including the agency, university faculty and administrators, and international offices and field partners, which can also be facilitated through the use of technology.

Formal components of study abroad such as orientation, housing, supervision and support all impact students' study abroad experience and can influence their growth and learning outcomes. Before outcomes of such experiences are discussed it is important to note the unique value of informal experiences, as a key part of the study abroad experience.

2.5.3.4 Informal Experiences

In addition to the formal components of study abroad, the immersion experience of an international practicum creates opportunity for learning through a variety of informal experiences. Research reports that students learn significantly through informal activities outside of their scheduled practicum and other educational activities that are a part of their study abroad program. Poole and Davis's (2006) research on a Mexican study abroad experience found that students benefited much through the informal learning of recreation and leisure activities⁵. These experiences brought the student into contact with local Mexican people, their culture and customs, and had a greater impact on their personal growth and development than their classroom experiences in Mexico. Even so, Poole and Davis's (2006) research suggests this learning does not happen automatically; therefore discussion on the learning opportunities that these informal opportunities are providing should be clearly integrated in the course objectives to help students develop the link between cultural and self-awareness and cultural competency.

Although there are a variety of models of international field practicum placements, housing options, methods for supervision and informal experiences, the goal of all field practicum education abroad should be to support student learning towards competent practice

⁵ These areas were not listed on the syllabus as a formal part of the program.

outcomes. Next, discovered outcomes of study abroad presented in the literature will be reviewed.

2.5.4 Outcomes of International Practicum Education

Although the focus of this research study is on semester or longer international practicum experiences, there is limited empirical research on international practicums. Much of the empirical literature focuses on shorter term trips. The limited literature on semester field practicums will be discussed later, but first the literature on shorter term international educational experiences will be discussed. Although students experience less time in the country, short-term international experiences give students a brief opportunity to be engaged in a new understanding of globalization through travel, and to transnationally compare social work practices, social service theories, and social policies. (Barbera, 2006; Boyle et al., 1999; Dominelli & Bernard, 2003; Fairchild, Pillai & Noble, 2006; Lindsey, 2005; Gilin & Young, 2009). Although not all scholars agree (Tesoriero; 2006), Mapp, McFarland, & Newell's (2007) research reports perceived changes in short term trips that are similar to those in longer term international study experiences. Experiences within these study abroad trips have produced outcomes impacting participants' personal and professional development and cultural competency. These experiences have helped prepare participants for cross-cultural and international practice with people from developing nations. These outcomes, and the related experiences, will now be discussed in more detail.

2.5.4.1 Understanding of Difference

The literature reports that the experience of being the minority, often for the first time, influences study abroad participants' understanding of and tolerance for difference (Barlow, et al., 2010; Laubscher, 1994). The informal, out-of-classroom experiences that come with living in

a foreign community, such as living with local people and developing friendships in the community, have been found to significantly influence students' personal development and understanding of difference (Laubscher, 1994). Even short term experiences of being the "other" within a culture impacts students who have not experienced being a minority by providing opportunity for learning that is difficult for the student to experience within a classroom in their home country (Barbera, 2006; Gilin & Young, 2009). Students typically struggle through being a minority, often for the first time, creating unique learning opportunities (Engstrom & Jones, 2007; LeBlanc, 2003, Pawar et al., 2004), due to language differences, looking different and experiencing customs and traditions that are different than the culture they grew up in (Dominelli & Bernard, 2003; Gilin & Young, 2009; Tesoriero, 2006). Students doing international practicums are often a privileged minority, unlike many of their clients who experience oppression as a minority. Through experiencing what it feels like to be a minority, students have been reported to develop greater empathy with those who have less privilege than the majority culture (Albertson, 2003; Bennett, 2003; Leblanc, 2003; Pawar et al., 2004; Savoy, 2003). The experiences of being a minority, combined with the other experiences of a practicum abroad influence a students' cultural understanding and practice. This impact is likely carried home and presumably influences the student's professional practice and perhaps even their career path.

2.5.4.2 Cultural Competence and Sensitivity

Several studies on international social work education focus on outcomes related cross-culturally practice. Although a variety of terms are used in social work practice and in the scales used, all relate to cultural competency. Social workers have the ethical responsibility to be culturally competent according to the National Association of Social Workers. NASW (2008) defines cultural competence as having five essential elements. To be culturally competent one

needs to: “1) value diversity, 2) have the capacity for cultural self-assessment, 3) be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact, 4) institutionalize cultural knowledge, and 5) develop programs and services that reflect an understanding of diversity between and within cultures” (p. 13-14).

More recent literature has critiqued cultural competency models and expressed the need for cultural humility in the helping professions (Carpenter-Song, Nordquest Schwallie & Longhofer, 2007; Este, 2007; Hook, Owen & Utsey, 2013). Dean (2001) believes cultural competence is a “myth that is typically American and located in the metaphor of American ‘know-how” (p. 624). As cultural competency is the term utilized in much of the literature and taught in most U.S. social work programs, the term will be utilized in this study; however cultural humility will also be discussed as it suggests a less ethnocentric view of culture on the part of the social worker. Cultural humility includes being focused on the parts of the cultural identity that are most important to the client and approaching the relationship with a lack of superiority on the part of the helper. It does not assume competence based on prior experience with the culture, but with an openness that is respectful and work that is collaborative in nature (Hook et al., 2013). Although there has not been research on the outcomes of cultural humility from study abroad experiences, these concepts are important to consider when considering outcomes of study abroad as it relates to cultural practice.

Research on short term study abroad experiences report an increase in participants’ personal and professional development through increasing their self-awareness, cross-cultural sensitivity and reducing ethnocentrism (Barlow et al., 2010; Lindsey, 2005; Mapp et al., 2007; Map, 2012; Poole & Davis, 2006), leading to increased cultural competence (Boyle, 1999). Global competence, cultural understanding, and cultural competence and sensitivity have been

identified most often as positive outcomes of study abroad (Barlow, et , 2010; Boyle et al., 1999; Lindsey, 2005; Mapp, 2012; Mapp et al., 2007). Tesoriero's (2006) study of a 16 week field experience similarly finds that students' ethnocentricity decreased post trip. Tesoriero (2006) discovered that as students' personal concepts such as literacy and time were challenged, they began to respect differences in values, and develop a new appreciation for different cultures, values and worldviews. As students competently engage in culture, empathy adapts into intercultural sensitivity, competency and ethnorelativism. Gilin and Young's (2009) study reports that students developed new innovative ideas for social work practice, an understanding of how policies shape practice, and how U.S. social work practice is influenced by policy and the values behind these policies.

In comparing Boyle's (1999) quantitative study of multi-cultural competence and Mapp et al.'s (2007) study of cross-cultural adaptability, students who had less international experience before departure report a greater increase in cross-cultural competence from pre to post test, suggesting that students' first international experiences result in the most significant impact. However, qualitative studies have revealed that all students, no matter their previous international experiences, engender increased cultural awareness (Mapp et al., 2007).

Although Poole & Davis (2006) report much literature on the link between self-awareness and cultural competence, their study revealed that students were not necessarily aware of this link themselves. Students said they developed much personal knowledge and growth from the international experience, but they did not see this as clearly linking to increased cultural competency that affected their social work practice. These studies measure students' ability to work with cultures, based on their theoretical knowledge, values and skills as rated via an

assessment or test. Other studies reveal clearer links to cross-cultural direct practice skills, which will now be discussed.

2.5.4.3 Developing New Practice Approaches

Barlow et al. (2010) and Gilin and Young's (2009) research reports the development of new practice approaches through international study. Gilin and Young (2009) conducted qualitative research of a ten day study abroad experience in Italy for American social work students. The students in this study visited agencies and heard lectures from local people. The study revealed that students developed new ideas for social work practice, developed a better understanding of how policies shape practice and how U.S. social work practice is influenced by politics, policy and the values behind these policies. Barlow et al.'s (2010) study of EU students who completed international practicums in Canada found that upon their return home students wanted to utilize their learning in Canada to affect change in policies, procedures, and the practice of social work ethics. They felt they were better prepared for cross-cultural practice. This suggests that students' overseas experiences will influence their social work practice in the future beyond what is considered status quo in their own community and culture. However, there are very limited studies on this topic reported in the scholarly literature, which justifies the value of this research study.

The literature indicates experiencing social work in developing countries, in particular, not only can contribute to benefiting the host nation through social service development, but can also contribute to students' ability to understand cross-cultural theory and practice in unique ways, preparing them for specific areas of cross-cultural and international practice at home or abroad (Boyle et al., 1999; Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Larson & Allen, 2006; Patterson, 2004). The experiences studying in developing countries helped students later work in their home

country with immigrants from these countries. Boyle, Nackerud and Kilpatrick (1999) found there is a lack of social workers prepared to work with Mexican immigrants and that study abroad experiences in Mexico can help prepare students for working with immigrants to the U.S. Lowe et al. (2008) encourage study programs to develop in West Africa due to the increasing numbers of immigrants from West Africa to North America.

Students also learn macro level perspectives regarding structural causes of poverty through international experiences. An emerging theme in Larson and Allen's (2006) findings from Canadian students' experiences reported students had "a significant shift in their thinking from attributing individual responsibility for poverty and disadvantage toward broader structural factors" (p. 511) as well as a "significant shift in their understanding of their own social location, privilege and contribution to oppression of others" (p. 512). Students in the study said they became aware of their own misperceptions in these stated areas, which moved them towards behavior changes that they perceived as less oppressive.

Another outcome reported to take place beyond the international study trip is collaborative research, writing and teaching opportunities for students and faculty, including partnerships and exchanges between universities. These experiences allow for opportunities of mutual learning and growth beyond the short-term experience, which can result in further international learning, practice, teaching and research opportunities (Lowe et al., 2008). As the literature reveals, short term experiences can contribute significantly to participants' growth and learning; however longer term study abroad experiences can have a more significant impact on students.

2.5.4.4 Impact of Longer Term Study Abroad

Tesoriero (2006) believes that short term study abroad experiences are limited in nature; therefore do not have as great of an impact on participants as longer term experiences that combine adequate supervision and living in another culture for an extended period of time. Semester-long, or longer, international field practicums are important in this regard. One student spending a semester practicum experience abroad reflected on the experience as being different than being a shorter term tourist: “I lived, worked and breathed the community development project the entire time” (Bennett, 2003, p. 144). Another student felt she could not fully reflect on the experiences until her return home (Hammond, 2003), and many reported they could transfer knowledge and skills from their learning into their future social work practice (Hammond, 2003; Leblanc, 2003, Myles, 2003). This literature suggests the benefits of semester long international practicums relate to the opportunity they give students to learn and see patterns over time, enabling an even richer learning experience than a shorter term trip. This research study will explore this gap in the literature by studying the long term impact of semester long international field practicums.

2.5.4.5 Other Outcomes to Explore

As there are a limited number of studies on long term outcomes of study abroad in social work, a brief review of outcomes from general study abroad literature relevant to this research is explored in this section. General study abroad literature indicates significant long term outcomes.

Language study is often a common reason for general study abroad and comparison studies between students at home and abroad have found significant increase in language proficiency in students who have studied abroad (Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1990;

Opper, Teichler & Carlson, 1990). A study of students⁶ from a faith-based university in the U.S. found that students who studied abroad had an increased sense of life purpose and commitment to service to others over time, where those who did not study abroad had a decreased sense of life purpose and commitment to service over time (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2010). A large longitudinal study (n=3,700) of university graduates who spent from a summer to a year abroad, found that study abroad experiences positively influence participants' future academic attainment, cultural development, career impact, and personal growth (IES, 2011; Dwyer, 2004). Another study reports on long term research of study abroad participants (n= 458). Over half of the participants reported that they felt their study abroad experience benefited them professionally, contributed to finding their first job and increased their international understanding (Opper et al.,1990). These findings suggest there may be similar findings in long term outcomes of international field practicums.

2.5.4.6 Negative Experiences and Effects of Study Abroad

Although much literature reports benefits and positive outcomes of study abroad, one must not assume that these experiences are always fully beneficial to all involved. Egstrom and Mathiesen's (2012) review of the literature on social work study abroad experiences reports there are no large studies on negative experiences within study abroad. There have been only limited studies on the negative outcomes. Two students in Pawar et al.'s study (2004) expressed the perceived losses of not having learned certain social work skills they would have learned in a home setting. These students also felt they had less advantage in the labor market for social work positions at home. Other negative effects are the danger of negatively impacting the community one is serving within. This will now be discussed.

⁶ n=74. Researchers recognized the sample size as a limitation to this study.

Although early social work models that were exported to other countries have often been adapted over time to reflect their community's culture, today study abroad experiences can still be seen as imperialistic as they tend to go only one way: those from more developed nations sending the students abroad to less developed countries (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Hunter & Hollis, 2013; Wehbi, 2009). Rotabi et al. (2006) believe U.S. study abroad programs are an outgrowth of the adventurist exploratory spirit of times past and that they repeat colonialist tendencies. When social work education was first "exported" abroad by North Americans, mostly by the U.S., individualistic models dominated the profession and were taught to developing nations. These individualist models were later met with resistance in communities that traditionally reflected more communal paradigms. Over time these countries began to incorporate more community based models and developed their own innovative and culturally effective ways of practicing.

Those from more developed nations can be viewed by locals in host countries as lacking in compassion and egocentric. Even in the role of student, one can come across as paternalistic or as "the expert," which can further disempower local people (Rotabi, Gammonley & Gamble, 2006; Lough, 2009). According to Rotabi et al. (2006):

Study abroad grounded in imperialistic values can be characterized as an oppressive practice. Study tours minimizing opportunities for informal interaction with indigenous representatives of the community, those making exclusive or primary use of tour buses or trips to U.S.-based fast-food outlets, and those emphasizing site visits that just compare and contrast provision of formal social services between the USA and developing nations represent this perspective (p. 452).

Developers and participants in international social work educational programs need to be aware of the potential oppressive relationships that can exist in study abroad experiences so they can reduce oppression and encourage mutually beneficial growth and learning outcomes.

Although this study is not specifically focused on the host setting's experiences of oppression

through the international practicum or study abroad program, it is imperative when encouraging international education abroad, whether a two week trip or a semester experience, that oppressive power relationships are counteracted allowing students to engage in life-long learning that is not oppressive (Rotabi et al., 2006; Wehbi, 2009). Next, anti-oppressive approaches to study abroad will be discussed.

2.5.4.7 Anti-Oppressive Strategies

Both secular and faith-based organizations that serve as practicum sites run the risk of repeating colonialistic practices of times past, yet can also provide opportunities for empowering development models of learning if organized appropriately (Flanigan, 2009; Gray, 2005; Patterson, 2012; Patterson, 2014; Wehbi, 2010). As much of the literature on study abroad emphasizes gains in cultural competence, Wehbi (2009) suggests that learning about culture abroad “without engaging in a critical analysis of the contextual factors which surround it could potentially reinforce misconceptions as cultural stereotypes” (p. 51). Wehbi (2009) suggests that students need to “critically examine their motivations for undertaking an international placement” (p. 49), as part of the process of preventing unequal power relationships. This has direct implications for the nature of student supervision.

Students often desire to study abroad because of a fascination with other cultures, a liking of people from other countries, or a desire to make a positive difference or give back. Although these reasons may seem to be of no harm on the surface, they can come across as imperialistic and ethnocentric if the student does not engage in critical reflection of the underlying assumptions behind each of these reasons. When students have the opportunity to deconstruct their motivations and reflect on their preconceived assumptions and still choose to study abroad, there is a greater chance that they will develop empowering non-oppressive relationships

throughout their study abroad experience. This, again, is a critical element that should be part of student supervision. Although current social work education abroad tends to have more reciprocal models of mutual learning than in times past, organizers of study abroad need to be cautious of this tendency for oppressive relationships and move towards anti-oppressive and culturally humble methods. This is particularly important in international social work and development.

Anti-oppressive practice (AOP) is rooted in critical theory. AOP acknowledges the power differential that exists as broader than racism alone and relates to the oppressive structures that exist between various dominant and non-dominant groups in society (Laird, 2008). AOP also recognizes the power of the social worker over the client system and the danger of this one up position, emphasizing the client as their own agent of change (Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly, 2002). AOP practitioners are aware of the unintentional oppression that can take place when in the role of the helper (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002). This oppression could be displayed by imposing American models of social work practice, rather than adapting practices to be culturally sensitive to the setting. Issues related to oppression are particularly important when examining study abroad outcomes of students from North America, particularly the United States, given their imperialistic reputation (Winks, 1979; Rotabi et al., 2006).

Critics of anti-oppressive practice suggest that anti-oppressive practice has become disempowering by its focus on state regulations that ultimately further oppress, are developed in a top down manner, do not eliminate power differentials, and change language and terminology instead of behaviors (McLaughlin, 2005, Rush & Keenan, 2014, Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005)⁷. Although Rush & Keen (2014) acknowledge the critiques of how anti-oppressive practice can

⁷ Although further criticisms of anti-oppressive practice do exist, they are beyond the scope of this research study, therefore this study will focus on aspects of anti-oppressive practice that are relevant to this particular study.

manifest itself in disempowering ways, they suggest that when social workers focus on oppression at micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice at the same time, rather than focused practice that is compartmentalized to one area, a transformative process can take place that works against oppression. They suggest anti-oppressive social work can avoid succumbing to power by providing interventions that relate to the person-in-environment, that are user-based and user-controlled, and by advocating for transformative policies that are not oppressive in nature.

There are several suggestions in the literature for how experiences within study abroad can help work towards anti-oppressive methods of study and practice. First, longer term relationships not only provide an ongoing opportunity for students to do field practicums in a consistent location, they help sending universities to be more aware of the needs of the partner organizations and can produce a greater adaptation to the culture as compared to shorter, one time trips.

Second, examining the ethical implications can lead towards a greater degree of anti-oppressive practices within study abroad. Rotabi et al. (2006) and Gammonley et al.'s (2007) models of study abroad examine the values and ethics of social work as a basis for developing ethical study abroad experiences. The basic core values of social work are service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008). As these core values and ethical principles, are all embraced from pre-trip to post-trip, with an emphasis on self-determination, reciprocity, mutual respect and learning, ethical, non-oppressive study abroad experiences can develop (Lager et al., 2010, Lough 2009).

Next, literature suggests the importance of the participant in study abroad having language knowledge. Both Dominelli (2004) and Gammonley et al. (2007) write of the importance of language communication in international experiences. Use of the local language is an opportunity for fostering empowering relationships with local people, if the international social worker learns the language, or disempowerment for the local people, if social workers make no effort to learn the language. Even in short-term trips basic respect for and learning of the language can prevent disempowerment and foster respect and feelings of equality (Gammonley et al., 2007). Dominelli (2004) considers “language exclusion as a form of oppression that devalues both the contributions of other people and their agency or ability to act as subjects (p. 516)”. Those who speak languages considered dominant need to be aware of the privilege they hold and develop ways to prevent language from being an oppressive mechanism in international exchange. When these considerations are made, language has the opportunity to be an empowering rather than disempowering force in the study abroad relationship.

Finally, Abram and Cruce (2007) suggest a model of ‘Reverse Mission’ derived from theology and missions, which “emphasizes learning from indigenous people in host countries; raising the critical consciousness of social workers about their cultural biases and misconceptions; and advocating for changes within one’s home country to impact poverty and injustice in the world” (p.3). A key part of learning in this model is from listening to and talking directly with those who are “involved in the struggle” of oppression, including indigenous residents, social workers, leaders and activists. Abram and Cruce (2007) report that American participants in this model often discover how their country’s policies and practices have influenced the poverty and oppression of other cultures and nations and dispel their misconceptions that “their country can do no wrong” (p. 9).

There are many advantages to international field practicum education reflected in the literature, but “if executed poorly these experiences could negatively impact both students and host communities” (Lough, 2009, p. 472). Lough (2009) gives these suggestions for the effective administration of study abroad programs that are focused on the student, but can lead towards anti-oppressive methods of international field practicum administration. Students should be given clear roles that have been suggested by the host agency. The goals of the placement should be developed in a way that will be mutually beneficial to the host agency and the student. Students should be given proper support pre-trip to help develop clear and appropriate expectations preparing them to have satisfying experiences and positive learning outcomes. While in the field, regular supervision and support that includes guided reflection will enable students to process their experiences with a more correct understanding of what they are seeing and experiencing in order to not further perpetuate negative stereotypes and ethnocentric ideas. The concerns in the literature regarding anti-oppressive practice issues as they relate to international practicums justify the theoretical foundation for this study, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.5.4.8 Social Work Career Choices and Practice Approaches

In exploring outcomes of study abroad, a goal of this research is to look at how specific experiences of study abroad have influenced participants’ future career choices and practice approaches. Therefore, it is important to briefly describe the meaning of career choices and practice approaches⁸. Social work’s early history focused on work with the poor; however the profession has grown to include practice with many marginalized or at-risk groups, including at-risk children, youth, families, people with disabilities, Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgender and

⁸ Since the research will be focused on American social work students, general areas of practice taught and used in the U.S. will be the focus of this exploration.

Questioning (GLBTQ) populations, people with mental health or substance abuse needs, the aging, and other general counseling activities, opening up opportunities for social work careers in all of these areas (Suppes & Wells, 2009). In North America, broader social work career opportunities are often categorized as micro, mezzo or macro levels of practice, although much social work practice overlaps into more than one area. Common micro practice roles of practice are case work or case management, crisis intervention, and counseling or therapy. Mezzo practice includes work with families and groups. Macro practice areas include community organizing and development, administration, social policy development, community education and social work education (Suppes & Wells, 2009; Timberlake, Zajicek-Farber & Sabatino, 2008).

Some students choose an international field practicum due to their interest in international social work practice, however they are not always cognizant of how social work practice varies by country and by setting. International social work opportunities are growing and can overlap into many fields and levels of practice (Healy, 2008). Practice approaches within countries also vary beyond what students may have learned in their social work studies at home; therefore the learning experiences of an international practicum have the potential to influence participants' understanding of practice approaches and broaden their methods of practice.

The range of theoretical perspectives and methods of practice approaches are also extensive, from positivist perspectives to radical approaches (Payne, 2005a). Generalist perspectives in North America tend to focus on ecological systems theory and other scientific, evidenced-based methods that are often utilized due to funding and management restraints (Timberlake et al., 2008). There are also a variety of political perspectives internationally from more conservative to socialistic and Marxist perspectives, which all influence the social welfare

systems of nations. The U.S.'s political perspective tends to have a moderate to conservative approach to social welfare, with a more reluctant welfare state than many developed nations, and a more developed social welfare system than many developing nations (Suppes & Wells, 2012).

When working in less traditional fields such as community organizing, grassroots agencies or social action activities in the United States, critical approaches are more common than in traditional social welfare systems, including governmental programs (Kahn, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Less individualist and more community based models tend to be more dominant in countries other than the U.S.; therefore students studying abroad may have greater exposure to these models of practice than if they only studied and did a practicum in the U.S. (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002; Guy-Walls, 2007). These differences can provide a great opportunity for utilizing the strength of globalization trends in impacting social work education and practice. Marsiglia and Kulis (2015) state, "Globalization is challenging the one-on-one approach commonly used by practitioners and is making social workers recognize the importance of communities and groups as sources of transformation" (p. 353).

It is also important to recognize that even though there may be some restrictions to approaches of practice within specific fields of practice, social workers may also have a broader paradigm of thought that is different than and perhaps, in conflict with, the perspective they are expected to use within practice. These personal perspectives, rather than just workplace expectations of practice, will be important to explore in the research study.

2.6 Strengths, Limitations, and Gaps in the Literature that Inform this Study

Key strengths in the literature include the growing scholarship that expresses the need for more global education in social work to prepare social workers for the globalized world. Literature suggests that study abroad opportunities and international practicums, more

specifically, provide beneficial global learning opportunities for participants. In addition, there is a growing amount of empirical literature on the outcomes of study abroad experiences in social work. Much of this literature reports increases in cultural competency after study abroad experiences; however there are limitations to this scholarship. Most published research is based on short-term study abroad experiences and limited to short term outcomes. General studies of study abroad across disciplines have indicated significant long term influence of experiences on cultural development, career, and personal growth; however there is very little literature specific to social work that examined the long term impact of international practicum experiences. If social work education has the goal of preparing effective practitioners for cross-cultural practice there is a need for more research in this area (Gilin & Young, 2009). Rai (2004) and Pawar et al. (2004) suggest that further research from the perspectives of the students is important. The available literature on the outcomes of international practicums, combined with these gaps and limitations in the literature, has influenced this study to explore the long term outcomes of participants' experiences from their perspectives.

An additional strength in the research is the concern for reducing and eliminating oppressive relationships within study abroad experiences. Research on programs with international field practicums indicates they have in common a critical perspective and an emphasis on the need for anti-oppressive methods that are both sensitive to the needs of the host country and facilitate culturally sensitive practice models and model anti-oppressive practice methods. Whebi (2009) proposes that due to the power imbalances between nations, empirical research should be explored focusing on students' motivations for studying abroad, in order to prepare them more effectively for anti-oppressive experiences. Further research on anti-oppressive perspectives of study abroad based on both the perspectives of the host country and

the student would help to develop models of anti-oppressive study abroad experiences (Rai, 2004; Lough, 2009). The literature discussing the concerns of oppression within communities that host study abroad experiences has informed the anti-oppressive theoretical foundation of this study, and contributes to the development of interview questions and the related analysis on anti-oppressive practice learning outcomes.

The available literature on study abroad gives detailed descriptions of aspects of study abroad that relate to the administration of the experience and can impact the experience to provide both formal and informal learning beyond the trip. These aspects of study abroad, specific outcomes, and general career opportunities explored have given a framework for developing the research question and related interview prompts.

This research study explores long term outcomes of social work practicums abroad, by looking at how social workers perceive their experience has impacted their career choices and practice approaches. This exploration of participants' experiences within study abroad, which examines the perceptions of the impact of students' learning after they have graduated and are practicing social work, can foster the development of models of study abroad. This study will meet gaps in the literature, by providing a study of the long term outcomes of study abroad, from the experience of the participant. The participants' perspectives on the unique aspects of study abroad and how they may influence students' future social work practice offers valuable learning on how to administer programs in order to maximize the positive experiences and minimize the negative experiences of international practicums for both the participant and the community served.

2.7 Summary

This literature review provides a historical review of study abroad leading to the increased opportunities for study abroad in our increasingly globalized society. The value of international field practicums as an avenue for preparing social work students for increased global competencies was discussed. Next, models of international study abroad were described, followed by a description of aspects of study abroad experiences. Key aspects include orientation, housing experiences, supervision and support, and the value of informal experiences as an additional avenue for learning. Learning outcomes of study abroad present in literature were reviewed, including developed awareness of oppression and privilege, increased cross-cultural sensitivity and developed cross-cultural practice methods. Much scholarly literature is based on the experiences of short term study abroad experiences; however research has reported the increased benefits of longer term study abroad experiences. The limitations in the literature justify this study on the outcomes semester study abroad experiences and participants' longer term outcomes of such experiences. This literature review also makes note that negative experiences, that can affect both the student and the community served, do take place in international practicums; therefore they are an important aspect to explore when researching the lived experiences of participants' international practicums. One of the negative aspects of study abroad throughout the literature is the danger of oppressive practices within the communities served; therefore anti-oppressive strategies were explored, which links this literature review to the theoretical approach to this study. This will be discussed further in the following methodology chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This study uses qualitative methodology to explore the lived experiences of participants in semester long international field practicums and how they were impacted by these experiences. Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland's (2006) approach to qualitative study is utilized as this approach allows the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of the participants through the process of intensive interviews. Data from these interviews was analyzed to discover themes and ultimately draw conclusions that help us to better understand the impact of study abroad experiences on the participants. This study is grounded in the interpretivist, post positivist and critical perspectives. Previous literature on the subject informs this research design and guided the interview process.

This chapter discusses the research questions that guide this study and describes the process of development of the research focus and the rationale for qualitative design. The theoretical framework that grounded this study will be discussed followed by the qualitative methodology that guides this study. The steps taken to carry out and analyze the study are described, along with the background of the researcher that informs the researcher's position related to the study and reveal research bias. Next there is a discussion of human subject issues addressing the steps carried out to create rigor to the study. Finally, limitations of the study are discussed.

3.1 Research Question and Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the significant experiences within international field practicums and their impact upon the participants. The initial sub questions addressed in this study are:

- What do participants perceive as the most significant experiences within their field practicums?
- How do participants describe these significant experiences within international practicum and overall study abroad experience?
- How do participants perceive that their practicum and related experiences influenced them, their career choices and practice approaches since their practicum?

The following additional sub question developed through the interviews:

- Based on these experiences, how do participants view cross-cultural and/or international social work practice?

This final question resulted from participants' responses on how their lived experiences not only informed their current practice, but also their general views of cross-cultural and international social work practice.

These questions and sub questions were developed through looking at Gubrium and Holstein's (1997) description of the value of combining both "what" questions and "how" questions in qualitative research in order to "focus qualitative inquiry on both the interpretive process of a constructed social world and the substantive meanings, contexts, and conditions that shape its inhabitants actions" (p. 15). The "what" questions are descriptive – they ask the participant "what" significant experiences constructed their learning and impacted them the most. The "how" questions are more analytical – they ask the respondent to address "how" these experiences have impacted their social work practice and perspectives.

This research explores what participants perceived as significant and how they develop meaning from these experiences. This research is not looking for a causal relationship but is

attempting to determine ways in which the field practicum experience conjoins with subsequent career choices and practice approaches, as is consistent with qualitative methodologies (Lofland et al., 2006). Before discussing the methodology, the position of the researcher will be discussed.

3.2 Personal Reflexivity: The Researcher's Position

Padgett (2008) discusses the importance of the researcher as a key factor in the research process; therefore it is important for the researcher to transparently discuss their position, personal opinions, and biases regarding the research subject as a method of personal reflexivity. This is the first stage in the process of bracketing as a method of eliminated research bias and increasing the rigor of the study (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

I am white female who grew up in an upper middle class neighborhood that was primarily Caucasian, but had some cultural diversity. In appearance I was from the majority culture within my community; however socioeconomically we were in a minority due to having a lower middle class income. Starting in high school, as part of my Christian faith commitment, I felt a personal calling to serve people in need both domestically and internationally. My first international trip was a two week church mission trip to Eastern Europe soon after my graduation from high school, just five years after the fall of communism. We stayed with an American family, did some activities for children in their yard, and visited some parts of the country. Although I am grateful for the experience, I did not feel I had an immersion experience.

I chose to study social work to develop skills to live out my faith and personal desire to work with impoverished people. I felt social work would help me develop skills to serve people in need, either domestically or internationally. Along with much involvement in volunteer service and internships in the community locally while in college, I also spent a month in Belize for a service learning class. As my professor knew I was interested international work in a faith-

based setting, she presented an opportunity for me to do an international practicum and study abroad in such a setting. This opportunity seemed like a natural progression for me, after having completed two short term trips; it made sense to consider a semester long international experience to test out what I felt I may be called to do more long term. During my last year of college, I spent a semester in Romania doing an international practicum for my social work studies. Both of these experiences allowed for a deeper level of immersion compared to my first international experience. During the semester in Romania, I experienced living with a host family, adapting to cultural ways of doing laundry, cooking, and bathing and developing local friendships, while also seeing extreme need amongst abandoned and at-risk children during my practicum experience. This experience impacted my career direction and educational goals significantly and confirmed a desire to live out my faith through international social work.

I completed a Master's in Social Work and spent a total of six years living in Romania. For five of these years, I coordinated the social programs for a faith-based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that developed out of the study abroad program that I had completed my international practicum with. During this time, I also supervised social work students doing semester practicums and facilitated short term study abroad teams that worked within our NGO for one to three weeks.

I believe my own study abroad experience positively influenced my perspectives and career direction. I have also seen how study abroad experiences have affected both the participants that I supervised and the local community members that I served on staff with. Through supervising students, I saw how their experiences impacted them, both positively and negatively. I discovered the value of supporting the students through supervision and encouraging their immersion into the Romanian culture. I also assisted students as they prepared

to go back to the U.S. and struggled with whether their international experiences would translate into helpful skills for their social work career.

Upon my return home to the U.S., I acted as the U.S. liaison for the Romanian Studies Program and worked with several American universities to facilitate study abroad experiences for their students. I also began teaching social work full-time at Malone University and facilitated opportunities for our students to participate in study abroad experiences. These experiences helped me to see the academic and political side of study abroad from the perspectives on the universities and social work accrediting body, The Council of Social Work Education (CSWE).

As a faculty member and field practicum coordinator, I help interested students decide if an international field practicum is the best route for them to take. My experiences have helped me to see the value of international practicum placements, but be realistic of the positives and negatives of such practicums. I help students consider the pros and cons in deciding if an international practicum is best for their current needs and future career desires, but they ultimately decide what is best for them. I have seen how international practicums prepare students for their future social work practice, but I have also seen the benefits of domestic practicum placements in giving students specific skills sets for positions within American agencies. Some of these agencies hire the students for these positions due to their internship experience at the agency. In summary, my experiences have helped me see the benefit of both international and domestic practicum placements, but I have seen some of these benefits be different from each other. These experiences helped to develop my curiosity on the subject. My personal experiences, combined with further research, helped to develop the research focus of the study.

3.3 Developing a Research Focus

My experiences with study abroad influenced my desire to study the outcomes of international study experiences within social work education; however a review of the literature helped to inform my personal experiences and develop a research focus regarding the outcomes of study abroad experiences. As I studied the literature I discovered there was both anecdotal and empirical literature on international study within social work with some specific literature on the outcomes of international practicums, most pointing out the benefits of such experiences. There was very little literature on the longer term outcomes of international practicum experiences, which led to my interest in studying this impact further. In considering what approach to take to study long term outcomes, I could have studied the topic from a number of perspectives, including the perspective of the sending agency, the practice supervisors of those who had studied abroad, or the perspective of the participant. I chose to focus on the experiences of international practicums from the perspectives of the student participants. I believe this type of study fills a gap in the literature, while also living out my social work values of exploring the lived experiences of individuals, from their perspectives (Padget, 2008).

In addition to having an interest in international practicums, which led to an exploration of the literature, I have also had an interest in international social work practice. Through this I have explored the literature on the subject and discovered a valuable relationship between anti-oppressive practice and international social work (Patterson, 2012). The literature on international field practicums that discusses concerns related to colonialistic practices and potential oppression in international practicum settings, confirmed the value of exploring participants' perspectives on international social work as an outcome of their international practicum experience.

This exploration of the literature, combined with my personal experiences, helped to develop this study exploring participants' experiences with international practicums and how these experiences have impacted them, their career choices and their practices approaches. This research helps us to understand the benefits and pitfalls of such experiences, to not only promote these benefits, but to understand how we can develop programs that will maximize the positive outcomes and minimize negative outcomes. Next, the rationale for a qualitative design method is discussed.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Rationale for Qualitative Design

The limited amount of empirical research on the subject validates the need for an exploratory qualitative study that will draw out “undiscovered themes” that were not found in previous literature (Padgett, 2008). Utilizing qualitative research to explore an area with limited research can help us learn more about the subject to answer the research question, which can also lead to future research on the subject. Lofland et al. (2006) state:

Intensive interviewing, which seeks to discover the informant's views of a particular situation or topic or experience in or with a particular situation, “structured interviewing,” (such as opinion polling) seeks to elicit choices between alternative answers to questions on a topic or situation that may not be directly relevant to the interviewee. Among other contrasts, “the structured interview seeks to determine the frequency of preconceived kinds of things, while the intensive qualitative interview seeks to find out what kinds of things exist in the first place (p. 17).

It is premature to determine variables for a large scale quantitative study on the outcomes of study abroad, but this qualitative exploratory study can help “identify variables that can then be measured” (p. 40). These newly discovered variables can be utilized in further research, based on the outcomes of this study.

Doing intensive interviews through qualitative research also opens up the opportunity for the participant to direct the discussion of meanings and outcomes behind their experiences rather than the preconceived ideas of the researcher directing responses between given choices (Lofland et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). This allows the researcher to keep an open mind about the issue. This is particularly important in this study, due to the limited research on the subject and the researcher's personal experiences. Although the researcher's personal experiences inform the research question, this should not determine the answers to the questions. Through hearing the lived stories of the participants, and bracketing my own experiences and perspectives, the participants' perspectives directed the discussion and outcomes, and eventual analysis, rather than personal bias based on limited research and my own experiences.

Finally, the purpose of this study is to understand how the "lived experiences" of field practicums abroad impact participants. The qualitative design and the nature of intensive interview questions also allows for the necessary personal and emotional depth and breadth from the perspective of the participants in order to answer the research question (Creswell, 2007; Lofland et al. 2006; Padgett, 2008). The research question, which pertains to the experiences of international practicums and their influence of practice approaches, could not be answered in-depth through quantitative research methods.

3.4.2 Theoretical Framework

C. Wright (1959) suggests that theory should be based on the world we are viewing. His views are consistent with qualitative research methodology, which does not have a specific theoretical foundation. Both the literature and the researcher inform the research design; however, ultimately the participants' lived experiences reveal the outcomes of the study, rather than theory alone. To impose a specific theoretical foundation to this study could limit my

results, reduce the exploratory nature of the study, and filter out potential undiscovered themes that could make my study less valuable (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012); however it is important to discuss the basic theoretical foundations that inform the nature of this qualitative study. Cresswell (2007) states that:

Researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs into the research process... Good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at minimum, to be aware of how they influence the conduct of inquiry (p. 15).

This research is grounded within the interpretivist, post-positivist paradigms, taking into consideration developmental theory as the participants tended to be in the emerging adulthood stage of development, which may have been a factor influencing the meaning and impact of their experiences. . The research is also informed by the critical paradigm of anti-oppressive. These frameworks will now be discussed.

3.4.2.1 Interpretive Perspective

Porter and Robinson (2011) describe hermeneutical or interpretive perspectives, as asking three questions: “What is understanding? How might we describe it best? And How might we understand it better?” (p. 2). A goal of this research study, grounded in interpretive theory, is to respond to these questions by understanding the lived experience of participants in international practicums both during their practicum experience and after they have returned home.

Understanding the subjective, lived experiences of participants in international practicums and the perceived meaning behind their experiences, both during their time abroad and their return home working as practicing professionals, are seen as the primary goal in this research design.

Although the data pertaining to participants’ lived experiences is the primary object of analysis, interpretive designs are informed by the researcher’s interest and available literature. The role of the researcher is an important part of the design process and interpretation of the

data. This minimizes the “role played by theoretical literature that informs the research question” (p. 38). In interpretive research, the research idea may come from the literature, but according to Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012):

It is not uncommon, for instance, for interpretive researchers to conduct research that returns them to places familiar from prior activities, in which they draw on previously required cultural knowledge (such as the places where they previously worked, lived or studied for other purposes or where they have family or ancestral roots) (p. 25).

A process of reflexivity is utilized in this study as an interpretive method; however, as Shwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) state, there is danger of only using what one is familiar with, therefore it is also important to explore beyond what one knows to design an interpretive study. This study combines the researchers’ experience with scholarly literature to develop the research design. The review of the literature helped to identify gaps in scholarship, which were used to refine the research questions; however these questions are just “starting points” (p. 37) that were further developed through the interview process.

Interpretive research methods were utilized to hear the participant’s lived story during intensive interviewing. This allowed the participants to respond to the research questions and the researcher to interpret these results based on their experiences; however to help reduce researcher bias, before final interpretation the researcher provided summaries of the data to the participants for member checking. A process of bracketing through coding, memoing, and constant comparison (Creswell, 2007; Tufford & Newman, 2010) also took place during the analysis in order to make sure the focus of analysis was not on the personal opinions of the research, but on the perspectives of the participants. This process allowed both the researcher and the participant to play a central role throughout the research study, and in the interpretation of the results.

3.4.2.2 Post-Positivist Theory

Although the interpretivist perspective is the overarching perspective in this study, the post positivist paradigm also informs my theoretical approach to methodology. Post-positivism critiques the positivist, objective approach, yet values the scientific, empirical formulation of results. The methodology of this study, based on Lofland et al.'s (2006) approach to design, follows an interpretive approach that utilizes a step-by-step process of methodology, including a literature review focused on the subject, which guided the formulating research questions and an interview guide, followed by a systematic coding of data to draw out themes and patterns based on the subjective reality of the participants (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Cresswell, 2007). Post-positive approaches also value multiple perspectives of individuals within the study (Cresswell, 2007). There were eighteen participants in this study. They had diverse study abroad experiences, a variety in time since their international practicum, and a variety of current practice settings, which values this post-positivistic perspective. The steps taken to bring rigor to this study, through measures to increase the transformability, confirmability, trustworthiness, and credibility of the study, also are informed by a post-positivistic perspective. These are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

3.4.2.3 Developmental Theory: Emerging Adulthood

In order to understand the lived experience of the participants, it is important to consider their stage of development. Participants' ages ranged from 18-28 at the time of their international practicum. According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development this age range coincides with a transition from one developmental stage into another. Around the age of twenty individuals leave adolescence, a stage characterized by the struggle between identity and role confusion and by their mid-twenties to early thirties enter early adulthood a stage characterized

by the struggle between intimacy and isolation (Shaffer, 2002). Most young adults in America and other industrialized countries that are between the ages of eighteen and their mid-twenties are going through what Arnett (2006) calls the stage of Emerging Adulthood, a stage in between Erikson's adolescence and early adult stages. According to Arnett's research and theory development (2006), in this stage most people are "making enduring choices that will set the foundation for their adult lives" (p. 8).

Arnett (2006) states that the developmental stage of Emerging Adulthood is "different in important ways from the adolescence that precedes it or the young adulthood that follows it" (p. 4). Although there is more diversity of development during this stage than in previous periods of history, more people in this stage are studying longer and getting married later, which has impacted their development. Arnett (2006) discusses five features of emerging adults. Emerging adults are in the age of: feeling in between, instability, identity exploration, self-focus, and age of possibilities. These will now be discussed as they relate to the participants in this research study.

According to research results of participants in this stage of life, 60% felt they had not quite reached adulthood (Arnett, 2006). In this "in-between" stage they are in the age of identity exploration; exploring various possibilities for their lives, including personal development, career choices, and love choices. Emerging adults tend to have residential instability, due to their exploration of different possibilities and frequent changes as it relates to education, work and intimate relationships. They have the most freedom they will ever have in their lives as they are less obligated to social relationships and more focused on their own independence and autonomy. This stage of instability and freedom likely allowed many of the participants in this study the ability to move abroad as a part of their learning experience, contributing to their educational experience and personal development into adulthood.

Emerging adults tend to be self-focused but not selfish or self-centered, and open to the perspectives of others. Those experiencing an international practicum in this stage have the opportunity to explore their identity in a new culture, where they experience new perspectives. Emerging adults are also in the “age of possibilities,” with the sense that they will accomplish their goals in life to a greater degree than is actually typical. Emerging adults see this stage of life as an opportunity to transform their lives independently of their parents. Arnett (2006) states that in this stage, “more than any period of life, emerging adulthood presents the possibility of change, because the range of choices for how to live is greater than it has ever been before and greater than it ever will be again” (p. 14). Due to the openness to the perspectives of others that is typical of emerging adults, an international practicum during this critical period is likely to inform participants’ personal perspectives, identity development, and life choices more so than during any other life stage. Next the anti-oppressive framework for this study is explored.

3.4.2.4 Critical Theory/Anti-Oppressive Framework

Critical theory acknowledges oppression throughout history and shows a concern for oppressive structures that exist today, and the need for change that reduces oppression and leads towards empowerment (Creswell, 2007; Fook, 2002). This theoretical perspective brings awareness to privilege as a factor in oppression. As revealed in the literature review, there is a concern for the development of anti-oppressive practice methods in international learning, which is based on critical theory. Although the focus of this research is not to interview people from oppressed groups, but actually people who have been privileged enough to study abroad as part of their higher education, the importance of a critical, anti-oppressive theoretical approach to international social work, as noted in the literature review, influences this framework. Critical perspectives on multiculturalism hold the view that “that self-reflection promotes change of

perspective” (Sinseros, p. 5, 2008). The self-reflective process developed through the interview questions allowed for discovery of potential critical, anti-oppressive perspectives as outcomes from the participants’ lived experiences. Critical, anti-oppressive perspectives also informed the interpretation of the results of this study and were utilized as a means to evaluate how participants’ practice approaches had been impacted by their international experience. The combination of these theoretical perspectives informed the following methodology.

3.4.3 Sample and Recruitment Procedures

The final participants were eighteen social work graduates from the U.S. who completed a semester field practicum outside the U.S. as part of their social work studies. Participants have had the lived experience of a social work practicum abroad, and after graduation, have pursued their professional career.

Eighteen participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Creswell, 2007; Liamputtong, 2009; Yegidis & Weinbach, 2006). Potential participants were made aware of the study through professional social work associations and personal connections with social work professors. Information (See Appendix A) was sent out through listservs, email, and Facebook, requesting interested applicants to make contact via phone or email. A list of participants was completed before beginning interviews.

Potential participants were first sent an information sheet about the study (See Appendix B). They were asked to contact the researcher if still interested in the study. Twenty-four social workers expressed interest in the study. I followed up with an email or telephone call to answer any questions and to find out the nature of their experience and if they met the needed criteria for the study. If they did not meet the criteria for the study, they were told they were not eligible. If

a person was eligible and still interested in being interviewed, they were sent an information sheet and consent form, and asked for additional information for arranging an interview.

In addition to meeting the criteria of having completed a semester long international practicum, participants were selected so a range of factors could be represented. Within the limits of those indicating interest in participation in the study, both male and female respondents were sought. As well, there was variation in the location where the international field practicum was completed, in the degree completed (BSW vs. MSW), in the time elapsed since their practicum, in the type of university they attended, and in the area(s) of employment since graduation.⁹ The effort to build as much variation as possible in the sample of respondents increased after the study had the minimum number of respondents (i.e., 12). The final six chosen respondents increased the diversity of the study sample.

In the end, eighteen individuals who met the criteria for the study, yet had a range of diversity of experiences, were interviewed for the study. Interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time, ideally in person, however when that was not possible interviews were arranged by phone or Skype.

3.4.4 Interview Process

Interviews were arranged approximately a week before they took place. They were conducted in private settings, including college campus meeting rooms, private offices, and library meeting rooms. Before beginning the official interview, I became acquainted with participants by engaging with them in a general social conversation related to the setting of the interview, the college they graduated from, any personal connections related to how they were referred to the interview and their current workplace. My social work practice knowledge and

⁹ I also attempted to find participants with racial diversity; however did not find any participants who were not Caucasian.

experience helped guide this process of engaging and building rapport with interviewees. Once rapport was built I asked participants if they had any questions about the study or the interview before beginning the interview process.

3.4.5 Data Collection

Eighteen semi-structured, intensive interviews were conducted, each lasting one to one and a half hours. At the beginning of the interview, the consent form (See Appendix D) was reviewed and signed (if participant did not do this ahead of time) and then demographic information was collected on a facesheet (See Appendix E). This allowed me to have certain aspects of the participants' experiences recorded so that I could refer to them during the interview process and also utilize them as a means of comparison during analysis. A general interview guide with open-ended questions was used (See Appendix G). The prompts in this guide were informed by the literature review. As Lofland et al. (2006) suggest, the interview guide was utilized in a flexible format. The interview prompts were reminders of topics of discussion, allowing the conversation to take a natural flow, varying somewhat from interview to interview. I began the interview by telling participants the purpose of the interview would be for them to describe the story of the practicum and how their experience influenced them and their social work practice and perspectives, highlighting specific experiences they had along the way. I encouraged them to share both the positive and negative perceptions and related experiences. Interviews were recorded and, later, transcribed by me or by a research assistant¹⁰.

A complete interview guide is available in Appendix G and is based on the following information. First participants were asked to talk about their motivations for study abroad and the process they went through in preparation for their international field practicum. Next they were

¹⁰ Research assistants were not given names of participants and signed a required form to keep information confidential.

asked to describe significant experiences during their practicum experience. After responding in an open ended manner, they were asked to discuss the following: language issues, specifics regarding their internship experience, supervision, feelings of being alike or different than the dominant population, and any significant relationships and friendships built in the community they studied. They were asked to also discuss any missing components or weaknesses they felt existed in their program or personal experience. Then they were asked to describe their transition home and any related experiences that were significant to them.

After participants described their international experience and any related perceptions or feelings, they were asked how they felt these experiences influenced their personal and professional development, including career goals, practice approaches, and worldviews. If they had not already explored this area, they were asked to discuss how their experiences influenced their perspective of social work, cross-cultural and international social work, aid and development. To allow participants to further explore the outcomes of their international practicum, they were asked how they felt their practice would be different if they had not had this study abroad experience.

Participants were prompted to explore any regrets or changes they would have made if given the opportunity to do another practicum. Related to this, they were asked if there were any aspects of their international practicum that they felt could have been arranged differently in order to have been better prepared for their social work practice. In conclusion, they were asked to be a “consultant” for the development of future study abroad programs through giving their perspectives on what experiences or components they felt were important to include in such experiences and/or if there was any other information they felt would be beneficial for the development of such programs.

After sixteen interviews, the data had become saturated, meaning the themes discovered through the participants' stories were becoming repetitive. The information received through the interview was not providing any new information or further insight into the study (Cresswell, 2007). However, two more interviews were conducted with participants with varied demographic information, which added more diversity and further depth to the study¹¹. This resulted in eighteen total interviews.

3.4.6 Data Analysis

Lofland et al.'s (2006) methods were utilized for data analysis. Relevant field notes were recorded immediately after the interview in order to record impressions and analytical ideas. This process contributed to the development and refinement of further questions to be asked in future interviews. Analysis of the first interviews also contributed to the addition of a new prompt related to how the internship experiences impacted participants' views of cross-cultural and/or international social work practice. I did not explicitly use this prompt in the first four interviews, but all of the participants discussed at least one way their experiences impacted their cross-cultural or international worldviews and/or practice approaches. By the fifth interview, I began to use this prompt as it not only naturally fit into the flow of the interviews, but also directly related to the critical, anti-oppressive theoretical framework of the study and allowed the participants the opportunity to explicitly articulate their views of international and cross-cultural practice.

This process of constant comparison also helped me to develop initial codes, and to see that the data was saturated, which Creswell (2007) describes as "looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained does not provide further insight into the category" (p. 160).

Transcribed interviews were inputted into Atlas.ti computer software, which was utilized as a

¹¹ One was a male who had studied in Canada, which contributed to more gender diversity and experience in a developed country. The other had the unique experiences of now living and practicing social work in the country of her placement.

platform for organizing of the data. Then data was interpreted through open or initial coding, by looking for major categories. These categories included: experiences that participants had during their study abroad program, outcomes of their experiences, and suggestions for future development of programs. I then went through a process of focused coding, which Lofland et al. (2006) describe as building on initial coding by “beginning after the initial coding is well under way and has accumulated; by using a selected number of expanding or more analytically interesting initial codes to knit together larger chunks of data; and by using these expanding materials as the basis for asking more focused and analytical questions” (p. 201). These focused codes developed into the analysis of the data.

In combination with coding, Lofland et al.’s (2006) strategy of memoing was also utilized to make note of ideas regarding themes based on the perspectives of the participants, overall connections and other ideas to help assist in the methodological process and analysis. This began as memos and further developed into the analytical themes, written in longer form. These notes contributed to the completed analysis.

Relevant outliers were also analyzed to look for experiences unique to participants in order to pay attention to any contradictory patterns. This process is consistent with Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) concept of “negative case.” Outliers were compared and contrasted to common themes identified and utilized, which helped to both confirm emerging patterns, while bringing awareness of any exceptions to common themes.

Member checking was utilized in order to validate the accuracy and credibility of the interpretation of each interview (Creswell, 2007; Lofland et al., 2006). A summary of the interpretation of each interview was shared with the participants so they could give any further clarity or feedback. After the interviews were transcribed, but before coding was completed, a

summary of each participant's interview was emailed to them, asking them to respond to correct any inaccuracies in this initial summary and interpretation. If they did not respond back after the initial email, the email was resent, stating that if I did not hear back from them, the information was assumed to be accurate. The majority of the feedback received noted the interpretation was accurate; any inaccurate information was corrected based on participant feedback. Next, human subjects and related ethical issues are discussed.

3.5 Human Subjects/Ethical Issues

The standards of the Tricouncil Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Participants and the U.S. Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects were strictly adhered to throughout the process of this research study. Approval was obtained from both Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (Appendix I) and through Malone University's Human Research Committee (Appendix H). Research began only after the approval was received from Memorial University and Malone University's¹² ethics boards.

3.5.1 Informed Consent

Participants both verbally agreed and signed the informed consent waiver form (Appendix D). They were informed of the purpose of the study, general procedures, foreseeable risks and benefits, measures to ensure confidentiality, limits to confidentiality, their right to withdraw from the study or to have their data withdrawn at any time, and contact information for any questions and concerns they had.

¹² Malone University is my place of employment and requires all faculty to obtain approval from their research board.

3.5.2 Confidentiality

Participants were informed that throughout the research process their raw data would be kept confidential and their names will not appear in research reports. The raw data has been stored in a locked location and only those involved in the research were able to see the data (Liamputtong, 2009).¹³ Although quotes are displayed in qualitative results, confidentiality is maintained by using pseudonyms. Participants were informed that they can see a full report of the research data at any time.

3.5.3 Risks to Participants

In carrying out the research it is important to consider ethical concerns in human research in order to protect participants from injustice or harm. Although the participants were a low risk population, talking about experiences from the past had the potential of being an emotional experience. During and after the qualitative interviews, if I assessed any risk of harm to a participant related to the study, I was prepared to encourage anyone who needed further counseling to see a counselor or therapist. I was ready to refer him/her to someone appropriate in their residential area. This information was given to participants as part of their informed consent.

3.5.4 Benefits to Participants

Participants were also informed of the benefits of the study. The benefits of this study are believed to outweigh the risks. Participants may have benefited through reminders of the impact of their study abroad experience on their development as a professional. Some of the participants, gave unsolicited feedback after their interviews were complete, expressing that sharing their story did benefit them as a form of debriefing and a reminder of the impact of their experiences.

¹³ This includes transcribers, my supervisor or other research consultants.

The aim of this study is to aid in the development of future study abroad programs in order to help maximize positive experiences and minimize negative experiences that lead towards positive outcomes of international practicums abroad both for the participant and those that they serve professionally. Participants were informed that their shared experiences, as part of the research results, may benefit educators, practicum supervisors and program administrators to help them understand how international practicum experiences contribute to participants' career and practice approaches. This learning may help administrators develop effective international practicum experiences that benefit both the participant and the community served.

3.5.5 Research Rigor

Steps have been put in place to help reduce error and bias through increasing the transformability, confirmability, trustworthiness, and credibility of the study, all of which increase the rigor of qualitative studies (Liamputtong, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). First transferability will be discussed.

3.5.5.1 Transferability

In qualitative research, techniques of transferability help the study to be applicable to a variety of contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to select participants with a degree of variation, which Lofland et al. (2006) describes as “pushing the researcher to consider ways of looking beyond the most convenient contexts or those to which role grants him primary access” (p. 93). Although participants all had the common experience of an international practicum during their social work studies, purposive sampling provided “maximum variation,” as Creswell (2007) describes, in order to have “diverse variations” with “common themes” (p. 126-7). A variety of methods were utilized to look for participants from different universities who studied in different locations and diverse study

abroad programs. I also chose to interview participants who had a variety of time since their international practicum, which provided another point of difference. The diversity of the sample allowed for a means of comparison in order to see if meanings of unique experiences apply in other contexts, which increases the transferability of the study, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). The rich and thick descriptions of the results of this purposive sampling also help to increase the transferability by confirming, from the participants' words, the themes that develop through the study.

3.5.5.2 Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research helps the researcher ensure a reduction in research bias with findings based on the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's opinions and interest (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Recording and transcribing the words of the interviews verbatim, along with providing rich and thick descriptions within the research report, ensures accuracy of information, increasing the confirmability of the study. In addition, I bracketed my personal experiences and perspectives, which Tufford and Newman (2012) describe as mitigating "the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the project" (p. 81). This started through personal reflexivity, and then continued through utilizing field notes, memoing and step-by-step coding process through a constant comparison of data, which further increased the confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.5.5.3 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness and credibility provide confidence in the accuracy of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I conducted member checking by providing a summary of the interview to the participants, and adapting the results based on their feedback, which ensures

accuracy of the interpretation of the data. This helped to confirm the data presentation and analysis, and increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Lofland et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.5.5.4 Research Bias

Researcher bias has the potential of influencing sound ethics; therefore the researcher must be aware of her biases due to her personal experiences and opinions formed related to study abroad outcomes (Rubin & Babbie, 2001). However, Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that no research can be separated completely from bias. Self-awareness and utilization of biases in a positive rather than detrimental way can allow for personal experience to be strength rather than a detriment to the study.

Although my experience in international field practicums influenced my interest in this study and informed the study, I still diligently worked to stay neutral and focused on the perspectives of the participants as was described through the process of bracketing as method of increasing the confirmability of the study. The rich and thick descriptions based on the participants' perspectives, and confirmed through member checking, help to protect the results from this bias.

I did utilize contacts within my own network and interviewed some former students, which did have the potential to bias the study; however no participants had a current working or student relationship with me, which prevented a power differential with the researcher from infringing on ethical practice and influencing bias. This previous relationship may have allowed for a quicker development of rapport, which added depth and richness to the information received through the interview process. This reliance on contacts within my network was counter balanced, by advertising for participants and finding participants with experiences from a variety

of practicum placements, the majority of whom I did not personally know nor was I familiar with their international practicum settings. Although this qualitative study has many strengths, it is also important to discuss the limitations to the study.

3.6 Limitations

Although qualitative research is the best method for the study, there are still limitations to all research studies. Qualitative research and its subjective nature can be seen as less rigorous than positivist quantitative studies. Qualitative research is also time consuming. For this reason there are less participants than a potential quantitative study using a survey, therefore it cannot be measured for validity and reliability under the same criteria as quantitative studies.

Although diversity was added to the study through purposive sampling, this diversity was limited to the number of interested and available participants. It would have been beneficial to have more participants from countries considered developed as well as more participants from parts of the world with less participants, such as Latin America. It also may have been beneficial to compare the experiences of participants of social work practicums abroad to that of other study abroad students who experienced more classroom study and/or were from other majors of study. Although these variations would be interesting, they may have been even more time consuming. Adding a comparison to participants from classroom study abroad programs may have also limited the depth and breadth that occurred in this study in order to answer the research question.

Despite limitations, due to the limited research in this area, qualitative research of this nature was the best research for this study as it provided the emotional depth needed to answer the research question and to draw out “undiscovered” themes that were not found in previous literature (Padgett, 2008). This is particularly important due to the growing interest in this

subject, but the limited nature of empirical research on the outcomes of international field practicums from the perspectives of the participants.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This research methodology was designed to explore the experiences of participants in international field practicums and how those experiences have impacted their career choices and practice approaches. This chapter describes the research questions and purposes of the study. The steps taken to formulate the research question were described, including the researcher's position which informs the research process. Next the rationale for a qualitative design was discussed, followed by the theoretical framework for the study and specific research design for this study. Sampling and recruitment procedures were explained, leading to the process for interviewing the eighteen participants in the study. The process of data analysis was then described, utilizing Lofland et al.'s methodology for qualitative research. Ethical issues related to human subjects were discussed, including informed consent and steps to ensure confidentiality, followed by a description of risks and benefits. Finally, steps taken to ensure rigor through increasing the transformability, confirmability, trustworthiness, and credibility of the study have been described, followed by limitations to the study. Now a rich and thick description of the data will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Introduction to the Participants and their Stories

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of respondents' stories related to their international practicum experiences. It includes demographic information and descriptive data about the study's participants and presents a summary of the stories of their lived experiences. An outline summary of participants' interviews was sent to them to check for credibility and trustworthiness, prior to completing this chapter.

4.1 Descriptive Data

Interviews took place between June 2012 and September 2012. Through purposive sampling efforts were made to look for participants with a variety of demographics and experiences. These areas of variation included: a range of time since their practicum, master's and bachelor's level programs, male and female, regions of the world, and types of universities.¹⁴ Details related to the relevance of these demographics and their significance to the study are presented next. A summary of this overall data and related descriptions are presented in table format in Appendix J.

Eighteen social work graduates participated in the study (see Table 4.1). Fourteen participants were female, four were male. This ratio is a fairly typical of the ratio of female to male social workers and participants of study abroad, as more females chose to study social work and study abroad. Without intention, all of the participants were Caucasian U.S. citizens. Therefore the results of this study are most relevant to the impact of international practicums on participants from the dominant culture in the U.S.

¹⁴ The main sample criteria was a completed a semester social work practicum abroad. Although a range of experiences in these areas was sought after, there were limitations to this purposive method due to a limited number of people interested and available for interviews.

Table 4.1: Period of Studies		
	Bachelor's in Social Work	Master's in Social Work
Number of Participants¹⁵	14	5
Percentage of Participants	77%	28%

As shown in Table 4.1 fourteen participants completed an international practicum during their bachelor's degree in social work, and five participants completed their practicum during their Master's in Social Work (one completed an international practicum during both her Master's and Bachelor's programs). Although I sought out diversity, there were more BA level participants who met the criteria and were interested and available in the study. Due to life stage and circumstances offering them more flexibility to travel, more BA level students may choose to do a practicum abroad, which may explain these results.

Table 4.2: Age of Participants	Range	Mean	Median	Mode
Age at Time of Practicum	19-28 years	22.9	22	21
Time Since Practicum	.08-18 years	4.82	3	2

The time lapse since participants' practicums ranged from one month to sixteen years. At the time of their interview the age range was 19 to 40 years old; the age range at the time of their international practicum was 19 to 28 (See figure 4.2). As discussed in the theoretical section, Americans between the age of 18 through mid to late twenties are typically in the emerging adult

¹⁵ One participant had two study abroad experiences, one during her undergraduate social work program and one during her Master's in Social Work, therefore 19 experiences are displayed in the tables and discussed in the results.

state, a stage of identity exploration. According to theorist, Arnett (2006), in this stage most people are “making enduring choices that will set the foundation for their adult lives” (Arnett, p. 8). This stage provides great chance for the international practicum to impact their identity, growth and development, and ultimately their career choices and practice approach.

As mentioned in the methodology section, participants were sought with a variety of years since their practicum. This allowed the opportunity to explore how perceived outcomes may change with increased time since their international practicum. At the time of the interview, some were in early stages of identify formation and the related impact on their career choices and practice approaches since their practicum; others had more time to develop their identity as it relates to career choices and practice approaches.

Table 4.3 University Type	State University	Private non- faith affiliated university	Private Christian University
Number of Participants (n)	7	2	10
Percentage of Participants	36%	10%	50%

Participants in this study are from a variety of types of universities and colleges. Table 4.3 presents this data. Although participants were not sought from a particular type of university, the number who came from state or non-faith affiliated universities compared to faith-based Christian universities was almost even, with one participant having completed her undergraduate at a Christian university and her master’s at a non-faith affiliated university. Although, there were no reasons to expect differences based on university type, this aspect was maintained in

order to see if there were difference between the motivations, significant experiences and outcomes of experiences in the midst of this difference.¹⁶

Table 4.4: Country Categories							
Region of the World	North America	Central America	South America	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Asia	Africa
Participants (n)	3	2	1	2	5	1	5
Percentage of Participants	16%	11%	.05%	.11%	28%	.05%	28%
Development Status	Developed* (Canada, Northern Ireland, South Africa)			Developing* (All other countries)			
Participants (n)	5			14			
Percentage of Participants	27%			78%			
*Based on CIA World Factbook categories in 2008							

There is variety in the sample with respect to the country where participants completed their international practicum. As seen in Table 4.4, participants completed practicums in Canada (n=2), Mexico (n=1), Dominica (n=1), Guatemala (n=1), Ecuador (n=1), Northern Ireland (n=2), Romania (n=5), India (n=1), Ghana (n=1), Uganda (n=3), and South Africa (n=1). Table 4.4 displays practicum placements by region of the world and development status per the CIA World Factbook. Fourteen (78%) participants were in economically developed countries; five (27%) were in developing countries. Related to economic development, these countries also have varying types of social welfare programs, with Northern Ireland and Canada's programs considered more developed than the U.S. (Morgan, 2013). Country categories related to economic and social development were not originally sought after; however once potential participants who had studied in Northern Ireland and Canada expressed interest, more participants were sought who had had experiences in nations considered developed, to explore if

¹⁶ It is important to note that those at secular universities may or may not identify with their faith to as great or to a greater degree than those at faith based universities. Faith perspectives were only explored when the participant chose to discuss this as an aspect of their experiences and outcomes of their experiences.

there was any difference in their experiences and outcomes as compared to participants in countries considered developing. A discussion of the notable similarities and differences in their learning will be presented in the analysis.

Table 4.5: Language Fluency			
	Fluent in at least one of the official languages	Lacked fluency in common spoken language	Lacked Fluency in Primary Language, but took course
Participants (n)	13	14	5
Percentage of Participants	72%	78%	28%

Related to participants' experiences during their practicum was their language proficiency and how this affected their overall experience. As Table 4.5 displays, 75% of the participants were fluent in at least one of the official languages of the country where they studied. Although not required by all programs, the interview process revealed that many student participants were required to know the official language of the country of their international practicum.¹⁷ However, 78% said they lacked fluency in one of the languages that was spoken commonly by the community and their clients, which influenced their communication abilities and their overall experiences. It is important to see how this impacted experiences during their international practicum.

¹⁷ For most students this was English, but three participants spoke Spanish.

Table 4.6: Current Field of Work (These categories are not mutually exclusive)	n=	Percentage
Domestic Practice with U.S. Residents	16	89%
Administration	6	33%
Child Welfare	6	33%
Clinical/Mental Health	3	17%
Employment	3	17%
People with Disabilities	3	17%
Older Adults	2	11%
Overseas/International Development	2	11%
Refugees/Immigrants	2	11%
Criminal Justice	1	5.5%
LGBT Clients	1	5.5%
Medical	1	5.5%
University/College instructor	1	5.5%
Urban Community Development	1	5.5%

Finally, as the goal of this research is to explore how participants' international experiences impact their career choices and practice approaches, the areas of practice that the participants have been involved in since their international practicum are explored. As seen in Table 4.6, at the time of their interview most participants were practicing in the U.S. within a variety of fields of practice. Chapter 5 and 6 will further discuss the outcomes of participants' experiences as they relate to their career choices and practice approaches. The following data presentation arranged by participant will explore more details on how their international practicums have impacted their career choices and practice approaches.

4.2 Participants and their Stories

The stories of each participant are presented in chronological order of time since their practicum, from the participant with the most recent practicum (1 month) to a practicum that was the longest length of time from the time of the interview (18 years). Each section describes a

summary of an interview, highlighting the aspects of their experience that were perceived as most significant, starting with experiences leading up to the practicum and then followed by significant experiences during their practicum, and concluding with perspectives on the impact of their international practicum once they returned home and began practicing as professionals.

The prompts that guided the interviews were informed by the literature (See Appendix G). The topics presented in each section were based on the experiences expressed as most significant to the participant. The major topics discussed include: motivations for their international practicum, the significant experiences that occurred with orientation, the practicum experience, supervision, living in the community (including housing, experiences of feeling different than the majority, and relationships built), the impact of the experience since their return home, followed by their recommendations for the development of international practicums. An analysis of the major themes developed from these interviews is presented in Chapter 5.

4.2.1 Katrina

Katrina studied at a small private university on the East Coast of the United States. She completed her practicum her final semester of her senior year, just before participating in the interview. She is currently working in an after school program for children, while considering other career possibilities. Previous to her practicum abroad, Katrina had studied abroad in Australia. Her study abroad experience prior to her international practicum was not a field practicum. After this semester abroad she went to Dominica with her university for ten days, before to her semester study abroad experience there. After this experience, she was asked if she wanted to study in Dominica for a semester, to be in the first group of students from her college to do a semester practicum there. This was her only social work field practicum during her

studies. She decided to go because she thought it would be a great opportunity. Prior to her ten day trip to Dominica, she had an orientation in the form of a class about the country to learn about the culture, language, government and history.

While in Dominica for her semester experience, she stayed with another study abroad student in an apartment attached to the house of a local pastor. Through living like local people, she learned more about the simplicity of life, living without certain comforts of home, such as continual warm water, air conditioning, and internet at home.

While in Dominica, Katrina felt she really “stuck out.” She is Caucasian and the other student with her was African American, so she noticed how different their experiences were.

Sometimes it was neat because I feel like people are more likely to talk to you because they’re like, “oh, you’re different.” visually, it’s apparent. But then, at the same time it was rough cultural-wise because I really... just wanted to go and kind of see (things), and like observe...it was really hard to observe things without being noticed... I would rather be in the background.

Katrina pointed out that even though she felt different, she always felt safe. English was the official language of Dominica, so she was able to converse and practice in English, but she admitted that accents were thick and hard for her to understand.

For her internship, Katrina worked with a U.S. based non-government organization (NGO). She had about an hour long commute to another village for her internship. During her internship, she conducted interviews with local people. While at her internship, she felt she had more macro focused opportunities. Much of her work included observation, preparing presentations and organizing data, but she also did home and school visits. She wished she could have done more hands-on work. She had a room-mate who was also from her college, but interned at a different location, which was a Dominica based NGO. She said it was interesting to learn from the comparison between their experiences at two different agencies.

While in Dominica, her overall experience felt quite different than when she was in Australia, which was more of a “social” experience with other college students. She felt it was helpful to have one fellow student in Dominica, her room-mate, who she could have discussions with about their experience; however Katrina also felt more feelings of “solidarity.” This allowed her “to take time and reflect” on her experiences, compared to her previous semester abroad when she was in a different environment. She felt closer to local people; especially the town council who helped arrange her and her room-mate’s time in Dominica. During her time in Dominica compared to Australia, she also had more times to do activities on her own within the community, such as join a hiking group and get to know the people from a church her room-mate attended. While interacting with people in the community, she noticed there were a lot of young pregnancies and it was very acceptable to be pregnant at a young age without being married. She was able to have some good conversations with her supervisor about this as a comparison to the U.S. culture.

Her supervisor was a Dominican woman, the program manager for the NGO she worked with. She did not have a social work background, but had some U.S. training, which helped them to understand each other’s perspectives. “Because she was in that situation herself (in the U.S),” she also took time to explain differences between countries, which was helpful to Katrina. Katrina also had a field practicum seminar class by Skype with class-mates in the U.S. This was more of a check-in time, where they discussed various issues, and a time for them to feel supported, but Katrina could see this being helpful to some students who needed more support. She also emailed back and forth with her professor which she said was very helpful.

When asked about how her experiences have impacted her, Katrina shared that she learned to take initiative on her own. She also said she appreciated “seeing the things I learned

from class being put into play.” She also learned to be “more observant of people” and to not assume things about people and stereotype them. She remembered her professors saying, “no one’s ever fully culturally competent. You never get 100% there” and she found this to be true. She felt the best way to work towards cultural competency was to observe, listen and ask questions.

She also learned some comparisons between how worldviews reflect differing social welfare policy and practices in the U.S compared to Dominica. For example, she learned that corporal punishment was illegal there, unlike in the U.S.; however, like the U.S. there were different personal beliefs on the issue.

Katrina felt that during her field practicum in Dominica, she learned more about the macro level of social work practice, including funding issues. Before these experiences, she had more of a micro mindset. She said in social work classes her professors said:

No matter where you go you’re always going to be involved in all levels of social work, it’s always going to be there. ...the first couple social work classes I was like, “no, I just want to do micro...I’m just going to do micro” [laughs]. But it is interesting because even if you do get into the field in micro, there are still policies that affect that, you know. So I kind of noticed that within my agency...I understood the big picture more.

Before this experience Katrina was interested in doing something international, but her field practicum confirmed this desire. She now has interest in working with the Peace Corps. Katrina learned some new practice perspectives related to international social work and international relations. She stated clearly that she did not learn these through classes at her home university, but her personal perspectives on international practice developed much through the comparison between her room-mate’s Dominica based NGO experience and her experience working with an American based NGO. She saw positives and negatives to how each was culturally relevant and developed new perspective:

Where my (internship) was, I had a solid structure, things were very routine, which is nice, but, and there's still room for creativity, too, I felt like. But for hers...she just didn't like how it was organized and things like that....I think it's good (to have American influence) because within the agency there's that structure....at the same time, but I don't think the interventions that they choose are American based...it's people from Dominica (staffing the agency). ...I just think that they kind of mold it in their own way... I feel culture should be preserved...because I don't think there's necessarily a right or wrong way for things, it's just kind of like what works in that area. I liked how (my internship) was because it wasn't like this, you know, originally American agency is forcing these things on people. So I didn't think it was invasive in that sense....that would be something I would pay attention to in the future. If I were to choose an agency to work for, I wouldn't want to be in an agency that's overbearing and, you know, trying to force something at all.

When asked to give input to others considering study abroad and/or developing study abroad programs, Katrina encouraged students to participate in such experiences. She thinks it was beneficial to have a class on the country, culture and language before going abroad. She thinks that it is very important to be living in the community, as compared to a dorm setting.

4.2.2 Michelle

Michelle was a student at a private Christian university in the Midwest when she experienced her practicum abroad. She had changed her major and ended up with an open semester. Based on a professor's suggestion, she decided to use this opportunity to study abroad through a program affiliated with her university. Michelle's practicum abroad in Uganda was completed about six months prior to our interview. She was currently acting as a home visit social worker for a Head Start preschool program.

Michelle participated in an orientation when she arrived in Uganda and then started her practicum. Michelle lived in a dorm with two other room-mates studying abroad, but the rest of the students in the dorm were local people. She expressed that the easiest relationships she built were developed with other study abroad students. She said it was helpful to process experiences with them. She did develop relationships with some of the local honors students too and realized

the importance of developing these friendships with local people in order to understand their culture and learn from them. They also did two short term home stays with families. She felt that the home stays were meaningful to her and helped her to understand the family structure, culture, and develop relationships with local people.

Along with her internship, Michelle participated in coursework with other students, including a course that helped them to apply faith to their experiences and process their experiences. She found this to be a positive “tool to process” difficult questions and situations. She took a Ugandan language course as an elective. Even though English was the official language, she expressed that “it was helpful to learn at least some basics and to be able to try to communicate. She said “local people just really appreciated efforts to try to learn their language, rather than expecting them to be able to have perfect English to talk to me.” They also had a weekly field practicum seminar with the other social work students.

Michelle’s internship was at a local NGO that had a residential home for street children and a combined school for these children and others from the community. She was involved in educational presentations and community outreach. She felt her relationships with staff and other Ugandan students that interned there were positive and a lot of mutual learning took place. Michelle sometimes felt that she was working more at a Christian ministry site than a social work placement, which she expressed was not necessarily a negative, as “faith was important to the people there,” but sometimes she “wanted to do more social work” and be out of the classroom more. Even so, she felt she learned skills related to social work including, teaching, cross-cultural skills, and a greater understanding of marginalized and oppressed people groups.

Michelle said the language barrier was difficult. When discussing how it was to be immersed in a culture different than her own, she stated:

There was never a break from it, ever, for 4 months you were the stand out, different person and it wasn't something that like, "Oh if I just don't talk, they won't know." It was visible 100% of the time that I was different...having that experience of being the minority and being the different one, I think was even helpful.

When discussing the feelings of being different at her internship, Michelle pointed out that she was the only white person at her internship. She always felt different, but she thinks it was a good experience to feel different. However, she said that "language was a huge barrier," but she made the most of this experience and chose to learn how to communicate without language, which helped her to develop new ways of building relationships and show understanding to those she worked with.

At her internship site Michelle had a Ugandan supervisor. This relationship was uncomfortable at times as they struggled with cultural understanding of one another, but she felt this was good and pushed her to be challenged more. For the purposes of her university requirements to have a social worker as a supervisor, she was officially supervised by an American with an MSW who was on staff with the study abroad program. She helped her make connections to social work which made the experience more meaningful to her professional learning. She said she is not sure if she would have made it through her experience without this support. She did mention that she wishes she would have spent more time discussing practice approaches, instead of focusing mainly on the more macro issues of international social work.

The study abroad program did a formal debriefing retreat before Michelle left Uganda. She said this time was guided and helped direct the students to self-reflect. They discussed the transition home and what to expect. Michelle felt her transition home was more natural than she anticipated. At first it was hard to discuss her experiences, but over time it became more natural. She really struggled as to if the experience had truly changed her life as she felt it had not

changed her as much as she would have expected; however when reflecting back there were ways this experience did influence Michelle's perspectives and future social work practice.

Michelle stated that she learned through the more "extreme cultural differences" than she would have experienced at home. She acknowledged how social work is a profession for the oppressed, but she now has a greater desire to work with people who are the most oppressed and marginalized in society. The language barrier helped her to learn to work with a translator, which she feels will be a helpful skill in the future. She also said that living in an uncomfortable place for an entire four months "helped me to be comfortable with not putting my own personal values into the work that I do." The related example she gave is as follows:

I'm not shocked to go into a house and sit on the floor and work with kids now, like where it's trashed or if there were cockroaches...I don't have to hide my face and my shock and my horror, because I lived with cockroaches and mice in my dorm room for 4 months and it just takes a lot of the shock value out of (these) differences...I think that's been really helpful and really meaningful... I've experienced worse and worse seemed normal and it seemed ok and so, things like a dirty house ... that's not necessarily always a safety hazard for children... kind of taking a lot of my personal bias out of it.

She expressed that this experience has helped her to be able to focus more on what is actually needed in a home, rather than the superficial things. She believes that her practicum abroad may have "sped up" this process of learning for her, even if she may have eventually learned these skills.

Michelle said that this experience gave her a broader view of what social work is; however unexpectedly, through this experience, Michelle discovered that she felt best suited for doing social work in the U.S. rather than abroad. She believes this was a beneficial experience, because if she had not studied abroad, she may have always wished she was practicing somewhere overseas. Still, she can see herself working with immigrants at home, but not living abroad.

When asked about her views on international social work in general, Michelle admitted she is still struggling with her thoughts on this:

I'm still kind of wrestling with how I feel about whether sometimes international efforts are good or bad or helpful... I think I maybe have become a lot more in tune to ways that Americans (are) trying to help in other countries ...that sometimes it's not always actually helpful to the local people and so I think maybe that's partially why I'm hesitant about those things... seeing people there telling me that it's not always helpful and it's not always good, or that money is not always the answer or if you're not from that culture and you don't understand the cultural values, it's hard to help and it's hard to be effective.

She said she developed these thoughts based on conversations with local people and discussions they had in her Faith in Action course. She learned that there can be helpful efforts, but you have to first be the learner, not “not just being an expert.” She believes that positive international social work can take place, but it takes an effort.

Through these experiences, Michelle said, “I know less than what I started with.” Some examples she gave related to how faith and culture can be so intertwined, which had a spiritual impact on her and changed her perspectives on some theological issues. For example, her perspective changed on polygamy. In the Ugandan culture polygamy did not seem as bad as she perceived it to be. She said she has developed more openness to the diverse ways families live. Michelle expressed that she developed more cultural sensitivity through these experiences and the ability to be open minded and ask questions, but also a greater understanding and appreciation of her own cultural values too.

Overall, Michelle liked how things were arranged by her study abroad program, but said it was hard to manage all they were involved with, including class work, internship and travel. She enjoyed her coursework, but believes she would have benefited from more of a focus on her practicum more days of the week. She suggests a practicum that was more focused on professional social work experiences. She felt that she would have benefited from more

individual supervision as they mainly had group supervision. She strongly encouraged language study as a means for developing cultural sensitivity. Michelle believes her learning is still in process and said that the interview for this research study was part of this process of thinking about her experiences and learning from them. She wishes all social work students could have an experience abroad and recommends this type of experience for anyone.

4.2.3 Lindsey

Lindsey was pursuing her Bachelor's in Social Work at a state university and was looking for an opportunity to do her field practicum abroad. She had studied abroad shorter term three times prior to her international practicum. Her interview for this study took place one year after her international practicum. Through the study abroad coordinator at her university she found a practicum placement in India, which was affiliated with another university in the U.S. She had studied Asian religions previous to this so found this practicum idea interesting. Lindsey did not have any formal orientation, but she had some previous knowledge due to her studies. She also talked with people she knew from India as part of her preparation, which helped her in understanding the culture. A local college arranged and supervised her practicum.

Lindsey worked in an agency that had programs for women, including self-help, micro-finance, anti-human trafficking, HIV awareness and prevention, counseling, and a children's shelter. She rotated between these programs, which gave her a better understanding of the organization and programs within an international NGO. She was officially supervised twice a month by the dean of a college in the area where she studied. This supervisor was a local person who had experience working with North American students. Lindsey also had an on-site supervisor that helped with her field practicum contract and any other ongoing issues. Her

supervision was meaningful in helping her discuss differences between countries. For example, Lindsey said:

We talked about differences, like the code of ethics that we use in the US, and she encouraged me to look up and compare the code of ethics in India for social workers... She was really experienced working with students from North America and she was much more familiar with North American culture so that she could explain those things.

Lindsey felt she stood out in India, due to looking different than the native people. She also did not always understand what was going on around her within the culture in general and at her field practicum, due to culture and language barriers.

There were definitely times when it was frustrating because there are always things that you just can't understand...you have to kind of step back and you know, figure out what's going on... it's just so different...being a minority and standing out... I think it makes you so much more aware of what it's like to be a minority and just aware that the little things that you take for granted as being a member of the majority.

Now, that Lindsey works with refugees; she feels this experience has helped her to have a better understanding of what it is like for them to be in a different culture.

In India, Lindsey lived with a host family, a friend's family. They were from an upper caste. She did not know the local language, but many people in the community spoke English. Due to cultural issues, she was always accompanied by someone when traveling, therefore always had a translator. When speaking about her host family, she highly recommended this being a part of any study abroad experience. She expressed:

It was really great just because I was in a home environment... hospitality is such a big thing in their culture, so I just always felt really comfortable and really invited there...there was always something going on...They took me, if they were going to the mall...they just kind of all planned a trip and got the whole family together and we all went ...I had to go to temple with them a couple times when they were going to do special things, so it was, I think it was a really great experience to be really immersed in the culture and still have a really comfortable environment.

She also said she learned much about the caste system. She was working with a low caste group of people, which led to discussions with her host family, who were from a higher caste, a life

experience quite different than that of her clients. However, through this experience she said she learned about her own misconceptions, from the perspective of her host family. She also learned of some surprising similarities between castes, such as all castes of people are at risk for human trafficking.

Lindsey's study abroad program and university did not provide any debriefing once she came home. She said it took her about five months to process all her experiences as they were very "intense." She particularly noted the situations of human trafficking and domestic violence that she experienced during her practicum as significant experiences that she needed time to process.

Lindsey said all of her experiences had a positive impact on her, including helping her to mature emotionally and develop more self awareness, but much of her focus in our conversation was on the cultural learning. The cultural learning that took place during her practicum has changed her worldview and influenced her practice approaches. Before her interview, Lindsey said she looked back at old journals. Through this process, Lindsey discovered that she didn't realize all of the impact of her experience until later on, when the "light bulbs came on." First, she said her understanding of extreme poverty was enlightened through this experience:

You know you always read about or see things about living in such extreme poverty but until you've spent so much time walking in it yourself and kind of seeing the sites and understanding you know, what's going on and what options they have or what lack of option they have, you don't have a way to comprehend... (Now) I can kind of more comprehend them, other extreme situations with the refugees that come and just, I know they're not like fully comparable but I think in some ways I can kind of understand a little bit more.

Lindsey spoke specifically about how these experiences have strengthened her view of cultural competency and helped her to be more aware of the cultural differences of her clients. She felt she experienced this change of viewpoint due to being immersed in a culture so different than her

own. She does not believe that it is possible to have the same kind of learning when one is in one's own culture, as "you can do a lot of things without having to understand their culture, but you might do a lot of things really horribly...first you have to understand their culture." These experiences have helped her to be more self aware.

From a more macro perspective, Lindsey expressed new perspectives of international worldviews and issues through her experiences.

(I) was exposed to so many different things and just being there and being immersed helped me to understand how ethnocentric Americans are a lot of times and how our policies are really. Our policies have such an impact on other countries....it was really interesting just to kind of step out of my own shoes and see things from other peoples' perspectives... it definitely makes you think, instead of just being very concerned about your own wellbeing...just to kind of think of things more globally, (it) brought attention to a lot of capitalistic trends going on, and you know what that really means for a lot of people.

Lindsey has learned to not take international development programs at face value, but to take a critical look at how they are empowering those they serve. She observed models of practice that were developed in the West and applied to Indian women. She expressed concern that some of these models may not be culturally appropriate due to the difference in cultural, particularly in relationship to women's roles in India as compared to Western nations. Lindsey desires to learn more about culturally appropriate international development models and do research on their success.

As Lindsey thinks about her future, she has an interest in continue to use her experiences and to work in the international arena of practice. We discussed graduate schools (MSW programs) that have an international emphasis, where she can continue to learn how to do culturally appropriate international development work.

When discussing recommendations for future international study abroad students, Lindsey highly recommended home stays to increase cultural learning. She also recommended

that students travel while abroad on trains or other public transportation in order to see and meet people. She also recommended language study as a part of every study abroad program. She suggested it would have been helpful to be a part of a program connected with a college in order to have a community of students to learn with. She also would have appreciated having a supervisor in the U.S. to Skype with, along with her Indian supervisor, to discuss her internship and the cultural differences she was experiencing. Finally, Lindsey recommends that students experience other forms of international travel before an entire semester abroad, as she believes this would help students be more prepared for cultural differences and perhaps reduce their culture shock.

4.2.4 Susan

Susan had completed her field practicum in Romania one year ago prior to this interview. She currently works as a caregiver for the elderly. Although, she does not consider her position traditional social work, she sought this position by choice. She wanted to do direct service work with the elderly, largely due to her work with the elderly during her international field practicum. Susan had never been on an airplane before going to Romania for her field practicum. It was one of Susan's life goals on her "bucket list." When presented with the idea of doing an international practicum, she felt it was the right opportunity for her.

When she arrived in Romania she could not speak the language. She felt this was a barrier, but she had a translator and was taking language classes as a requirement of the program, which she suggested should be a requirement for all programs. Susan expressed that it is important to begin to learn to communicate in people's native language, even if at a basic level. Although Susan wished she would have had more intensive language study and would have

practiced it more on her own, by the end of her time in Romania, she said she could understand much more and speak enough to do some home visits by herself.

Walking around the town she lived in, Susan often felt different than those around her as she looked different than the typical Romanian. She did not expect her red curly hair to stand out so much, but as people stared she realized, “wow, I guess I am different.” She appreciated these experiences as she said it helps “(you) step out of your own shoes and be in someone else’s shoes,” which she said now helps her to understand U.S. immigrants more, especially those who do not know English.

Susan’s official supervisor, with MSW training from the U.S., was the director of the program. She also had supervision on daily tasks from a Romanian trained social worker with a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work. This supervision was focused on daily activities and tasks. Her MSW trained social worker helped her to advance her thinking, giving her fresh perspectives on understanding the people she was working with and giving her new insight, which she expressed as very helpful to her experience.

Susan lived with a host family that had several children, but many were adults and not living in the home any more. She expressed that she did not see them a lot, as they were not home very much, so did not feel living with a host family was a particularly significant experience for her. Susan also expressed spending spare time with staff from the agency she interned with; however as she talked about her most meaningful experiences, she repeatedly noted that her most significant relationships built were with the elderly she worked with as an intern.

During her field practicum, Susan worked within an elderly program, program for at-risk teens and program for people with special needs. Susan felt devastated by the conditions she saw

people living in, the elderly in particular. She described it as “mind blowing,” that they could survive with little heat and food in very simple living conditions. Before this, she did not have a desire to work with the elderly, but her experiences in Romania motivated her to work with the elderly upon her return to the U.S.

Susan said it was difficult to leave Romania at the end of the semester as she was finally settling into the culture and learning the language. She stated:

I had a rough time... I was starting to pick up on the language; I was starting to be able to have conversations and I was building strong friendships and then it just flew by the last month. So it was really hard for me the last week saying good bye.

Once Susan was home though, she was glad to see friends and family. Her adjustment home was not difficult once she was home. Susan described that since coming home from Romania she has developed a different view of America and being “American.” This came through having the opportunity to step “outside of myself and feeling it from a different standpoint.” She feels Americans are lucky to have access to much,” but she now struggles with how Americans act like “We’re American, we’re the best, where if you’re not speaking English get out of this country...so being able to see the other side and that you’re an outsider was kind of awaking for me.” She had a particular struggle during 4th of July Independence Day celebrations. She said, “it’s the “United States,” we’re not united at all. We’re not “Land of the Free” no, we’re not we’re racist and we still have all these problems and it’s really a struggle for me.”

Susan’s international practicum also confirmed her desire to be a less traditional social worker.

I had a real struggle because I have trouble with boundaries and I know I cross a lot of boundaries probably like giving money, hugging, you know. I wasn’t very professional ...I’ve crossed boundaries...I don’t see myself as a social worker in the future... but I still like try to maintain...social work values as I’m working.

Even though Susan does not see herself being a traditional social worker, the model she learned in Romania, acted as a model to motivate her towards intergenerational work:

I want to work with teenagers, elderly, special needs, homeless, all the areas that need help, so what I want to do is just build, it would be like a YMCA but have it like [the agency in Romania] where you have different groups in the same place.

Although Susan liked the experience of being in a more grassroots agency, she wished she could have seen more of the application of what she feels is traditional social work. Even though she does not have the desire to do traditional social work, she feels she was less prepared for traditional social work due to the nature of the practicum placement. She believes the home visits she did helped her to experience some traditional social work and she said the fact that her university required her to do a research project helped her with some of the professional learning. However, Susan believed the practicum experience could have given her more opportunities to bridge the gap of professional learning, such as having her practice doing assessments, for example.

In conclusion, Susan believed that the impact of her experience was great. She concluded by expressing her desire to encourage other students to take advantage of such experiences, to “branch out” and “see another culture other than what you’ve been living.”

4.2.5 Carla

Carla completed her international practicum two and a half years prior to the interview, during her bachelor’s in social work program at a small private university. She was interested doing her practicum abroad, but her school required she know the language to go to a practicum site in Ecuador that she was interested in. She thought another option, India, would be too great of a cultural difference for her, so chose to go to Northern Ireland. She did complete another practicum in the U.S. upon her return.

Carla's professor helped prepare her for her international practicum. She said this preparatory experience was extremely beneficial. The study abroad program she was a part of also provided orientation. She felt that other students who she met in Northern Ireland who were not a part of this orientation missed out on its benefits.

While in Northern Ireland, Carla noted how surprised she was by the fact she felt different. Due to her darker features and less make-up compared to local people, she was often spoken to in Spanish or Italian at first. She did not like this at first, but then used it as a topic of conversation. Although people spoke English in Northern Ireland, she noted the difference in phrases and accents. She had listened to news online ahead of time and thought this helped her to be more prepared for the language differences. She felt like when she opened her mouth people treated her like a celebrity due to her American accent. She said looking different and experiencing being a minority within the culture brought about positive growth and learning.

Because I am a white female in America and I think can more easily blend or have a lot of access to privileges, I'm not used to standing out, so I think that was definitely helpful for me as a person as well to know what it's like to kind of feel a 'little isolated sometimes at points to because you don't feel like one of that population.

While in Northern Ireland, Carla lived with a host family for the first week. She then stayed in a dorm with local college students. She requested to live with local students, even though it would be less comfortable than staying with Americans. She believed that she developed mutual cultural learning through relationships with her flat mates. She had friends on both sides of the cultural and religious conflict within the country and said she could talk openly about the Troubles with them.

During her field practicum, Carla worked at a community arts center that used the arts, including dance and drama, with students in programs to promote self-esteem and to help bridge the gaps between Catholics and Protestants. Her practicum was more macro focused, which gave

her more experience with development issues, including funding and program implementation.

She felt as if she made more macro connections to the micro work she had been focused on while in her previous studies:

So I had learned to kind of shift my way of thinking into...It's "how does this one person's problem relate back on a broader scale?" It just made me think on a higher level and also make the connections of, "Ok, why is this happening?" and "This is not just pertaining to this one person but it's something of an area and a community"...it's definitely shifted my focus to look on a broader level and definitely made me want to go on to get a master's degree and focus more on policy or program evaluation.

She also noticed a difference in practice approaches due to a more developed social welfare system compared to the U.S. Due to the social services that existed, such as socialized medicine, there was less focus on basic human rights and more of a focus on higher level changes, such as the arts and other extracurricular opportunities. She said there was focus on elderly and children "at the top of the list...It was really neat to see the emphasis still on the elderly and kids' population and how important they are to the community. Interestingly, Carla also noticed that social work was more respected as a profession in the U.K. compared to the U.S. and it was more competitive to get into schools of social work.

Carla was officially supervised by her professor at home via email, which, she said, helped her make connections between her practice in Northern Ireland and her academic learning. Her professor helped her process her "anger" due to the lack of social welfare services in the U.S. compared to Northern Ireland. She also worked with the on-site director as a supervisor. She found him to be more biased about certain issues and was somewhat "anti-American," but this helped her to be more outspoken in sharing her perspectives, yet thoughtful about learning from his perspectives. She said this was a negative experience at first, but it turned into positive learning.

Carla's return home left her realizing she had changed:

When I first got there, I remember feeling, it was exciting and new, and then sometimes we have all these ideas of what it's going to be like and then when it plays out some things turn out differently than what you expected. So I was very ready to come home I think. And then when I got home, it was nice but then...I was so different and then I came back and my family expected me to just be the same person again, my friends, and I just wasn't, and I also went through this phase where I was a little bit angry with the United States and I was a little ashamed that I'm finding all these other programs that they have in these other countries like socialized medicine and thinking you know, how can we be a superpower and call ourselves the United States and we don't even have these things for our own citizens? Which I learned eventually that everything is a system and nothing is good or bad which was just a learning experience, but I definitely went through that phase of "Oh, you know, America's just, this is disgraceful; this is ridiculous.

Carla said she became more self-aware of her own culture through this experience and realized she was more of a community person than she thought due to her Italian upbringing. She has less of a black and white perspective on social and cultural issues now and has become more outspoken in sharing her perspectives with others. Now she often challenges others who she does not agree with. She learned that people, both at home and abroad, can be ethnocentric. This has made her see the deeper meaning behind why people think Americans are ethnocentric and think America is the best, for example. She said her new worldview sometimes "ruffled" her relationships with other Americans, but her experiences had challenged her to grow into a more confident and independent person.

Professionally, Carla learned that it is possible to meet people's basic needs on a universal/policy level and that basic needs can be considered a right not just a privilege. At a more micro level, Carla said her international experience has helped her to put into practice her academic learning regarding client-centered practice, in order to be more respectful of client's opinions. She works as a resident advisor for a college and as a case manager for people with HIV/AIDS. She feels her experiences abroad have helped her in understanding the cross-cultural

dynamics of her students from a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. She is glad she is working with people on the micro level now and gaining more experience in this work, but her experience abroad gave her a feeling that she can work with people on all levels of practice. These experiences gave her the desire to make a broader impact at the macro level of social work practice and return to graduate school focused on policy. Her experiences abroad have also enabled her to realize the complexity of issues affecting her clients with HIV and AIDs.

There's definitely a lot of other factors not just them having HIV, but poverty and there's so many other things that are happening on the social level, so it's definitely made me I think about bigger pictures, like our CEO level with funding and with the Pennsylvania Department of Health...that all trickles down and impacts my ability to do my job.

Carla said that if she had only had one practicum rather than one in the U.S and one abroad, she would have had a hard time deciding which one to choose. She expressed that she gained more life-learning experience from her practicum abroad, but more practical social work skills in her practicum in the U.S. She expressed that neither practicum was better than the other; they were just different forms of learning.

Carla encouraged students to go abroad earlier in their studies if possible. She noticed a difference between students who had gone abroad, and those who had not, in their ability to make connections in the classroom. When asked what she believed were important components of study abroad experiences, Carla felt that students should take advantage of online resources to learn about the culture and recent events. She believes Skyping with professors and class-mates at home can be beneficial for debriefing and making connections to social work education. She also said that living with people from the country was valuable, even if harder. She also suggested that programs organize debriefing upon students' return home.

4.2.6 Andrea

Andrea lived and studied at a state school in the south and completed her international practicum in Canada during her Master's degree in social work. Previous to her MSW studies she worked as a substance abuse counselor. Before she did her international practicum she had other field practicums in the U.S. She had always wanted to study abroad in order to experience other cultures. Her university required students to be fluent in the language of the country they were studying which, for her, was only English; therefore she completed a practicum in Calgary, Canada through an alliance they had with her university. When I met Andrea her practicum had been completed two years prior, at age 28. She is currently a therapist at an acute in-patient psychiatric hospital working primarily with patients with substance abuse and mood disorders.

Her university provided an orientation, but this orientation did not relate to studying in Canada, specifically. She said they acted as if everything was similar in Canada to the U.S. so orientation was not needed, but she discovered distinct differences between Canada and the U.S. She described her experience:

Overall I felt very similar ...like everything was a half step off...It wasn't you know, total culture shock. I could go to the grocery store; I could ride the bus; I could navigate things. Everything was just off of skew from what was normal for me.

Examples related to these feelings that she referred to, included practicalities such as understanding the banking system, attitudes of what was considered conservative versus liberal, and racial and ethnic diversity differences.

Andrea experienced cultural learning in Canada, beyond just learning about Canadian culture compared to the United States. She lived with a Belgium family, a Brazilian housemate, and experienced the overall the multicultural feel of the city compared to her home community:

(What) was really surprising to me was the multicultural nature of everything. At one point I walked with my host family to have dinner and we went out to a German pub and

we were sitting down to dinner and there was a couple from South Africa; there was a couple from France, a couple from Belgium. The other student that was in the house with me, he was from Brazil... Out of thirteen of us I think there were six countries represented and you know that was amazing to me. I've never been in experiences like that before.

Andrea completed her practicum at an addiction treatment center for women. She experienced differences between the policies and practices, compared to at home. She said it was easier to get treatment in Canada, compared to her experiences in the U.S. When discussing with her supervisor that people who did not qualify as addicts according to the DSM were receiving treatment, her supervisor responded by saying: "They still need help and they're asking for help so let's get them the big help first." Andrea compared this to the U.S. by saying:

It's totally opposite of our system where people start with outpatient treatment and if they fail that they maybe go to intensive outpatient treatment and if they fail that then they might get to do to rehab if they have insurance, and in Canada if somebody lived in the province and they want help, they've got help and there was no question of insurance and there was no question of had they failed a previous level of treatment before.

She is now frustrated in the U.S. when she sees people that want treatment and cannot receive it. Andrea misses this practice approach she experienced in Canada. She admitted seeing what she perceived as weaknesses to the Canadian healthcare system as she witnessed someone having to wait longer for cancer treatment, but then realized that in the U.S. faster treatment is only available for people with health insurance. Someone in the U.S. without health insurance may not receive proper treatment at all.

Supervision was a significant part of Andrea's learning, and through this supervision mutual learning took place:

We were able to process the differences. Like one of my assignments as part of my placement was to take the Canadian social worker's code of ethics and the US code of ethics and compare them and see the differences and we were able to talk about that and process that. You know, she was able to help explain to me the theory behind doing treatment versus someone who didn't meet criteria according to the DSM for addiction. And you know, we were able to talk about different theories and different models... I really enjoyed that discourse... it helped her too because she really enjoyed being able to

point out the differences 'cause there's things that happen here in the US that were totally foreign to them.

These experiences in comparing social welfare policy and practice have contributed to Andrea's current practice. She says:

Overall, experiences made me much more accepting of others, much more curious about other ways to deal with clients and patients, it helped me to explore and expand my horizon beyond just treatment here in the south east and what my university taught me, because I learned some different treatment modalities and treatment options that were never presented here and probably never will be...I'm more client-centered...I'm going to advocate for the client more. I'll support macro policy changes but like I said that's not really ever been my area of interest...I'm a lot more prone to advocate for someone going through rehab that wants it and fighting with insurance companies about it, you know it's impacted my definition of what an addict would be. I know we have the official DSM definition ...I'm not turning those people away even though they may not necessarily meet a DSM criteria for addiction.

Her experiences in Canada also opened her eyes to new, alternative treatment approaches. At home she learned more traditionally focused theories such as cognitive behavioral therapy and strengths based perspective, but in Canada she was able to attend a spirituality and social work conference in which she learned more about Aboriginal practices, and related rituals and ceremonies. She believed that in the U.S. a similarly titled conference would have focused mostly in Christianity and social work practice, without the inclusion of other forms of spirituality, such as what she learned in Canada. She continues to incorporate some of these native practices in her current practice, particularly when working with issues of grief as she has found non-traditional treatments from Aboriginal practice to be effective in helping people move past their grief.

Andrea felt that her experiences in Canada influenced her to challenge the status quo and question things more:

I think just my supervisor's openness to me challenging, you know, status quo for her and her realizing that what the status quo is for her is not for me...helped me more than anything, and you know, that's made me want to seek a supervisor here that has a similar

background...But it's frustrating...because of my experience up there I am much more likely to question you know a policy instead of just being told we can do this; show me the background you know.

Much like the other members of the study, Andrea recommended study abroad for all students. She strongly suggested that students stay with a host family and interact with people in the community beyond the other students in the program. She also encouraged other students doing practicums abroad to do things outside of their comfort zone. She felt that her university should have provided a better orientation and debriefing and not assume that because she was going to Canada, things would be the same as at home.

4.2.7 Lori

Lori had a friend who went to Uganda on a trip, which sparked her interest when she heard about the international practicum opportunity in Uganda. She prayed about it and kept hearing about Uganda, so felt she was supposed to go. She went through a study abroad program with which her university, a small Christian College, was affiliated. Her professor provided some orientation pre-trip and she also received an orientation packet ahead of time from the program. She did a few days of orientation with the other students once she arrived.

English was the official language of the country, but many other languages were spoken by the local people. The study abroad program offered a class on the local language, but it conflicted with her internship hours so she chose to not take it.

Lori stayed with a host family for 3 weeks total, spent two weeks in The Bush with her fellow students and spent the rest of the time at a residential campus with half Ugandan students from the University and half American students. Her room-mate was American. There were 32 other students in her study abroad program. Lori developed relationships with Ugandans who were also interns at the Ugandan Children's home to which she was assigned, but she admitted

that “it was so much easier to gravitate towards the Americans. I think that was something we fought against.”

Lori said that she felt very different than at home, as she could not blend in even if she wanted to. It was hard to get used to the fact that people wanted to touch her. In the midst of feeling different, she discovered similarities too. “Although your culture is different, at a base level you’re all the same... O, like, college girls are the same all around the world. But yet, this is so different. So, I think a little bit of both.” Even though people spoke English at her practicum placement, she still felt a “communication disconnect,” due to cultural differences. She said, “People communicate in such different ways and they’re not aware of that.” She stated that this:

gave me more patience when I came back to the US and just trying to understand a little bit more in terms of cultural competency when I’m here because I have been from the majority culture my entire life and never really felt weird or out of place or different. So I think it gave me a little bit more compassion and empathy for minority groups.

During Lori’s practicum at a Ugandan children’s home, she didn’t feel she was doing traditional social work. She worked with the children in the home and did a lot of teaching. She was encouraged to appreciate the amount of client contact she had compared to an internship in the U.S. She struggled with the lack of organization at times, but learned to “roll with the punches,” “relax” and not take things personally. When there were cultural and communication challenges with her Ugandan supervisor, her American supervisor helped her to handle difficult situations and communicate more clearly with her Ugandan supervisor.

Lori’s Ugandan supervisor was not as familiar with the social work aspect of her work, but her American supervisor, who was on staff with the study abroad program, met with her in group supervision with the other social work students studying abroad. These group meetings with her American supervisor and fellow class-mates helped her to see the value of this

placement and the relationships built. These meetings also helped her to see how what she was doing was social work just in a different cultural context, even if she did not feel she was “doing” social work all the time. She said:

(Our supervisor) was really good for our sanity I think, just helping us to realize that it’s ok that it’s different, because I think a lot of us came with the idea that, “O, we’ll be doing American social work in Uganda.”

Her American supervisors stressed the idea of cultural humility and being careful to not judge things from American ideology. Lori felt these were important conversations to have. They helped her to have a less imperialistic perspective than she had subconsciously had before. For example, seeing things from a different perspective changed her view on international adoption.

I think, too, a couple girls that I was with really came in with the idea that this experience was going to...help them get into career in, like, international adoption. I think, just being in another country and seeing that culture and that kind of stuff almost turns you off to that idea because you’re, you know, these kids are better off in their culture with their people And, plus, family, is defined so much differently there too...I think it all gave us much less of an imperialistic kind of sense that like we have this white man’s burden and we are going to come in and save the world that maybe we subconsciously had beforehand.

When she went on a Safari with friends, it felt so different than the Uganda she had known, as she had been away from the tourist aspects of Africa prior to this experience. As part of her study abroad experiences in Uganda, she took a class that helped the students to process their experiences. In this class, she had learned the perspective of being a pilgrim, or traveler as opposed to a tourist, which opened her eyes to a new way of viewing her experience compared to a tourist. The Safari experience helped her to see this contrast to a greater degree, and her everyday experiences in Uganda, living closer to the local culture, were more “pilgrim” minded.

Her study abroad program did provide a debriefing before leaving, but she said this did not fully prepare her for the struggles she would feel on her return. The materialism at home was overwhelming to her and she had a hard time discussing her experience with others. She did not

know how to summarize her experience in a way they would understand. Friends tell her that she talks about her experience a lot more now than she did when she first got back.

Now looking back at her experiences, Lori believes that it challenged her “to question some of our efforts in relief and aid, and even missions and what that should look like.”

It made her much more critical about how and why Americans do the things they do in international work. She now questions her faith more, particularly how Christianity looks in different cultures. She is still processing these feelings, but starting to feel more comfortable with this struggle of coming to new personal opinions about international work.

Lori gained greater value of the impact that indigenous people can have on their own culture, which challenged her view of international service. Professionally, she said:

I don't want to say that it turned me off towards international social work, but it just made me think a lot more deeply about, do I want to do that? Because I realize it's so hard. You know, and, not only is it hard to help people for that program development, but there are just years like building relationships with people and knowing what's even needed and how to work with nationals and help them in the best way possible. (It is important to) not having that Messiah Complex ..., so I think it's given me a huge respect for people who do that...it's so hard to do well. Um, and you know, some international social workers probably did it fantastically, some might be done with a little bit more of a “we're going to come in and take charge” attitude. And so, as to individual international social workers or international programs, I can't speak to that.

As stated above, Lori's experiences showed her the value of social work practice and where she is best suited. She stressed the importance of having nationals help within their own countries and having Americans doing international work with a community development model of practice. She does not believe social services should look the same in other countries as they do in the U.S. and what is best practice in her home culture may not be best in other places. She also learned the importance of relationships as the core of social work, as opposed to the theory, paperwork and data focus we often see in the U.S.

Personally, Lori's experiences in Uganda have made her more confident in going to unknown neighborhoods. She has been drawn more towards practice models that emphasize the importance of relationships. She feels the experience she had abroad help her identify more with people who are different, due to her own feelings of being different while in Uganda. Even if she is not culturally competent with all groups, she feels she can empathize more with them. She doesn't feel anyone can be truly culturally competent. She said "one person doesn't speak for an entire culture." She said that culture is also about personality and her understanding is now more based on the individual and less on the generalities she learned through cultural competency education.

Lori said while she was in Uganda sometimes she wondered why she was there, but knowing what she knows now, if Lori had the chance to study in Uganda again she said she "wouldn't change a thing." At first, she thought she had missed out on certain things she would have learned in the U.S., due to having a less structured experience, but she experienced more of this structured learning during a practicum experience she completed in the U.S. upon her return home. If this had been her only placement, she would recommend having more structure to the practicum abroad.

When discussing suggestions for future students, Lori suggested that having both a domestic and international practicum was beneficial for employment. She recommends a course to help apply and process what one is experiencing, like she had. She also encouraged excursions and experiences, beyond the practicum and the classroom learning. She believes that the experiences outside of the class and practicum were the most meaningful to her learning.

4.2.8 Mathew

Mathew completed his Bachelor's level field practicum in South Africa two and a half years before the interview. Prior to this practicum he had traveled internationally, but wanted to spend more significant time abroad. After finding out about practicum options his university provided, he decided South Africa was the most interesting place. He received a scholarship, which helped him to be able to participate in this experience. Currently, Mathew works for a non-profit in the U.S. helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities successfully locate and retain employment.

Mathew had some general orientation before going to South Africa, but found the orientation on-site the most helpful, as it provided the needed depth of orientation that can only be learned within the country. While in South Africa, Mathew said there was no language barrier as people spoke English as their primary language. He did feel very different than the people around him, as he was often in all black crowds. However, he was used to this as he grew up as a white man in a predominantly black neighborhood. He felt local people appreciated him being there, and he connected with them due to his interest in soccer. He lived in a dorm with both Americans and Africans affiliated with the University of Capetown. He really enjoyed getting to know local people and believes that living with Africans helped him to integrate himself into the community and to develop more cultural learning and learning about the racial issues that existed. He also stayed for one week in a township. This strengthened his cultural learning as he saw more 2nd world poverty and had very unique cultural experiences there. The most significant culture experience that took place there was going to an all day church service, he said, as this was very different than any experience he had had in the U.S.

Mathew said he went to South Africa with no expectations, so didn't think he had any negative experiences. Along with his field practicum, he did take some courses at the local university and admitted some of these courses were a challenge due to the lack of creativity and lack of discussion. During his field practicum, Mathew worked at a school, primarily with a life skills class. He mostly worked with four teenage boys with discipline issues and other problems in school. He learned about the different focus on rehabilitation (South African model) compared to punishment (U.S. model). He described this learning through an example of a student who came to school with a knife and threatened to kill someone:

Specifically, they were more focused on the fact that this kid obviously has a lot of potential but he is also very troubled... so how can we help rehabilitate as opposed to how can we punish him? ...I think here, it's just quick to punish...he definitely would have been expelled and he would not have been suspended and he would have probably been prosecuted, and his, all of his belongings would have definitely been searched... they had a group of teachers and administrators and everything; they sat down and talked about, "Ok, what are we going to do?" And then brought him in...Just see how much thought was put into it and how there was not just a law they had to follow; they had some flexibility in their choices. It was just an interesting process to watch and kind of be a part of... but the fact that there was such an emphasis and effort put into it, you know that was just a very interesting model to watch and it has definitely impacted me because I see (the) benefit (of) not just saying, "Oh this kid screwed up, so let's punish him as harshly as we can and hopefully he will learn his lesson,"

He said in South Africa they took a person centered approach like he had learned in the U.S., but to a greater degree than in the U.S. Mathew believed he would not have learned the rehabilitation model in the ways he did if he had not gone to South Africa.

Mathew had a local supervisor without a social work degree, but also received supervision though Skype with a professor at home. His supervisor at home helped him make connections between home and his experiences there to make sure he did not miss out on needed learning. He believed this helped him to be prepared to work in the U.S. afterward. His South African supervisor also helped him to process his experiences there, particularly with the

differences between rehab and punishment he was noticing. He felt there was a benefit to having an on-site supervisor too. This on-site supervisor could help him process things immediately. This supervisor also understood the local culture, having grown up during apartheid. He gave an example of how having someone on-site to help him process things was beneficial to his cultural learning. This helped Mathew not focus what he could give, but what he could learn:

Even if we're the social worker or the person in the leadership position in some way there is still a learning that needs to take place... especially when you're working cross culturally; it's not like a pyramid system where, it's more like, maybe it's more like a circle where you're in the middle but everybody is on equal ground because to make that work you're going to have to, and should want to, learn a lot about their culture.

When arriving home, Mathew felt it was a whirlwind as he immediately started another internship. He did debrief with his social work professor who had supervised his internship and with the couple who provided a scholarship for him to travel to South Africa. This debriefing was good, but he suggested that a more "formal process" with all the students who had studied abroad would have been helpful.

Mathew benefited from this experience through his eyes being opened to a completely different culture and country. This helped him to understand reconciliation from their recent past. He learned so much from people openly discussing their differences; it was very positive model for cultural learning. It is now easier for Mathew to talk about differences with his friends and co-workers. He now has the view of "the whole world being a potential place to serve", but learned through this experience some ways to approach practice in global settings. He said his experiences allowed him to see that:

Different places are going to approach things differently...just be mindful of the history, and that is going to be a big part of being effective, is being aware of what has happened in the past and how that shaped what's kind of happening and going to happen in the future...it really illustrated that, that if you are going to work somewhere else, it's not like you can just get on the ground. There is a lot of front end work that you have to put in before you can be effective... like learning some of the language, learning the history

because I think the history really allows you to understand what groups there have been historically problems with.

He saw poverty like he had not seen in the U.S., but said:

When you read about it I feel like there's always this very negative kind of down view, and then you see it, and you see the people aren't... they're pretty happy. And whether they want to change or not who knows but there's definitely a portion of them that are just not interested in being modern and so a lot of organizations that try to make them modern aren't doing a great service... It's very misguided... I think historically that's a mistake that has been made over and over again.

In terms of his personal practice, Mathew believes that his experiences in South Africa have helped him to be more client-centered with helping his clients find the best employment for themselves, rather than being focused on what he thinks would be best for them. He also believes that if he had not gone to South Africa, he would not have developed a strong perspective on rehabilitation as a practice focus rather than punishment. He said, "I think I always knew (this was) the best way to go about approaching things, but I never saw it actually happen, I'm not sure I ever would have learned how the process actually works."

When asked to critique his experience to help in the development of future programs, Mathew said that it would have been helpful to have a class ahead of time in order to learn more about the history and culture of where he was going. The communication between his overseas practicum placement and home university could have been better in helping him have a better understanding of his practicum setting ahead of time. He believes it was beneficial that he was in his final year of school and had the maturity to learn what he learned through his experiences. He also suggested it would have been beneficial to have someone on-site who understood both the U.S. and South African system and culture in order to help him process and understand both systems.

4.2.9 Rob

While studying for his MSW at a state university in Southern United States, Rob was looking into doing a summer practicum and the only option was to study abroad. Other study abroad options required fluency in the native language, so he sought a practicum placement in Calgary, Canada through a university that partnered with his university. He received a scholarship so decided to go, as he was glad to experience another part of the world. He was twenty-six years of age at the time of his practicum, three years prior to the interview. He currently is the project coordinator for statewide mental health initiative and provides technical assistance for services.

Before arriving he received a packet of information from the host university, with informational materials, but other than that did not have a formal orientation. Once in Canada, he did not have much connection with the university as he was at his field practicum all week. He lived with a host family from Belgium that he found through a website. He had a great experience staying with this host family, and through them also met a lot of first generation Canadians. He discovered how international the city was, which surprised him.

Rob had grown up in Minnesota and traveled to Canada on family vacations, but after living in the South for the last seven years really noticed differences between his home and Calgary. He felt his experiences, personally and professionally, were much different than those who stayed in the U.S. for their practicum experience. He experienced much more diversity than at home. He noticed differences in grocery items that he could not find that he took for granted having available. He also noticed how politically conservative the south was compared to where he was at in Canada and how different the culture was overall. At home, he said “we were in the Bible belt so religion dominates a lot of cultural things. It’s not a conservative, liberal thing but

it's just a kind of a way of life, but you know the church is such a vital part of the community; that's how a lot of social services are accessed.” He said church in the U.S. at times can be like a “lynch pin;” “either it’ll help move the program forward or pulls it back.” While in Canada, he experienced social welfare programs being less connected with the church compared to at home.

While in Canada, Rob worked with a homeless shelter. The agency was involved in developing national case management standards. He was a part of organizing focus groups for lead agencies in the community. He saw similarities and differences to U.S. perspectives, but saw them developing more progressive strategies in Canada. He noticed similarities and differences in policies as well. From his observations, he learned that the provincial governments had more power in developing policy than states do in the U.S. He also observed his supervisors working within various systems in the community. Through these observations he sees things as grayer and less black and white, than he previously thought.

Rob talked bi-weekly with the field practicum coordinator at his home university and met weekly with his supervisor in Canada. His supervisor in Canada checked in informally with him to see what he was doing and discussed any issues or concerns that Rob had. He said his Canadian supervisor served a “dual role” with helping him professionally and with personal support outside the practicum, such as suggesting ideas of what to do in the community outside of his practicum experience. They also discussed cultural differences, particularly with aboriginal people, distress between communities, and the history and politics that related to his practice at his practicum agency.

He enjoyed experiencing the natural environment of the mountains during his spare time and being in a more urban environment with public transit during his weekdays. Through experiences outside his internship he also learned how globalized the world is. He was surprised

to see the U.S. influence. These observations included U.S. companies being advertised during public events, focus on U.S. politics through support for President Obama, and Canadian's enjoyment for country music and other "pop culture" from the United States.

Rob believed he had a richer experience due to being on his own in a different country without other students. Through relationships with so many international people he learned about their struggles as immigrants. He met engineers who had come to Canada for jobs and were now unemployed, not even able to find simple minimum wage jobs. One example he gave was from a conversation he had with a Brazilian women who was treated unfairly by her boss at a restaurant. This tension with her boss led her to return home. This made him think more about immigrant restaurant workers' experiences at home. Rob's worldview was expanded through these experiences, but he is not sure how different his practice would be now if he had not gone to Canada. His experiences in Canada did confirm that he wanted to do something more administrative and research focused, which he is doing now.

Rob suggested that international practicums should do a better job of organizing students' arrival than what he had experienced. He had to arrange his own travel from the airport, his housing, etc. on his own. He felt that it would have been helpful to have been given an emergency contact in Calgary. He has passed along information to future students who studied in the same location and thinks other students have had better experiences since he did his practicum in Calgary. During his undergraduate studies, he saw people who studied abroad hanging out with people from their same culture the whole time, and he recommends that study abroad students get to know local people and do things on their own outside of the organized study abroad experience. He said a study abroad experience is "what you make out of it". He recommends an international practicum for students who want a diverse experience, and suggests

they go with people they do not know, or on their own, so they do not just strengthen relationships from home, but experience new relationships.

4.2.10 Amy

Amy was a bachelor's level social work student at a state college in Southern United States. Five years prior to the interview, she completed her practicum in Ghana, West Africa through a study abroad program affiliated with her university. The fact that English was the official language was a motivating factor in her decision to go. She received a general orientation for all students before traveling to Ghana and a weeklong orientation once in the country.

Amy said she definitely stood out walking in town due to the contrast between her white skin and the dark skin of the African locals. This was a little uncomfortable as people would yell out at her, but she eventually got used to it. English was the official language, but there was still a language barrier as the accent was different and people spoke many different tribal languages. She did take a class in Twi, the main tribal language in her area. Amy discovered it was hard to develop close relationships; people often wanted something from her because she was white and American. She said, "It was difficult to see the genuine side of people;" however, her closest relationship was with a co-worker who never asked her for anything. Even with these differences, Amy discovered commonalities amongst her dorm mates from the local region and her clients.

I learned everyone kind of has the same problems, no matter where you go, like the kids (I went to school with)... they struggled with the same things, you know it's like the same materialism and consumerism that like people have here... the clients on my practicum, they were dealing with much bigger issues you know, I worked with the street children so a lot of them were working. It was a child labor project, trying to end child labor...but I think you still find a commonality in people, people just want better for themselves, no matter where you go.

During her internship, Amy was officially supervised on-site by a social worker who was the director of the agency. She also received supervision by email with her professor at home. She said she did not learn many social work skills from her on-site supervisor due to some unethical behaviors he had, including inappropriate boundaries and financial corruption. She had positive relationships with the other staff; however, and learned through working with them the importance of human relationships and the gray area between building relationships and keeping professional boundaries.

I think being professional is very important but there's still that humanity that you have to take into consideration and you're trying to build relationships with people... I think to make an effective impact you have to have a good foundation with someone or they're not going to trust you as a worker you know?

While in Ghana, Amy experienced inter-country collaboration development for the first time. From her experiences, she learned to take a critical look at international development policies and practices. For example, through her experiences Amy gained a new perspective on child labor, as the focus was on not stopping children from working, but making sure that the work they did was socially just and not interfering with their personal and educational development. Through these efforts, they were trying to develop socially just international development models that were culturally sensitive and relevant.

Unfortunately, Amy also experienced the reality of corruption in international development; however, despite the problem of corruption, she saw that the organizations she learned about still accomplished their goals. She said, "Just because things aren't one-hundred percent good doesn't mean that it's one-hundred percent bad. While it was a terrible thing that these things were happening, a program is still being delivered and there were still kids whose needs were being met." Even though it was challenging to do so in the midst of seeing the corruption, she went on to say that the most important thing is developing relationships.

In contrast, through Amy's experiences, she also noticed people with good intentions, creating more harm than good. She thought this was particularly an issue with certain people that move to Africa:

The type of person that it draws, some people are really like the "save Africa" type and think that, you know they're the white saviors and can fix it. I remember there was one incident with one of the, one of the girls in the program and I didn't know her that well, but she went with us one night, later on this day on public transportation and she went on this diatribe about how she was going to come to Africa and save it and going on and on and it was so embarrassing and there were people around her like looking at her like "Do you think I can't understand you?" It was just awful!

She said that she learned that this kind of attitude can influence one's social work practice and lead to culturally insensitive practice when an outsider tells a group how to change something without knowledge of the culture and society.

After graduating, Amy did go back to Ghana for a period of time. Her second trip was so much different than her first experience during her practicum. She had learned so much during her international practicum that during her second period living in Ghana, she could now focus on building relationships. Even so, she was convinced that she did not want to be an international social worker now. She said:

I'm so glad I've learned this, and that I haven't spent more time saying international development is what I want to do, because it's not the answer, I don't think it's the best thing, and like you get into huge issues with, you know, neocolonialism or whatever you want to call it where you're having all this money poured into countries and all these agendas formed for maybe things that the people don't really care about, I think that was like the biggest thing, was that if the community doesn't want your offer, it's not going to work, and so it's more about understanding where you're working and who you live with and also not trying to have that paternalistic view towards issues in Africa, like "I know best, let me help you."

Amy's experiences in Ghana influenced her away from international social work abroad, but towards working with international populations in the U.S.:

And I think that's just formed how I practice now working with refugees. I find it much easier in like helping them muddle through... the US; it's like I understand this isn't the

way you're used to doing it, and you think it's ridiculous and you think it's stupid that you have to like conform to these things but at the same time you need to do it to be able to succeed... So I'm much more comfortable helping people adapt to this culture, (rather) than trying to impress my culture or force my culture on them... to me that's just absurd [laughs]. You can't go somewhere (abroad) and tell them "you need to do it my way" it's ridiculous.

In conclusion, Amy recommended studying abroad for all students and suggested that four months of time in another country was not long enough. She also suggested that a specific orientation and debriefing related to the country of practice is important, including processing the how international development has the potential to positively and/or negatively affect those one is serving.

4.2.11 Victoria

Victoria was in a combined Master's of Social Work/Master's of Science in Public Health program when she completed her field practicum in Guatemala, five years before this interview. Prior to this experience, she had spent the summer in Guatemala. She decided to go back to Guatemala for her field practicum, but to a different town. She found this practicum site on her own. When she graduated she began working in the development office of an international NGO in the U.S. that worked in the area of reproductive health in 30 different countries. Now Victoria is back living in Guatemala working as the manager of a maternal child health program and coordinator of a water, hygiene and sanitation project for a local NGO.

Victoria felt very similar to many of the people she worked with at the practicum site as many of the managers were foreigners. When in the community and working with clients though, she said it was obvious that she was different as she looked like a foreigner and received a lot of stares. Victoria grew up speaking Spanish, so was fluent in the local language, but there were also indigenous languages spoken during her field practicum in Guatemala that she did not understand. A lot of her clients did not speak Spanish as their first language.

For the first month, she lived with a host family that was arranged through a local Spanish language program. After that she house sat for a friend that worked at her agency. She did join a gym that had a mixture of ex-patriots and Guatemalans and met some people there. Veronica's strongest relationships were developed with people at her internship, the family she stayed with and two sisters she met while living in Guatemala who invited her to their home.

During her internship Victoria mostly did a research study that was an evaluation of a peer education program that was working to increase sexual and reproductive knowledge in outlying communities around Antigua. Her interviews with local people as part of this research were expressed as significant experiences for her learning. She visited their homes and learned a lot from seeing their living environments.

Prior to Victoria's ethics approval for her research, she traveled to surrounding communities with one of the Guatemalan coordinators of the program she worked with. She said this experience was also significant to her as she learned about the background of these youth, not only through visiting with them, but also from the perspectives of the Guatemalan staff member she traveled with as they discussed the youth's backgrounds and living environments.

Victoria was supervised by someone who had graduated from the same MSW program as her. They had been friends prior to her field practicum, but tried to keep a professional relationship. She said their meetings were informal, but they talked about issues in the field and how to link the families she worked with with needed resources. She said her program manager was not very available, so her MSW supervisor was very helpful. She said they had a very trusting relationship. Victoria also talked with her professor at home once or twice while she was away, but felt that as her university had never sent students overseas before, they really did not know how to support her.

Previous to the practicum experience, Victoria had seen “a lot of variation in the quality of a lot of the NGOs.” Compared to this, she was excited to experience this agency “doing very good work.” She said that many of the programs were evidenced-based, sustainable, and made the most of their resources in an effective way. The staff was passionate and well trained. She said these programs had a good enough budget to attract quality staff, including many local staff, which she saw as extremely valuable, as this is an important way to gain the trust of indigenous people. She also learned through the process of development of the profession of social work in Guatemala as it was in an earlier stage of development compared to the U.S. She also learned the importance of social work ethics, whether one is practicing in the U.S. or abroad.

There were two main personal outcomes of Victoria practicum in Guatemala. She said the experience:

aroused my interest or confirmed...that I wanted to work abroad...it really made me see that that was where my passion is..You know I felt like I could really contribute something to the population, especially in a Latin American, Spanish speaking country. I think that was, that was overall the most noteworthy thing of the experience and then second to that would be also confirming that I really wanted to work in something related to reproductive health.

These experiences helped Victoria to decide what type of job and agency she would like to work for afterward. Victoria can see herself one day being the executive director of a small NGO that is modeled similarly to where she did her internship. Key learning from this agency included learning the importance of “building local capacity” at all levels from lower positions to upper management. In her work now her goal is “to make my job obsolete and that I can leave behind someone who is local that isn’t going to leave in a year or two... and not to have to be reliant on people coming from the states or some other country to fill their position.”

Her experience also gave her insight into international social work, development and the work of NGOs. She learned both good and bad ways to practice in this field. She said “just

because it's the best practice (in one place), doesn't mean it is necessarily the best practice here."

When giving suggestions for people wanting to practice internationally, she said:

Be as humble as possible and (do) not go to the country that they're going to with the idea that they you know have all of this superior knowledge that they're going to give people...but rather that they're going to first observe and learn and then see how what you have already, to complement what they have... I think we have strengths that we can bring to the table, but the communities that we work in also have those strengths...I think especially with the communities that I work with, they can be very distrustful of foreign people, even if they're just Guatemalan people from the capital. Because of previous poor treatment that they've received... you need to prove yourself to them before you can really do anything with them.

When asked to share how her experiences can influence other study abroad programs, Victoria said the relationship between the agency and the university is important. She created her own practicum placement, which worked out for her, but she believes a more formal relationship would be more beneficial to participants in international practicums. She recommended a cultural orientation be included in the experience. She also suggested students stay with a host family as a way to engage with the community. Victoria believes this also helps the organization build trust within the community. She also said that it is important to have someone at the agency, such as a supervisor, that has Western knowledge of social work training, so students have someone to share ideas and questions with. If this is not provided at the agency, it would be valuable to have a professor at home that the student can communicate with. She suggested it is helpful for students to debrief with other students who have gone abroad, even if at different locations. Victoria's final advice was to students from programs that do not offer a study abroad opportunity:

If you're at a university that doesn't have an existing international social work program and you really do want to go abroad, to really make it happen. I think what you do with it really outweighs maybe the difficulty you have to encounter in order to get your placement set up...for me it was invaluable in terms of making me see that that was really where I ultimately wanted to be..to not do it just because no one's done it before you would be a real shame.

4.2.12 Karen

Karen is currently the executive director of crisis pregnancy center in a small rural community in the Midwest. She completed her international practicum in Uganda five and a half years prior to the interview, while attending a private Christian university in the Midwest. Before her international practicum, she had gone on a mission trip to Tanzania, where she developed a heart for this part of the world. When given an opportunity to do a practicum in Uganda she decided to go. Karen had an orientation with the agency ahead of time in the U.S., and then had a few days orientation in the Uganda.

Karen felt very different while in Uganda as she was “very white” and the local people were “very black.” She described how being white was associated with wealth; People would yell out phrases when passing them on the street. She said, “that was really a challenging thing of just constantly feeling like, I couldn’t blend in just because of my skin color. That was probably one of the bigger challenges.” The official language was English, but people spoke a variety of native tongues, which she found to be a challenge, particularly in villages. She said “the natives love when they see these white girls trying to speak their language, so she and the other students tried to learn as much as they could. She felt it was difficult to adapt to the cultural differences, but she wanted to learn about the culture and adapt in order to not offend people.

Karen experienced different housing situations while there. Their home base was a guest house, where they got to know the staff well. They also traveled quite a bit and stayed in different guest houses and hotels. While visiting Rwanda, they stayed in a compound for the staff of the agency, which included nationals. Due to moving around so much, it was harder to develop relationships with local people. Despite this, Karen said she did develop some closer relationships during her experience, including the staff at the main guest house. She grew

particularly close to a woman from the community who they called “mama” who had AIDS. This woman helped reduce the stigma of people living with AIDS. She also played volleyball with local people. She shared a story of how through these relationships, she had inspired one of the men to work for the agency she did her internship with. He sent her a letter afterward to tell her about how meaningful this was to him. She also developed relationships with the other study abroad students. There was tension at times, but through this experience Karen learned more about herself.

There were about fifteen students from a variety of majors within the program Karen participated in. This NGO organized their classes, internships and learning through travel. Along with her internship she also took classes on African traditional religion, literature, and economics. She went on a trip for three weeks to Rwanda to study about the Rwandan genocide. For her practicum, Karen worked with an international NGO that had a child sponsorship program, school, and programs related to HIV/AIDS. During her internship, her supervisor was supportive, but she did not feel her supervisors helped bridge the cultural gap or explain ties to social work. She said her informal conversations with her class-mates did help them apply social work learning to their experiences. As compared to her prior trip to Tanzania, her debriefing experiences were not as helpful while in Uganda.

Karen came home at Christmas, which was also the time of her birthday. She really struggled with the materialism she saw around her. She said, “I can just remember sitting up in my room and just crying and crying and crying; it’s your birthday, its Christmas and I’m just like I don’t want any of this, it’s not needed.”

Karen's international practicum helped her see what it meant to have basic needs met and not compare this to what typical U.S. standards are. Even in the midst of unjust poverty, she now sees simplicity of life as being a strength.

This new awakening happening to me even while I was there, just, you know, it's not about living in a nice home, really for most, for the people there they don't know life as I know it. They want basic needs met and if I have a roof over my head, if I have shelter, running water, and I'm healthy. Those are the things that matter... and it is still extreme poverty, but do I want to take someone who lives there and bring them to this? No... but that simplicity of life because it's not so messed up by stuff for them.

Karen believes that not having everything she was used to having at home, including a mirror and regular electricity challenged her, yet positively affected her. She admitted that during her practicum she was less grief stricken by poverty compared to her previous trip to Africa, but she began to recognize her own selfishness more and feels she grew in her faith through this experience and learned to be less selfish. She still struggles with being "guilt stricken" by the amount of materialism she sees in the U.S.

Karen's experience in Uganda helped to confirm that social work was the right profession for her. She said that social work and her (Christian) faith go hand in hand, and this experience helped her to see this to a greater degree. She learned to not deny her faith and her understanding of God's love for creation. Her Ugandan supervisor modeling deep love for "innocent outcasts" has helped her develop this perspective with those that she works with now who are often seen as "outcasts." She sees the key to effective social work practice as being relationship building, rather than a focus on a specific theory of practice.

Karen now relates her work in Uganda with people with STDs to her work at home with people with STDs. She also works within a community with a lot of Amish people. She said in her community there "appear to be very oppressed women (who) live behind a lot of secrets." She compares this to those she worked with in Uganda. She realizes there are differences in

poverty where she is now compared to Uganda, but her experiences there helped her approach to be less judgmental, to have a greater awareness for people's needs and the value of their stories. She said people just want someone "to love and care for them." Karen's view of people has changed as she is not as frustrated by differences between people.

Karen now lives in the community she grew up in and sometimes feels conflict with her family due to this personal growth she experienced during her practicum abroad. She has more of a desire to stand up for those who are poor, to empower them and support them. She expressed that if she would not have gone away to school and studied abroad, she may not have established her own beliefs apart from her parents. If she had not gone overseas, she thinks she would have still learned some of these things, but not to as great of an extent.

When asked to think about how her practicum could have been arranged differently, Karen discussed that her group was the first group of students in this program and it was less organized than she would have preferred. Karen suggested that it was important to have a good orientation that included orientation to the city and living circumstances, along with debriefing of their experiences. She wishes she would have had a better understanding of what she would be doing ahead of time, but also realizes the cultural differences contributed to the lack of information she received ahead of time.

Karen said that it would have been helpful to have an American supervisor or support person whose sole purpose is to work with students. This person could help make links back to social work perspectives, to discuss cultural differences, and what to do in difficult cross-cultural circumstances (such as being touched inappropriately). She said because they moved around so much, they experienced a variety of learning opportunities, but that it would have been better to be based in one location. She thinks that having a house just for students would have been better

than staying in a guest house. She also suggested that it would have been better for her practicum to have been spread out throughout the entire semester, rather than having the practicum for one part and the coursework during the other part. This would have enabled she and her class-mates to process and make connections between learning experiences. Finally, Karen said that studying abroad was “one of the best choices I have ever made” and “wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

Although Karen is currently working in her hometown, she has an interest in working internationally again someday.

4.2.13 Alison

Alison had the unique situation of doing two overseas social work practicums, one in Northern Ireland during her bachelor’s program at a private Christian university, six years prior to our interview, and one in Ecuador, during her MSW program, two years prior to our interview, while attending a private, selective, research university. During the interview, Alison compared and contrasted the two experiences, which is how the data will be presented in this section.

Alison said it was important to note that after her two practicum experiences in Ecuador she continued to stay connected with Ecuador and continued to travel there, as she met her boyfriend, now fiancé there. This relationship has encouraged her to stay connected with the country and has extended her learning.

Prior to her first practicum experience during her BA program, Alison had traveled internationally, which increased her interest in doing an international placement. She was limited to where she could go due to her limited foreign language skills; therefore decided to go through a program arranged through her university in Northern Ireland. Her school arranged this through a study abroad program that did not normally arrange practicums, but set up a practicum

specifically for her. While working on her MSW, she was studying towards combined MSW and Public Health degrees and completed two practicums in Ecuador, one for each degree.

Alison shared that during her experiences in both countries she saw similarities and differences between local people and herself. While in Northern Ireland, Alison's physical characteristics were similar to local people, but she did feel differences in the culture and dress of local people. The cultural differences, due to The Conflict, were very obvious to her, as she could not personally relate to such a religious divide. While in Ecuador, she felt a language barrier that she did not experience in Northern Ireland, but could also see commonalities between cultures.

In Northern Ireland, Alison lived in a student village with other foreign exchange students so did not interact much with people from Northern Ireland. In Ecuador, she stayed in a hostel while at the main site of the study abroad program, but also did homestays during her internship. Her internship was eight hours away from where the program was located. Each housing situation had its positives and negatives. Northern Ireland felt "fun" and "convenient," but she said, "I always felt like it would have been nice to get to know people from the place." In Ecuador the homestays were "very rustic," as they did not have hot water, and sometimes did not have running water, for example. These homestays were more difficult, but a good experience, which she appreciated. She went back to the home base every three weeks in order to have internet communications. Each time she returned to the practicum site, she switched host families. The program had it designed this way, so that more families could benefit as it was a "means of income" for them. Alison got to know the culture more through staying with families. When comparing both experiences, she stated, "I think they were both good experiences in different ways and I think it is fine to live in a little more rustic situation, but I don't think that

moving constantly is good.” While in Ecuador, Alison did take language classes, but she learned the language and became fluent through her experiences.

While in Northern Ireland, Alison worked with local children’s commission doing outreach advocacy, and organizational planning for youth programs. She worked with the Traveler, or Roma population, in special needs schools and with a UN Convention on the Rights of the Child program on integration and education. She had completed a practicum in the U.S. previous to this, which increased her ability to learn through the comparison of practice and policy between countries. Alison said she went from:

a situation where it’s just a whole different set of problems and priorities to a place where we are at a place talking about children rights to play and need to have child friendly city, it was so far from where we were at in the states... I think it was a totally different cultural way of looking at children because I think in the states, children are..viewed as a problem to be solved...where as there it was much more child-centered approach whether they were thinking about before the child was in the system, before a child is being abused, before anything like that, and how do we create an environment where children can be healthy and happy. And I think that was a really different approach because I had never seen anything, I had never heard of the term child-friendly city before I went there and I haven’t really heard it since then...I think that the same problems that exist here in the states exist there as well, but I was just coming at it from a different angle and looking at it from a different perspective... I think it helped me realize that there is more than one way to approach an issue in child protection and child welfare. Because here child welfare, people hear child welfare and think like taking away children who are being abused and don’t think it’s a broader perspective of child well being.

She also noticed that social work was a more respected profession in Northern Ireland and that people have more of a “seat at the table” with city planning and consulting.

Alison stated that her supervision in Northern Ireland was “awesome,” as she had “both professional supervision mentorship and also personal.” She also had supervision through her university at home, including a site visit from her professor while there. She said her supervisors were “very involved as well with helping” her understand the culture, post Conflict. They gave her good feedback and supported her professional development.

According to Alison, the most positive impact that her Northern Ireland experience had on her was learning a very different cultural approach to working with children, a more child-centered approach to practice, as discussed above. This has influenced her practice today by helping her to understand how the environment affects children and how a change in environment, including at the structural level of society, can impact the children's behavior and development. This experience also helped Alison understand her own cultural identity and how it is perceived in different cross-cultural settings:

It really makes you think about how outsiders are perceived because in Northern Ireland I was an outsider but people were excited, but it's like being someone from England who is here and you're like cool, that's very exciting your accent... So it's totally different because they were kind of, in freedom school and my other, my job in D.C. they were kind of like ok, well here is another white girl coming to save the world or whatever, whereas in Northern Ireland they were like "you're so exciting and new, and we're not used to this, and we like your accents" so it was very, very different but I think that contrast was also something that made me think a lot about (how) you always carry your identity with you and sometimes it makes things easier and sometimes it makes things more difficult, but either way you can't leave it behind.

When Alison came home from Northern Ireland, she did not experience a formal debriefing but thinks she met with her professor. She said coming home was a "whirlwind" and was difficult. She was busy finishing up her final thesis and graduated and started working.

In comparison to Northern Ireland, while in Ecuador Alison's supervisor was the executive director of the agency. He was not a social worker and did not have an awareness of the day to day work she was doing. She said that because she was an advanced standing student she was not required to have a supervisor; therefore, did not have formal supervision meetings. She did not have helpful feedback or professional growth due to not having an academic or professional supervisor. She said her task supervisor was helpful, but left halfway through her experience.

While in Ecuador, Alison worked within an agency that had more of an international development focus. This was a very positive experience for her and is what she saw herself doing in the future, and in fact, is doing now. Alison said:

I was actually able to get real-world experience with what I was trying to do, so that was really positive. And I learned a lot, I just learned a lot about how communities work and how community development works or doesn't work, especially a lot about inequalities. Even with a very small community like that, there's a great deal of inequality and there's a lot of -especially in a smaller community- there's so many dynamics and things going on that you can't really understand it from an outsider's perspective.

Alison learned a lot about community development in Ecuador. She learned about both the positive and negative implications for the community, having had the opportunity to understand things from an "insider's perspective." For example, through seeing how people lived in Ecuador, Alison's thinking was expanded as to what makes a good quality of life. She said, people are perceived as poor, however:

(Their) physical environment is very giving and so they don't have to worry about food quite as much as we would, and it's (a) very relaxed environment and you can kind of just enjoy life. But at the same time you're always kind of teetering on the edge of, like if a child gets sick and they can't get to the doctor. Or maybe you don't have the same opportunities you would have because you may not be able to continue in school. So (these experiences affected my) thinking about what makes quality of life.

Alison also learned to think more critically about issues such as micro finance and further education, which are often seen as the "magic bullet" in international work. She saw that these programs were "educating people out of their own community," which can negatively affect the community due to brain drain. Alison said these experiences "gave her context" and helped her to critically think about these issues.

Alison believes that her international experiences opened up the door for her current employment in international development, both due to the practical experiences she gained and

her developed fluency in Spanish through living in Ecuador. She discussed how this learning has affected her understanding of the work she is currently doing:

I'm managing programs in four countries and we're doing all this stuff with community health workers and I always have to take it with a grain of salt 'cause we always talk about community health workers and things like that, but I realize that a community health worker is probably already the more privileged person, one of the more privileged people in a community. So everything that we do and all the incentives that we offer and everything like that is furthering a gap between the rich and the poor while at the same time it might be increasing the health of everyone. It definitely still has implications for the community... at this level we look at things from a distance and we're not really deeply involved, but I always think about my experience in that community and try to kind of apply it to "if we would do this how would that affect the community itself? And what are the things that we're not really seeing?"

When discussing cultural competence Alison stated:

I don't think anyone ever necessarily gains cultural competence; I think you're always continuing to learn about just everything because (there are) so many things to take into account... And I think just being really open about recognizing your privilege or your lack of privilege or your prejudices, whatever they may be and really putting it out on the table, so that it's not something people feel like it can't be talked about.

She also discussed how learning about culture internationally has implications for working with people within her own country and culture too.

I think, thinking about behavior change and empathy and how to work with people and understand where they are coming from, is something that is universal in social work... Culture is so much more than just where you're from and your skin color. It's a whole range of things. So I think being in these other countries help me realize that the things that I learned in social work, how to relate to and understand a ten year old child who is dealing with abuse are the same concepts as you would in dealing with a 50 year old man who wants to continue over fishing or whatever, it's the same concept, it's talking to people and listening and understanding what they are saying to you.

Alison also discussed how she feels that social work has a lot to offer the community, locally and internationally. She stated that international social work "suffers from a lack of identity." She believes general principles of social work can be applied to a variety of international settings, including work with international populations in the U.S.

Alison said that her experiences abroad have changed her view of Americans and her perspective on how Americans practice internationally.

(I) think that everyone loves to hate Americans, especially Americans who are do-gooders, but I think honestly because of our history of being hated for so long, I think it makes you look pretty critically at how you're acting. Especially every time I was ever abroad, I always saw big groups of Americans who were acting in a way that was kind of embarrassing, but it makes you really think more critically and know that people are watching you and waiting for you to do something... But I think in a lot of ways because of that a lot of Americans who do this kind of work and have been doing it for awhile are more aware of their own cultural and are more, somewhat more culturally sensitive than other people might be, who come from a culture that maybe isn't looked at as, "what are they going to do or I can't believe they did that"

When asked how her learning in both practicums can help influence the development of future international practicum placements, Alison suggested that orientation is important for students. As a part of this process it is important to make sure that the placement is a good fit for the individual student, what they hope to gain from the experience, how much personal time they need, and what they can handle. For example, she suggested that home stays are not ideal for a student who needs a lot of personal time. She believes that students will benefit from opportunities to debrief openly. She suggested this might be hard to do with an on-site supervisor at one's agency, so it is important to have someone outside of your practicum, such as a professor at home to debrief with, particularly in BA level practicums. She also recommended a "crash pack" for students for when they are in a difficult time of culture shock. She suggested this crash pack include letters from home, favorite snacks, and anything else that would encourage the student during difficult times of culture shock.

4.2.14 John

Six years prior to our interview, John had studied abroad in Romania through an independent program connected with his university. Before studying abroad, he had worked in

group homes with people with disabilities for about four years. He decided to do his practicum in Romania as he wanted to have a diverse experience outside an American perspective. Currently, John is the social services director at a nursing home and working on his MSW. John took an optional course on Romania that his college offered the semester before he went to Romania. He also had an orientation upon his arrival.

John said he stood out in Romania due to his blond hair, piercings and tattoos, so people knew he was American. Even so, he felt accepted by the local people. His biggest adjustment after arriving was getting used to the city and the language barrier. He took language classes twice a week as a requirement of the study abroad program. He said he did not pick up the language easily, but found the classes were very helpful. It also helped that many young people spoke English, but he admitted this also made it easier to not have motivation to study the language.

John stayed with a host family, which he said was a good experience. He recommended staying with a host family as “it immerses you in the culture” and helps you to not avoid the cultural learning that can take place in this setting. Students in his program were also given a budget for food that was similar to what Romanians lived on, which he thought was very helpful cultural learning as well. The language barrier made it a challenge, but also fun to learn how to communicate. He described a now comical experience where every time he would ask if they had hot water for a shower his host mother would bring him hot soup, but after a month he and his American room-mate discovered they could access hot water from the tap after all.

John said he developed good Romanian friendships, particularly with two Romanian men that he met through the NGO he worked with during his practicum. They helped him get to know the city and traveled with him to other areas of Romania. He said that one of his “favorite

experiences” was “building relationships with Romanians, someone outside of your culture, your norms, but still having a genuine friendship (with people) who grew up in a different background.” He also developed good relationships with other Americans. He discussed a weekly gathering they had with other foreigners, which he said:

gave us an opportunity to talk about the differences and to vent a little bit if you needed to and it was just nice to be able to talk with a group who kind of related to this new experience and kind of knew what you were going through...It helped to know there were others who were going through similar experiences.

Unlike his internships in the U.S., John said his international internship was more than just his practicum, but was a 24 hours, seven days a week experience. During his time in Romania, he really enjoyed traveling on weekends to see other parts of the country. Some of these trips were organized by the study abroad program, but some he arranged on his own. He also had the unique experience of being in Romania during an outbreak (or fear) of an outbreak of the bird flu, in which parts of the city were quarantined including where he was living.

For the formal aspect of his practicum, John worked mostly with people with disabilities and the elderly. He enjoyed the fact that his agency had a variety of programs and that he could stay busy in the fields of practice he was interested in working in. He helped with elderly clubs and a variety of programs for people with disabilities. He enjoyed talking with the people with disabilities about cultural differences and helping them to feel the same as anyone else. Through home visits to various clients from both groups, he learned much more about the environment people lived in and how difficult their lives were. He could see the important impact the agency he was working with had on their lives. For a class project, he conducted a needs assessment in a community where they were considering developing a program. John also learned more of the language through these experiences.

John had an American supervisor with an MSW who had studied social work in the U.S., but had lived in Romania for a few years, working for the agency he did his practicum. They met at least once a week and also worked on some projects together. He said it was helpful to have someone to supervise him who understood the American system and could link his social work learning in Romania to his American studies and experiences. They also discussed culture shock, issues of poverty and social problems internationally as compared to the U.S. Before he left Romania, he had a group debriefing time with the study abroad director. They discussed the transition home and what reverse culture shock may look like. When John moved home he immediately started working and went back to his normal routine. He didn't think that he went through any major culture shock.

When asked how John felt his experiences had impacted him, he first noted that the experience of being a minority helped him to identify with minority groups in the U.S. He said this "gives me a better understanding of people who are coming from a different culture, who are new to the United States who may not understand the language and the cultural norms and kind of feel as an outsider."

John also feels that due to his experience of not knowing the language fluently in Romania he is better able to identify visual cues, which has helped him "perceive how people were feeling or what they were saying through action and emotion." He does not know for sure if his experiences in Romania have influenced his move to work with the elderly, but said that it may have, as beforehand he had planned to continue to work in group homes for people with disabilities.

John noticed that social work was not as formal in Romania, which may have been a weakness if he had not practiced in social service setting before going to Romania. At the same

time, he realizes that some of this learning takes place in each new job as you need to learn the policies, procedures and paperwork of each individual social service setting.

Also while in Romania, John experienced learning through the process of the development of social welfare services. For example, he experienced Romania starting to shut down orphanages as they were seen as unethical. He also saw social services developing more policies and procedures of practice in order to track case files, for example. John also experienced an American organization being turned over to local people who could “initiate and start building for their own country and their own culture.” He sees this as a model for what social work really is about. John learned the importance of moving from Maslow’s baseline to develop up through the hierarchy of needs.

John appreciated learning what it was like to work outside of the U.S. and experience working in a more community focused setting rather than the individualistic culture he sees in the U.S.

Just to know kind of what it’s like outside of America. We tend to look at ourselves as this is, or our way is the only way and kind of judge people on why are they doing it this way when democracy is the best and then you go somewhere and you just see how everybody works together and it’s, it’s more of a village, a team, of the culture. Then you come here and everybody is, “I’m for myself” and building “me” up.

John said these experiences have influenced his view of social welfare policy. He hopes that this has positively impacted his life and practice too. He expressed that the learning he experienced can only be learned through “stepping outside” of one’s own culture. He said that when he has talks with others who have completed a semester abroad, even in different locations, he has felt camaraderie with them because they also experienced “what it’s like outside the bubble.” He would like to do something in the area of international social work in the future. He

said if he moved overseas again he would study the language more as it was a barrier to not know the language well.

John said there was nothing he would change about the program or his experiences as it served the purposes he was hoping for. The challenges he experienced were good challenges. John did not specifically remember any negative experiences, but said “the good days were as important as the bad days.” He encouraged others to research the culture and language ahead of time and talk to someone who has been there, if possible. He recommends housing with host families and living on a budget similar to a local family. John suggested that it was important to have an MSW supervisor who knows the American system, but also the culture and language of the country. He recommends this type of experience to others.

4.2.15 Melissa

When I met with Melissa, she was a stay at home mom, having recently moved for her husband’s job. Prior to their move, she worked as a social worker within the fields of international adoption, services for people with disabilities and did volunteer work with refugees. She also taught some college classes. Melissa lived overseas as a child and has an international family through siblings adopted from other countries. She developed an interest in Romania when seeing specials on TV about Romania. During her undergraduate program at a Christian university, she made a connection with a graduate student who lived there and decided to do her MSW practicum in Romania, nine years prior to our interview. She decided to stay in Romania for an extra three months beyond her practicum, a total of six months.

Melissa’s school did not provide any formal orientation, but she met with a graduate ahead of time who connected with this program. This meeting helped her prepare, but she also did her own reading and research to prepare for her experience. She had a basic orientation with

the study abroad program director when arriving in the country and had weekly meetings, which acted as an ongoing orientation and weekly debriefing. She also started language classes immediately. By the time she left she had a basic understanding and could follow a conversation.

Related to language development, Melissa stated:

I think the language classes helped and then living with a host family really helped, really helped, because it was a constant... There really was not someone home consistently that spoke English. So I was forced to... I mean at the time I didn't always appreciate it, but it was really helpful in learning the language... The classes were good to get some basic things and also you could ask what's really going on in this situation, you know... being with the host family and then going to the bilingual church. I went to a bilingual church, so that helped too because I could hear it in both (languages).

Melissa formed relationships with people working at the agency she interned at. These relationships were easier to develop than in the general community as more people spoke English. Living with a host family also gave her a better understanding of "how a typical Romanian family works and lives." It was a "stretching experience," but she said, "I think I would not have gotten as connected... to other Romanians.... It made it much richer; I think that it was a huge part of understanding the culture experience." Melissa also got to know her host family in a more personal way than typical, as she began dating her host brother after her time as a student ended. She became engaged to him while still in Romania and is now married to him. Her host mother, now mother-in-law, grew up in an orphanage so she learned through her experiences of growing up in an orphanage in Romania, compared to her own upbringing in an American military family.

Melissa lived in Asian countries growing up as a military kid. In Asia there was a greater contrast between her facial features and the local people's compared to Romania. Melissa said:

I didn't anticipate feeling so different because you know, I am white and the culture is white, so I didn't feel the same in terms of feeling different racially... I had lived in Korea, I had been to Jamaica through social work things. And so I didn't have that feeling of I'm an "other" because of that. But certainly the way I dressed, I think I kind

of, you know, stuck out. And then being overweight as a student, I definitely, I felt more conscious of that than I do here because there's a lot of other overweight people in the United States. (I did) stand out a little bit... I think you're more of a target for someone asking you for money, you know.

While at her internship, Melissa worked with abandoned children in state run institutions, with people with disabilities, and the elderly. She worked within both group activities for these clients and did home visits. She had some negative experiences while working with the Romanian staff and felt she was able to experience the culture in a deep way. She discovered the mistrust people had for each other and a difference in privacy issues. She also experienced the negative feelings other European volunteers had towards Americans. She learned from other European ex-patriots as well as from Romanians how America was often perceived by others. She learned the importance of not stereotyping. Through the difficult times and struggles of this cross-cultural experience she began to rely on her Christian faith more. Melissa said she went through a spiritual struggle of understanding the differences between countries, particularly in the area of injustices related to poverty.

Melissa met weekly for an hour with her supervisor, which was mostly focused on the goals of the practicum and how to work through stressful situations. She also had group supervision with other students and thinks that she also had some phone calls with her professor at home. Melissa said she "felt like the agency I was volunteering for did a really good job with kind of a weekly debriefing. But when I got back, that was it," as she did not have any further debriefing.

Melissa said she had culture shock coming home. In particular, she struggled with the materialism she saw. She also felt her field practicum did not prepare her for her first social work job, working with people with disabilities within the American system. As she did not have the language skills, her practicum in Romania had been more macro level in practice. She said she

was less prepared for the U.S. micro level practice. She did admit though, that many people do not feel adequately prepared for their first social work job. Over time she realized that her experiences in Romania did help prepare her by giving her a continued passion for people with disabilities, increased her creativity to “think outside the box,” understand cultural differences, and understand what really is essential to basic needs. Once working at home she felt people were putting unnecessary standards on their clients based on their own cultural viewpoints, rather than focusing only on concerns related to their safety and well being.

After coming home, Melissa worked for a brief time within an international adoption agency. Her experience in Romania helped her to develop more of a heart for orphans due to her experiences both within her practicum and with developing a relationship with her host mother, now mother-in-law, who had grown up in an orphanage. She also volunteered with refugees and said her experiences in Romania contributed to her ability to work affectively with them, understand and respect their cultural differences and ways of living. She noticed a distinct difference in her understanding of refugee’s experiences in a way that other volunteers did not seem to understand. She learned the importance of valuing family relationships at a higher level than many American families do. In general, her experiences in Romania made her less scared of how to handle cultural differences with clients.

On a more macro level, Melissa said she learned that international practice is “much harder than I thought”.

(People) have this idealized view of, I’m going to go and everyone’s going to be so happy and they’re going to be very happy with the help that I give, you know. And, I mean I know I struggled a little bit with (wondering if I am) bringing my social work values or are these American values that I am imposing on... am I causing people to be dependent upon me, you know... America isn’t necessarily the wonderful country that’s coming to save all these poor people, you know, it gave me a more realistic view of it.

She now thinks very differently about aid given to other countries due to her experiences seeing aid being given that was not needed by the local community. She saw how basic needs were the focus of much of the work she saw in the community, rather than deeper emotional needs. These experiences gave her a more realistic view on how Americans should help and give. While she was in Romania she also experienced American professionals visiting to train Romanians and wondered how realistic their models were and if they would work in Romania.

Melissa has taught as an adjunct instructor since her international practicum. While teaching social work and sociology, Melissa has used her macro level experiences in Romania in her teaching the most, related to cultural sensitivity, organizational development and more macro issues of social work practice.

When thinking about how her experience could have been different, Melissa said that having more micro level experiences would have been more helpful to her. She wishes she would have taken more opportunities to have some American social work experiences beforehand to help her gain experience to practice in the U.S. Melissa wished she could have done more group work in Romania. Other than these thoughts, she said she had no regrets and was glad to have taken advantage of this opportunity and the learning she experienced.

Due to her involvement with academia, Melissa said has spent some time thinking about how international programs could be arranged. She believes it is important to have an understanding of what the student is responsible for financially while abroad and to have an orientation ahead of time. She also suggested that it is important for students to live with a host family to have a deeper level of cultural understanding, to connect with people within the community and experience the culture. She also suggests that a group supervision time is beneficial in order to support students and to allow students time to be free to express their

struggles without people from the local community. She also recommended having a contact person at one's home university to debrief with, who has a neutral perspective, especially to discuss any challenges related to any negative experiences. She has encouraged others to get as much experience as possible in the U.S. too.

4.2.16 Heather

After her professor discussed it as an option, Heather decided to do her practicum in Romania through an independent program affiliated with her university. Her practicum took place ten and a half years ago. Since then Heather has worked as a social worker for people with disabilities and within a mental health agency. She is currently a stay at home mother, but she and her family are a part of a community development initiative where they are intentionally living in an urban poor community in the Mid-West United States.

Heather had the unique situation of being the only student in the study abroad program during the semester she was there, which allowed her a greater immersion experience. She had a one-on-one orientation upon her arrival where she shadowed and learned from the study abroad director who gave her a tour of the various programs of the NGO she would work with.

Heather lived with a host family. Her host sister spoke English, but the parents did not. She said that living with a host family was very important to her overall experience. Without this experience, Heather feels she would not have learned as much about the culture, language and local foods. She also took language classes and could converse "enough to get by" by the end of her experience.

While in Romania, she said on the surface she felt "so different...bigger, taller, blonder, whiter, everything, than everybody else." At first she very much felt like an outsider, but by the end felt she blended in more with the culture, "as relationships grew and changed." Heather said

she developed significant relationships with local people, including her host sister and other people in the community. Heather stated that these relationships were very important as she “had to gain people’s trust” as they were used to seeing tourists and students for short periods of time. She believes because she was not in a group of students, it was easier to build relationships with local people. Through this experience she discovered that if the focus was on building relationships, “looking different doesn’t really play as big of a role as I thought it was going to.” The experience being a minority also has helped her notice others who feel this way now. She learned to not try to change them, but to help make them feel more comfortable and included.

During her practicum in Romania, she experienced working with a grassroots agency that worked with abandoned children, the elderly and within a kindergarten program for mostly low income Roma, or Gypsy, children. She received her supervision from an MSW who had been trained in the U.S. but now lived in Romania and had founded and directed the NGO she was working with.

I got a lot of supervision because I had so much going on at one time with my supervisor. ...In addition to that, we had a specific time that we met weekly and as needed if I needed to meet with her about something, which I did a few times, just to talk to her and to debrief what I had been doing, and I really enjoyed that time. There was so much happening in my mind, and I was just learning so much in so many different areas of my life...She was very flexible to meet with me when I needed to, and she always made herself available, and she taught me a lot about Romanian culture during that time. We talked about that and what I was doing. (I) found the whole experience debilitating, you know, I was homesick and just never had seen poverty like that before. (We talked about) how to use that and go into social work, and not to let it get the best of you. But you know, this is why you’re here and this is why you’re doing what you’re doing, and you want to make these changes. Empathy versus sympathy...she really taught me a lot about that.

Her supervisor found ways to bridge the gap of learning that needed to take place so that she was prepared for her work in the U.S. afterward. This included helping her practice paperwork and documentation, which prepared her for her second practicum in the U.S. She also learned much

from the foreign workers who were “working themselves out of a job... trying to empower and promote the Romanians so (the organization and its work) became theirs.” This has contributed to the cross-cultural community development work she is currently involved in.

Heather’s transition home was difficult. It was Christmastime and she experienced cultural shock, which displayed itself mostly in feelings related to materialism. She felt she had so much. One of the administrators and a social work professor at her university who were both familiar with the program in Romania helped her during this transition. Her professor helped her think about how to have a more balanced perspective. She has learned to not be angry about what others do not have.

Heather’s experiences in Romania gave her more of a desire to “be present” and love marginalized people. Her first jobs were working with people with disabilities and mental illnesses. She has chosen to try to work in jobs with less paperwork and more of a focus on the people and building relationships with them. Her experiences in Romania taught her to intentionally empower her clients. They made her a better client-centered advocate even in the midst of ethical dilemmas that created professional risks.

After her experience, Heather knew she also wanted to live intentionally amongst the poor. Eight years ago she moved into the largest white slum in the U.S. to intentionally do Christian ministry, social work and live in the community with other neighbors doing the same thing. She also learned the value of intentionally replacing oneself when working cross-culturally. Through relationships she developed in Romania, she saw very capable Romanians leaving the country. At first she thought it was better for them to leave, but now she sees that it is beneficial for people to stay in their own communities. Heather relates this to her work with empowering indigenous community members in her own community development work now.

Her learning about micro enterprise contributed to the creation of their small business development of selling local produce in their community.

Heather and her husband are now in the process of adopting. She believes that her experiences in Romania contributed to this desire due to “seeing kids who don’t have families.” They have two biological children and may adopt older children with special needs.

Heather said the world feels a lot smaller now. Her awareness of cultural competency developed beyond what she learned in the classroom. Having lived in a different culture has allowed her to understand differences in culture and to be more sensitive to them. She realized that people often want the same things in life and have a lot in common, where before she only noticed the differences. Even so, she also learned about differences.

She believes that when doing international and cross-cultural work it is important to understand the history and politics of the culture. She said that relationship building is the key, along with keeping the client at the center of your focus. She values community development models that immerse oneself in the culture and suggests that cross-cultural and international work should include adopting aspects of the culture into your own life. She also said that social workers should focus on what they have in common with the local people and culture and use the strengths perspective in practice. She is married to someone from a different culture and works to introduce her children to different cultures, teaching them that one culture is not better than another. She has done some work with refugees and believes she now has a better understanding of the lack of services in other countries and why people may want to come to the U.S.

Heather thinks that her life would be extremely different if she had not experienced the semester in Romania. She said:

You can’t know, but I definitely think that I wouldn’t be here in (the town I am doing community development). I probably wouldn’t have met my husband, and it would just

be a lot of different things. I think the church that I was drawn to after that.. it would have been a lot different had I not gone on that trip...in big ways.

When giving suggestions for how things could have been arranged differently, Heather suggested pairing students studying abroad with students from their home university or local area who have gone through a similar experience. This would have given her more support in the process of going to Romania and returning home. She recommends that students live with a host family for additional immersion in the culture. She appreciated taking classes taught by Americans and local people. Heather recommends that social workers go to impoverished nations for study abroad experiences as compared to more developed countries, due to the particular learning she experienced from being in an impoverished country.

4.2.17 Theresa

Theresa had always wanted to study abroad. The private, Christian college she attended offered a study abroad program in Romania that was affiliated with her university. She completed her practicum eleven years ago, and currently works as the coordinator of a county Children First Council, where she connects families with needed services for their children. While in Romania, Theresa had regular on-site orientation, supervision, and debriefing as well as language study. Compared to others interviewed, Theresa did not look or feel that different, as her physical features blended in with that of local people, but she noticed a significant difference in the way that she dressed. She said her clothing was less professional and baggier, compared to the European style of Romanians, which made her look different than the local people. She lived with a host family, which helped with her Romanian language, as her host father practiced Romanian with her. By the time she left she could communicate basic information in Romanian and could shop on her own.

Theresa worked within a variety of programs within a Christian NGO that worked with children, the elderly and people with disabilities. The most significantly impactful experience she had was working in a poor Roma neighborhood, helping develop a new program to support children in starting kindergarten:

I guess that experience gave me a different perspective because I know there are people who use the system and then you get the people who really need help to move forward. And in that area of town, just to learn about the Roma culture amazed me because they could burn down their house just to stay warm for the day, not thinking about tomorrow.

Theresa did not have strong memories of her supervision experience, she said, due to the length of time since her practicum. She did remember meeting regularly with her supervisor, but expressed other conversations and relationships as being more significant memories. Theresa said she got to know local people and learned through these relationships. When talking about relationships she built while in Romania, she discussed a significant friendship she developed with Mihai. She said:

I'm a dreamer and I like to have what I want; Americans (are) like that. And you know, (Mihai) shared basically you can't always have what you want. And as a Romanian, you know, that would have been very tough, because he didn't have a choice in a lot of things. He grew up, you know, in the communist era, where you got what you got and that's it...And I still think about that some days. You can't have everything you want. And I hear that voice.

Another contrast Theresa discovered when comparing the U.S. and Romania, related to the experience of being in Romania on September 11, 2001, the day the U.S. World Trade Center was hit in a terrorist attack. Romanians pointed out that if it has happened in their country the whole world would not have known about it. This helped give Theresa a realization that Americans feel they are the best in the world and are "selfish" people. She said that when something happens "we are not going to take it." Other countries do not always have this mindset or privilege.

When Theresa came home, she was frustrated by people's responses to her time in Romania. She said, "I guess the frustration for me was, everyone was like, "O, how was your experience?" It wasn't an experience, it was a part of my life, you know... it was *only* three and a half months of my life." She didn't feel other's appreciated the significance that this experience had on her life.

When asked about how Teresa felt her time studying abroad impacted her view of cross-cultural social work, she commented:

I do think there's a bigger impact locally when the local people step up and do the service, I guess, instead of an outsider coming in. But sometimes you need those outsiders to come in and look at the picture, because you're not as attached to it and you can see things from a different perspective.... That's something I think that did affect me over there because you go in with...your middle class mindset expecting everybody to be on time and to do this and that and you're like this is how you should be doing it! People have to find that balance of, ok this might be the better option, but how could we incorporate it into our culture and make it work...And I think I still have mixed feelings about some of that stuff because, again, you're kind of trying to tell somebody how to do things your way, but at the same time, if they don't learn another perspective or another method, how can they ever grow beyond what they know?

The most direct affect that the experience had on her professional career, though, was her decision to go to graduate school. She said "I didn't plan on going beyond getting my bachelor's degree," but her experiences in Romania made her interested in doing more work overseas. She said, "I need as much education as possible to go back." Since then, Theresa has not gone back to work overseas, due to other life circumstances, but still has the desire. Her graduate studies combined with her learning in Romania did contribute to her moving into more administrative social work roles. Her experiences in Romania made her realize the importance of more macro social work and administrative issues, such as strategic program development.

When asked if she had any recommendations for students participating in such experiences, Theresa encouraged students to participate in a study abroad experience. She

suggested they get clarification ahead of time on appropriate dress and any other cultural issues. While there she encourages students to stay with a host family and to develop relationships with the local people.

4.2.18 Sam

Sam triple majored in social work, international development and Spanish at a private Christian College that had a large international development emphasis. Sam did his social work field practicum through a Christian relief organization in Mexico. He also received Spanish credit while there. Currently, Sam is an administrator within a county department of corrections for juveniles, providing probation and parole services for youth.

Sam studied the language for a month in the country before beginning his practicum. He initially lived with a host family but subsequently moved to the group home when he began his field practicum. Sam looked different than everyone around him due to his height and hair color. He felt he was in the “spotlight” all the time, as he had lighter hair and was taller than most people. But while in Mexico he also experienced what he called the “sameness” factor as he was staying with a middle class Mexican family for the first month.

It really reinforced breaking another stereotype. (They were) just a regular middle class family, you know, they travel and they have their hobbies and the clubs that they go to and (are) just pretty normal. Probably the normalness, the similarities were probably the most striking thing.

Sam’s practicum was in a group home for kids who had been living on the street. Because he lived in the group home, he had to struggle with how boundaries were different than what he had been taught during his social work education.

You were never off. Even if it was your day off you were always there...kids would still come in. I mean it’s their house so you had your own office, which is where you slept, but it’s their house still. I mean they had a right to come in and talk.

The absence of clear boundaries strengthened the depth of Sam's learning about his clients. For example:

We had a kid who had AIDS. I had never met anybody with AIDS before, I mean never, so just exposure of different, different experiences. I think it just was helpful just to broaden my mind. I don't know that I would have gotten that if I hadn't went (sic) there. Living with someone with AIDS is different than a client coming into your office. You get to see him and other kids be mean to him and tease him...so it's just different dynamics.

Sam also experienced the feelings of being a person of privilege because he was white. He shared a story of how a client was having trouble getting his pay check, so asked him to go with him because he was white. This client believed he was only able to successfully pick up the paycheck because Sam was with him.

Sam said his official practicum supervision was less than ideal. He had an American supervisor with the credentials to supervise him; however she spoke less of the language than him and, "She didn't have a good grasp of (Mexican) social welfare...so a lot of what we were dealing with was just my relationships with the kids...but as far as more of a macro view, I didn't get that from her. She couldn't give it...I think she was in a bad situation." Sam suggested that a more ideal supervisor would have been someone that understood the Mexican social welfare system and could help him understand some of the differences. Sam also said he would have appreciated being able to share experiences and ideas with class-mates in a group setting.

Despite these perceived negatives, he did experience support from the professors who sponsored the trip, even though they were not social workers and lived in a different town:

They've dedicated their whole life to international development. They're just living saints. They're just very good people....They travel extensively and live in Latin America, so I still keep up with them...They view the world upside down on purpose. They view things from a different perspective and I think it's useful to remember that... Most of the world doesn't live the way we do and they have a profound understanding of that. They try to live simple lives. They're Quakers so they're into social justice and equality.

Sam's international experience gave him a new understanding of how to work cross-culturally. For example, his experience taught him more about working within a culture that was less time oriented. This impacted him more than learning different models of practice. He said he was more focused on learning the cultural aspects of social work as compared to learning new practice models.

Sam stated that the experiences of learning the culture and Spanish language "did help me get my job" as he works in an area with a large Hispanic population. "It helped me with promotions...very impactful." These experiences also helped him to understand Mexicans better.

I think a lot of when I deal with Mexican folks now, just a lot of, of understanding of what they're going through, of why somebody would leave there and come here. I think it helps with empathy and, not just judging or jumping to a conclusion of why somebody is here or, or things like that. We did some study along the border about the factories there, and why people immigrate and it's just when you hear it from people it's hard to make global, global judgments about them.

Sam's experiences gave him a better understanding what it is like to be a minority too. For example, he said:

If I'm in a meeting and somebody is the only African-American in the room. It definitely brings back the feeling of... what is he/she feeling while they're sitting there, or what it would be like if that was in the opposite, or do I ever have to be in the opposite? Probably not, probably it is pretty rare to be the only white person in the room. I have a point of reference to remember that.

Despite these positive ways the experience has positively influenced him long term, when Sam came home from the practicum experience, he immediately graduated and did not feel his experiences fully prepared him for the job market. He said he was not adequately prepared for writing case plans, supervision plans and other formal training.

He also believes that his program could have done a better job of helping them to learn the day to day language and "slang" of the particular Spanish spoken amongst their clients. He

also thinks it would have been beneficial to have been included in the field practicum seminar with his class-mates at home. He also said it may not have been ideal to live at the group home due to the lack of boundaries with the clients he served, especially as a social work student.

As the interview ended, Sam said that discussing this experience helped bring up a lot of memories. Now he wants to go back and look at his pictures again in order to reminisce more about his experiences.

4.3 Summary

A total of eighteen social work graduates were interviewed for the study. These social workers' stories were presented in this chapter in order to understand their journey from making the decision to study abroad, experiencing a semester abroad and learning how their experiences have informed their current understanding of the world and professional practice. The participants experienced a diverse range of practicum and general immersion experiences in different parts of the world and are now at different points in their professional careers, yet have some overlapping themes of learning from their experiences along with some unique perspectives.

Participants had a variety of motivations for studying abroad. Although some expressed personal faith commitments that impacted their experiences, they did not express this as their primary motivation for studying abroad. Many participants either had a short previous international experience that piqued their interest in doing an international practicum for a longer period of time and/or had always desired to go abroad. Still, they said there was need for a meaningful orientation before the trip and debriefing upon their return.

The nature of housing was often directly related to a participant's immersion in the local milieu and ability to form meaningful relationships within the community. Many cited other

significant relationships in the community that they also learned from. Almost all of the participants had feelings of being different within the culture. Many of them believed that going through the experience of feeling different as a minority within the culture impacted their subsequent social work practice.

Participants had both positive and negative experiences and varied degrees of learning during their practicum. They had both positive and negative experiences with supervision and expressed the importance of having a supervisor who understood the local culture, could help them understand similarities and differences to social work practice there compared to the U.S., and with whom they could share openly and honestly their learning and their struggles of adapting to the culture.

Participants expressed various ways their experiences have impacted them personally and challenged their worldviews, views of America, and their faith and religious views. Participants who studied in a faith-based program and/or were from a faith based universities may have mentioned issues of faith more often, but some participants who were from secular universities and study abroad programs also expressed spiritual or religious experiences that impacted them personally or professionally.

All participants discussed ways the international practicum influenced them once they returned home, including in some cases career directions, but more commonly practice approaches. Some common themes include: understanding of the importance of relationship building in practice; cross-cultural practice abilities; and understanding of power, privilege and oppression.

Without prompting, almost all participants recommended that students participate in international practicums; however they also gave recommendations to maximize the positive

outcomes and minimize the negative outcomes of such experiences. These recommendations include the importance of an orientation or other methods to help prepare them for the practicalities of living in the specific country they were going to study. They discussed the important value of developing relationships with local people, sometimes facilitated through the nature of one's housing. Some participants recommend opportunities for learning the language, including secondary languages spoken if English was the official language. Participants also recommend both support on-site and support from their home university. Participants said it is important to have support to facilitate cross-cultural learning and social work learning during international practicum in ways that will prepare students for their future social work practice. Many participants experienced either some form of reverse culture shock or surprising impact upon their return home and suggest that a debriefing experience would have helped them with this transition. The next chapter will present an in-depth analysis of the themes discovered through comparing participant stories.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents themes revealed through analysis of participant stories. A process of constant comparison was utilized while summarizing the interviews for member checking, coding and writing the data presentation chapter. Lofland et al.'s (2006) strategy of “memoing” was used to record ideas and themes as a part of the data analysis.

The analytical themes developed begin by looking at paradoxical experiences during study abroad and how this has impacted participants' development since their international field practicum experience. The analysis explores three sets of themes emerging from the data that relate to the participants' experiences: 1) the interplay between reference points, 2) experiences with comfort compared to discomfort, and 3) experience with immersion and the oases of safety away from their immersion experience. Although these themes will be presented as conceptually distinct, they are overlapping in nature. Through exploring these themes related to the experiences and learning of participants' lived experiences, the following themes related to participants' perceived learning outcomes will be described: 1) relationship building as practice method, 2) an objective to subjective understanding of culture, 3) development of cultural humility, 4) a new understanding of privilege and power vs. oppression, and 4) anti-oppressive practice perspectives.

5.1 The Interplay between Reference Points

As participants described their study abroad experiences, there was a dynamic of shifting reference points over time; changes in these points of reference had an impact on the participants' lived experiences. At the beginning of their experience participants' worldviews for understanding their surroundings were generally based on previous life and educational experiences from their own culture and social work education in the U.S. This was their

dominant reference point and the foundation for understanding what was normal. Over time this reference point shifted as they gained new experiences. These international experiences led to different feelings in regards to their home culture and environment, different views about social work practice upon their return home and a shifted understanding of social well-being. This section describes this shift, beginning where the participants started with American culture as their reference point.

5.1.1 American Culture as a Reference Point

While preparing for their time abroad, some participants participated in orientation activities that exposed them to the new cultural environment in which they would be living and working, including reading books on the culture, learning the language, and/or listening to online newscasts from the country in order to get a sense of the language accent and current events within the country. Although the U.S. was still their predominant reference point for understanding the world, many participants intentionally began to embrace a new reference point.

Once arriving in the country, participants often compared their new experiences to cultural understanding based on their reference point from home – their new experiences were filtered by their common worldview as an American. Lack of access to certain resources related to their lifestyle in the U.S. was immediately recognized. For example, some said it was different to not have access to their own car – they had to rely on public transportation or walking; others talked about eating different foods, or having to do laundry by hand. Rob described an experience shopping in Canada:

I remember going to the grocery store and looking for lemon grass. I wanted to get this to cook and they just didn't have it there. And it was just like, oh yeah man I guess they do not (have pretty) common southern food.

Although lifestyle differences were noted by some participants, the major point of comparison that participants discussed was, as an American, not being the dominant group. Most experienced being a minority for the first time, feeling that they did not blend into the local society. Sam described this by stating:

I'm 6'4," I'm a really big guy, so I stick out everywhere I go in Mexico. So it was just different for me to have that experience. I had never been in that experience before. (I felt) very different, and stuck out, a blonde, I mean light brown hair, they call it blonde.... It felt like I was in the spotlight all the time.... I'm from a very small town in South Dakota, 500 people, so being anonymous in a city, I thought I would like. But then I didn't feel anonymous, I felt like everybody judged me, prejudged me just based on what they were seeing.

Furthermore, many of the participants struggled with not having English spoken around them, or having English spoken in an accent that was difficult for them to understand. Even for those who knew there would be a language barrier, they still discussed the challenge of this barrier compared to being in the dominant language group at home. Most participants did not complain about this or see it as a negative, but expressed how different it was to experience a communication barrier compared to at home. Some participants were frustrated by not being able to understand and communicate well with those around them. Karen said:

You go down to the city and people would be speaking English but some would be speaking a language that we were just like "we don't have any clue what you're saying" and that was aggravating I think just because I'm like "I know you're talking about me right now, but I don't have a clue what you're saying" you know? "What are you saying about me?"

As many participants were living in countries that spoke English as a national language, or they were fluent in the primary language in their host country, they still were challenged by a new and different accent. Participants who completed practicums in African countries discussed

how even though they were told English was the official language,¹⁸ there were many languages spoken around them besides English and the accents or dialects were hard to understand. Amy expressed:

The joke of Ghana is “the official language is English, but nobody actually chooses to speak English” ... the main language is Twi and it’s thought to be a tribal language, but the majority, well the biggest tribe there... a lot of people, you know, they’ll speak English to you, but I also think that just because usually English isn’t the first language the people are learning, the accents I felt were very difficult to be understood even speaking English to English...If you would say one thing differently than how they’re used to saying it, the accent really throws people.

Participants who were in countries most different from the United States noted the cultural differences, but did not seem as surprised by the differences in culture as compared to the U.S. Participants in countries that were more similar to the U.S., such as Canada and Northern Ireland, were more surprised by certain subtle differences. These differences included differences in the physical environment and socially normative behaviors and worldviews. For example, Andrea described her experiences in Canada as feeling a “half step off” from her experience at home. The two participants who were in Canada also observed that what was considered to be culturally conservative in Canada was quite different than the United States; conservative viewpoints in Canada would be considered liberal in their home areas. These participants also noticed a difference in how religion influenced the culture of social services in the U.S. as compared to Canada. Rob stated:

The religious aspect (of social services) was very different. I live in the Bible belt so religion dominates a lot of cultural things. It’s not a conservative, liberal thing but it’s just a kind of a way of life...(Where I am from) the church is such a vital part of the community that’s how you know a lot of social services are distributed and accessed.... I mean you did see some similar ways of accessing services but (in the U.S.) the church can kind of be like a lynch pin in some ways either it’ll help move the program forward or it pulls it back.

¹⁸ Due to English being the official language, most of these students were not required to take courses in the tribal languages, or if they did take an optional course, only learned one of the tribal languages of the many spoken around them.

Several participants found the American orientation to time quite different than their host country; something that was difficult to adjust to. Carla for example found things in Northern Ireland more relaxed than in the U.S.:

I'm used to more of a strict, regimented, "get things done" kind of thing and they have a much more relaxed approach to it and "Oh, have a cup of tea and relax for a few minutes and work for a few hours and just go home. It's not that big of a deal, they'll get done... That was hard for me to learn how to relax coming from, especially with, junior year was such an intense academic year too for me, and then going over there and having just kind of a halt; it was a lot for me to handle the cultural difference.

Amy similarly described how the orientation to work in Ghana was different from what she was used to:

You would get to work at nine o'clock but then nothing would happen until twelve because people just don't show up on time for things, like if you're late you're late. It's fine. So there would be a lot of time where I wouldn't have too much to do and I think that was really hard to do... just a different type of work ethic than I was used to. How we work here in the US is different.

Sometimes these differences in culture made learning more difficult. Sam for example related the challenges he experienced in the Mexican culture in regards to orientation to time. He said, "I probably wasn't able to observe (the differences in social work practice) as much because I was just trying to figure out the cultural part of it." In addition to comparing their social and cultural environment abroad to their home environment, participants also utilized their United States education in social work as a reference point at first.

5.1.2 The Shifting Reference Point of Social Work Practice

At the beginning of their practicums, participants' understanding of social work practice was based on their U.S.-based education; this was a reference point to understanding social welfare and best practice models during their practicum experience. The nature of social work and social welfare in their host country was continually understood in relation to how it was done

at home, often with a belief at first that how it was done at home was the “right” way. However, many said it was significant to experience different methods and models of practice within a new societal context, and these contributed to a shifting reference point.

The different methods and models of practice learned vary by participants’ personal experience and by host country. Some participants were in countries with economic and social welfare systems that are more developed than the U.S.; others were in countries where social welfare and economic systems were less developed (i.e., developing countries). Those in a developing country often felt the social welfare system was focused more on basic needs than on psycho-emotional needs. Some, like John, perceived the social welfare system as developmentally based on the needs of the country. His description of the system was “more of a let’s start at the base level, help with the basic needs for helping with shelter, food, and then build up on a tier of, to self-actualization.”

Some participants who completed practicums in developing nations were critical of the work they were doing as it did not feel like professional social work as taught in the U.S. Lori explained this by stating:

My internship really wasn’t anything like American social work would be considered. I did a lot of teaching in the school. ..I think in that culture there’s not organization as Americans know it or are familiar with it or as I’m familiar with it. I think of myself as extremely type A and that was something that was really hard for me to get there that day and for them to come tell me, “You’re teaching the health class for one hour. You may go now...” And then when I was at the children’s home. I really just kind of hung out and played with the kids and just formed relationships with them, which, at first, was really hard for me because I was like, “I feel like I’m on a missions trip; I don’t feel like I’m doing a social work practicum.” I liked this but I didn’t know if this was the experience I was supposed to be having.

In summary, many of the participants that did their practicum in developing countries noticed distinct differences in social work practice that were less formal than the social work practice they had experienced in the U.S. Practice in developing countries was typically focused more on

basic needs and crisis care compared to what they had learned about and experienced in the U.S., which up until this point had been their frame of reference.

Those in developed countries such as Canada and Northern Ireland similarly used the U.S. as their point of reference; they saw that social work focused less on basic needs and crises, and more focused on quality of life issues and psycho-emotional needs. Based on her experiences in Northern Ireland, Carla stated:

It was so interesting that fighting for basic human rights was not even something that was on their radar because a lot of people have socialized medicine and all those things that we are trying to fight for are basic, fundamental human rights. That was just something that they didn't need to worry about because they already have it. So for them it was more of a focus on arts and the additives. A lot of times with programs that get cut here that are necessary, but everywhere I went it was something about art and implementation in the community and how that goes back to other positive changes.

Regardless of whether their practicum was in the developing or the developed world, participants found their home reference point to reduce in importance as their experiences abroad created a new reference point for understanding social work. Many began to feel that their American reference point was not the best or only way for understanding ways of living or practicing social work in the context they were living in while abroad. They began to understand and appreciate the value of the way things were done in their host country and this facilitated a change or shift in reference point. Susan described “stepping outside herself and viewing things from a different standpoint” as changing her view of the world. At the beginning, many expressed struggling with the informality of their practice settings compared to the U.S, but when their reference point shifted they let go of the “U.S. is best” kind of perspective. John for example said he realized “the informal setting was appropriate; there’s no sense in doing unneeded paperwork just to do unneeded paperwork.”

Some of the participants, including Carla, also commented on how community-focused other countries were in their social welfare practices compared to the U.S. As Carla began to appreciate this difference, her reference point changed and she critiqued the U.S.'s individualistic culture:

The inclusion was what I really liked, it was more of a community focus rather than an individualized culture, so they were very inclusive...I had looked at a grant writing that they were working on for a community center... they had each population and how it fitted and how it would benefit each population, including children and elderly, which I think a lot of times in the US gets kind of left behind, the kids and the elderly a lot of times too, funding and the importance of them, but it seemed different there, that was, it was top of the list like "this is very important."

Participants also shared stories of how their understanding of culturally sensitive social welfare practices shifted as they developed an understanding of best practices within the culture they were working in. Amy described how her understanding of child labor shifted through her learning experiences in Ghana, moving from a U.S.-based understanding that child labor was always unjust, to seeing from a Ghana perspective how child labor can be seen as just:

Children working is still really important, and they weren't trying to stop children from working, but they wanted them to be able to go to school and to do those other things as well, that it doesn't like interfere with their development. And I think just like that kind of idea and approach of them still giving them the vocational skills to know how to fix cars, seamstresses, etc...I saw it like you're still having the children work, It's just doing something where they can get paid more and hopefully work less hours... They're saying "well we're not going to change the way we do things just because the international developments say we need to do it this way." So I think they were trying to keep their own identity and how their culture operates and still support the rights of orphans.

Through experiencing a developing social welfare organization that started with meeting basic needs, some of the participants developed an understanding for how an organization can move from meeting basic needs towards the development of social welfare systems that are locally run. Participants also saw how community members were empowered by locally-run systems. Although this community development model is taught in the U.S., participants' experiences

prior to their international practicum had been based on established social welfare systems that were not in the process of development, like many of the systems they were working with during their practicum abroad. These well-established social welfare systems and related programs were not as community based and less focused on the process of empowering local people from the community to develop as leaders. John expressed his learning compared to his experiences at home:

It was kind of neat to see somewhat of a building process on an organization that had been running for a little while. Because the focus of (the organization) was it was started by people from outside the country, but the intent is to turn into a Romanian ran program. So, trying to help show people the needs that are there and have them initiate and start building for their own country and their own culture.

This shift began while many of the participants were still abroad, but became even more apparent when they returned home and they found themselves questioning certain aspects of American culture, social work practices and behaviors. The U.S. was no longer their primary reference point for understanding their host country nor for understanding the world, as their worldview, practice approaches, and cultural experiences had expanded beyond the typical American experience.

5.1.3 Home is not Normal Anymore: A shift in Reference Points

Home was a reference point when participants were initially abroad, but when they returned home they had two reference points that sometimes were diametrically opposed: their reference point from the U.S. and their reference point based on their international experience. This often changed their feelings about their home country of America, their worldviews compared to those around them, and their understanding of social work practice. This competition between two reference points also impacted participants' feelings about themselves and the world around them. Once home, they began to critique the viewpoints and practices of

their original reference point of the U.S. as their experiences abroad had given them a new reference point that challenged their original reference points. Participants coming home in December felt particularly strong differences during the holiday season. Lori said:

First off it was very cold and the materialism was very hard for me. I'm walking through the mall, overwhelmed, it was so bright and there were all these smells and colors and it was just very overwhelming to me...certainly in Uganda there were a lot of very sensual experiences, but in a different way... I'd been used to living out of a suitcase with five outfits and coming back to ginormous (sic) malls and it's Christmastime and that was hard.

Participants found it hard to share their experiences with people back home in the U.S. They found it difficult to summarize their experiences and to describe how they had been affected by their experience abroad. Heather expressed this by stating:

That transition was difficult, very difficult. I came home and I was very glad to see my family but I was definitely feeling like I went into a culture shock, even greater than when I went to Romania, that wasn't really my everyday reality. This was in the United States, and just made me feel, made me realize again, just how much we have, how much I have, and it made me want to change, to make a lot of changes as far as, it was difficult going back and having a car, just for me, I didn't have to share with anybody and I could go wherever I wanted and I could just burn through fuel, just the things that we take for granted. And just the things that I have, the amount of clothes, it really did a number on me...I never really went back, I guess it just really stuck. Always still thinking about how the rest of the world lives now that I've seen it, and I can't pretend that it doesn't.

There was also difficulty adjusting to lifestyles at home. Theresa said that once she was home she missed the simplicity and laid back culture of Romania and had a hard time adjusting to this difference:

I remembered some of the simplicity in Romania versus the complex things over here in the US. Everything was more relaxed over there. I'm probably more of an uptight person, so being in that structure (in the U.S.) now I have to make sure I'm on time and here and there and everything. The more pressure I have the more anxious I am.

In addition to feeling their perspective had changed, many of the participants noticed they had changed, which was further understood as they noticed that the people at home had stayed the same. For example, many of the participants realized they didn't feel or appreciate

being American in the same way that other Americans did, and in the same way they felt before their international experience. Susan noted her experience of being at 4th of July celebrations where everyone was celebrating the freedom of America and she was feeling shame due to America's history of oppression. She stated:

Honestly, last year, Fourth of July I was like "So what? We're Americans." I didn't want to sing "God Bless America," I didn't want to sing any of the patriotic songs, I still don't, I just I'm like we're so egotistical and it bothers me. We are immigrants; we came to a country uninvited - and killed all these people and we're "Oh, we're America, we're a country." Like it's a huge struggle for me, it's just the mentality that we think we're so great and we're one of the worst countries ever... And you know it's the "United States," we're not united at all. We're not "Land of the Free." No, we're not. We're racist and we still have all these problems and it's really a struggle for me

The international experience has affected some of the participants' relationships with those around them at home. As their reference point shifted, and they had a new point of comparison, they now felt their perspectives are not typical of the average American. They are now more critical of certain American perspectives they had once seen as normal. Carla expressed this by saying:

I notice it the most I think when I go back home and visit my parents because especially with Pennsylvania there's a lot of conservative areas especially here with people that I meet, when I go out, that extreme patriotism and the fact that if you say anything bad about the United States you must not love your country, or if you're antiwar you must not love America or you can't support the troops and be against war. So I've had a lot of conversations with people about things like that, and it's great that we have this country, but I think there's always been an increase too recently with the wars and things that we have to stand by each other, and that God loves America and what about everybody else? Or just other general statements that people make day to day without thinking, kind of has made me take a step back and think about it a little bit more like it's not just something you just said, it has a deeper meaning behind it.

Other participants noted similar experiences, but felt it was important to have a balance between critiquing their own culture and country and appreciating its strengths. Michelle said that her experiences abroad have helped her to not negate the value of her own identity as an American, but to also learn to be critical. She said she "saw the beauty in other people appreciating their

culture,” but has still remained sensitive to how America is viewed internationally, which feeds into the negative stereotype of “the rich white people who know everything.” She has developed a positive, yet humble identity of her culture due to this dichotomy. Michelle’s comments reflected that although some of the participants’ views of American changed dramatically, for some after being home in the U.S. for a while, their views readjusted to a new reference point. They have discovered what they feel is a balance between developing more critical views of America to a constructive critique of both the positives and negatives of American society as compared to what they have experienced overseas.

The international experience also expanded participants’ range and depth of understanding of social work practice and models of practice, especially as they compare themselves to their peers. Carla stated, “I always felt a little shielded when I would hang out with other people who were social workers or some of my friends who are even from northeastern part of the United States (where she grew up and had studied), very different way of thinking.” Many of the participants said they are more likely to question the typical American practices now.

Some of these American practices overlapped with religious and faith perspectives. Some participants felt their experience have impacted, and even challenged, their religious and faith perspectives that had been based on American cultural values. Some participants expressed how Christianity and faith expression looked different in different cultures. Andrea said she learned Native American perspectives on spirituality that she had not learned in the South where spiritual social work practices were mostly focused on Christian practices. Some participants expressed their newfound views have impacted their faith motivations to pursue Christian missions and ministry in different ways. Heather is now living in an urban poor community practicing faith-

based community development, which developed out of her shifting reference point on how to approach community-based Christian ministry.

Participants shifting reference points also generally impact their approach to social work practice. Alison's experiences in Northern Ireland helped her see that "there is more than one way to approach an issue in child protection and child welfare." These shifts in reference points have set participants apart from their American social work peers. This shift in learning includes questioning typical American practices, relating more to clients who are from international places, and utilizing this newfound perspective to advocate on their behalf. This was true of most participants; however the reference point of comparison was different depending on their own personal worldviews and prior experiences and the country they had studied and lived in.

5.1.4 A Shift in Understanding of Social Wellbeing

As participants' perspectives shifted from the U.S. being their main reference point to their international experiences being a reference point, their new reference point has impacted their view of their home environment. This new frame of reference now influences their assessment of other people's home environments, shifting their understanding of social wellbeing of people. The nature of the shift in understanding of what constitutes social wellbeing is different based on the country/culture where the participant studied. Those in developing countries have gained a better understanding of basic needs of their clients and have come to appreciate that their own cultural reference point for what was considered safe and healthy was inadequate for what is considered safe and healthy for some families. Karen stated:

...realizing that with a roof over their head and food on the table and running water and their health, in Uganda they were happy with that and they were okay... my compassion for them is different and just trying, I think trying not to be too judgmental... I get ticked off with my family sometimes with words that are used in discussing poor people. And I don't even like to say poor people; people who are just struggling... I want to just stand up for those folks and to really try to empower them. (This) is very much near and dear to

my heart. To support them and to encourage them that you can do this- whatever that looks like in your life.

Melissa said this tension between reference points has positively impacted her professional practice following graduation, as compared to co-workers who had not had the same experiences of studying abroad:

And so there were some people who we were working with what by American standards were in poverty and other practitioners were like, well they are eating possum. And I was like, well, maybe that's what they eat, you know. I don't think that's that big of a deal I think that that came from being influenced by living there and seeing not everything has to be suburbia (sic) America. Most of the other practitioners who I was working with, that's their experience, growing up in middle class or upper middle class families and working with impoverished people and they hadn't experienced anything different. (It was) an unnecessary standard. (They also would say) I don't know if this is healthy for a family to be sleeping in the same room here... I had just come from Romania where that was a typical thing where everyone was going to sleep in the same room. I didn't see that as a problem at all. So that did lead to some conflict sometimes of what kind of intervention are we going to do with this family.

Those who studied in developed countries where more resources are devoted to social welfare (i.e., Canada and Northern Ireland) saw fewer people with basic needs and crises and as a result saw social work practice more focused on quality of life issues. This has led them to be more critical of U.S. social welfare practice and to wonder what would be possible if the U.S. developed more liberal social welfare benefits that would more adequately address basic needs. Andrea described how much easier it was to receive addictions services in Canada compared to the U.S.:

In Canada it's like if somebody lived in the province and they want help, they've got help and there was no question of insurance and there was no question of had they failed a previous level of treatment before and it seemed like it was a lot nicer format than here. It's been frustrating for me here because I see the people that want treatment and I'm like "Why can't we do it like the Canadians?"

Whether experiencing more developed social services in countries that had less people in crisis, or less developed social welfare systems, the new perspectives experienced during their

international practicum, have contributed to a shift in participants' social work perspectives and impacted their worldviews, giving them new frameworks for practice.

5.1.5 Summary of Shifting Reference Points

In summary, participants began with the U.S. as their reference point to their experiences during their time of study abroad; however, they experienced a dynamic interplay between reference points, which shifted over time. As they began to experience new viewpoints and perspectives to living, culture, and social work, at first they compared their lived experience growing up and studying in the U.S. Over the period of their practicum experience, this reference point began to shift, and many began to see the world through new eyes, thus shifting their reference point. When they returned home, many discovered their reference point had changed, which has affected their worldviews and feelings about the U.S. They now have a new point of comparison and realize their feelings and attitudes are different than many other Americans they interact with at home; their experiences made them more critical of perspectives they had previously considered to be normal. For some, this criticism remains, for others they have come to develop what they perceived as a more balanced perspective over time, in which they now appreciate both positive aspects of their original reference point of the U.S., but also remain critical of certain aspects of American culture and social work practice. Participant's new reference point has impacted their view the well-being of their clients and how to adequately address these issues. Their reference point on social wellbeing varies based on whether they experienced what seemed like a more developed social welfare system compared to the U.S. or a less developed social welfare system. Along with a shift in reference points, participants had experiences with varying levels of comfort and discomfort, which has contributed to their overall growth and learning.

5.2 Experience with Comfort vs. Discomfort

While describing significant experiences, participants expressed both feelings of comfort and discomfort related to their experiences. During their experience, these feelings related to the contrast between the discomforts of feeling different than those around them while finding comfort in commonalities. Participants also discussed their supervision times as a significant experience that related to their feelings of comfort or discomfort. Participants were able to identify these feelings and figure out how to work through situations that made them feel uncomfortable. Much like their experience with a shift in reference point, their experience with comfort shifted over time throughout their experience, resulting in feelings of discomfort when they assimilated back into their own culture at home. These experiences have shed new light on what it feels like to be different, informing their understanding of and practice with those that experience this feeling on a regular basis.

5.2.1 Feeling of Being Different

During their international practicum experience, many participants expressed discomfort due to feeling like a minority for the first time for an extended period of time. These feelings often related to physically looking different. Sam described this as feeling “in the spotlight all the time.” Many also felt uncomfortable due to the language barrier as they felt there was a “communication disconnect.” Those that were aware of the benefit of learning through the discomfort seemed to have a greater degree of learning through the experience. Michelle discussed her discomfort, but also the benefits to having this experience:

Language was a huge barrier, the nursery school children were just starting school so they didn't have a lot of English skills and they just thought I was a complete novelty. So it was just always like I'm climbing on, they would call us “mzungu,” like which was like “white person” like I'm climbing on the mzungu! I was a toy to them not being able to communicate well in other aspects....sometimes it felt like a barrier, but it was also I think a beneficial experience to still try to figure out how am I going to communicate to this person that really can't understand me very well and I can't understand them very

well, cause there are ways to still communicate and to still show empathy and to show understanding and build relationships even if language isn't very possible.

The participants who were aware of the discomfort of feeling different eventually learned to take advantage of the learning opportunities it gave them while at abroad as well. Emphasizing this, Amy expressed:

At first I was very overwhelmed, like I didn't like it...it made me really uncomfortable because anywhere you went people looked at you and came up to you and I just wasn't used to any kind of attention like that. But then I started to capitalize on it and use it as a way like "oh I'm going to go out, this is a good way for me to talk to people and it's a conversation starter and I can use this."

Participants were able to make a choice between having more comfortable or less comfortable experiences. They found comfort with people and experiences that were most familiar to their culture. At the same time, most pushed themselves into less comfortable situations, which led to increased learning and awareness. One example is when student participants chose living arrangements that pushed them beyond their comfort zone. Carla described her experience:

I know that especially when people are in uncomfortable situations they gravitate towards what they know and that's definitely me and so I knew that if I had requested to live with other American students or international students that I would shy away from trying to get more in touch with Irish students, so I figured that if I lived with people from Northern Ireland, I had no other option but to try to get it and really take advantage because that's why I was there to study, the Irish culture.

When participants embraced these uncomfortable situations, leading to a fuller immersion, they experienced more opportunities for learning through differences, but they also found commonality with those around them in the midst of the differences.

5.2.2 Comfort and Commonality in the Midst of Difference and Discomfort

As participants embraced their experiences of discomfort they often learned to feel more comfortable with their differences, and by the end of their experience felt much more

comfortable even though the differences were still present. Heather discussed her feelings of being different changing over time:

On the surface level when I first got there I felt so different... by the end of it I definitely felt like I belonged. And not even just at the end, I did feel pretty different, but that changed, as relationships grew and changed.

In the midst of feeling different, some of the participants also discussed what they had in common with those from the culture in which they were living. Despite the noticed feelings of being different, those that worked on developing relationships with local people often discovered commonalities in the midst of difference, which moved them towards a more comfortable state.

For example, Alison stated:

There was obviously a language barrier and some different perspectives and obviously physical differences, but again I felt like I had a lot in common with people and it was easy to just hang out with people and really see the difference.

Some of participants' experiences with supervision were more comfortable than others, which seemed to significantly impact their overall experiences and their meaning behind these experiences. Experiences with supervision will now be discussed.

5.2.3 Comfort Level with Supervision

Participants had a variety of experiences with supervision, some of which were comfortable and some that felt very uncomfortable. Some participants had more than one supervisor. In most cases, one was an on-site supervisor at their practicum and the other was an off-site supervisor who worked for their study abroad program in some capacity. The participants who had one supervisor, with whom they felt uncomfortable, often did not experience the depth of learning through supervision that others experienced. More often than not; however those who had one supervisor with whom they did not feel comfortable had also had a supervisor that they felt comfortable with. The supervisor they felt most comfortable with was typically

perceived as significant to their support, growth and learning. Their comparison of experiences with both supervisors will be discussed in this section.

Michelle had an onsite practicum supervisor that she felt uncomfortable with at times. She said, “I didn’t feel like we always understood each other very well. I had a difficult time understanding what he was expecting from me as far as what he wanted my learning to look like and what activities he wanted me to be participating in.” However, even though participants like Michelle struggled with this, those that had a different off-site supervisor who they felt more comfortable speaking with in the midst of the uncomfortable situations they were in, were more often able to mitigate these feelings of discomfort. This allowed them more significant experiences with the supervisor that was most meaningful to their learning. Referring to her experience with the supervisor she felt more comfortable with, Michelle stated:

I think (she was) really helpful in helping me make connections because...it was different than what I was thinking I was signing up for when picking that location....so she was really good at helping me make connections about like how this fits with social work and what you’re learning and how this is valuable even if I didn’t think it was valuable.

Most participants felt most comfortable having a supervisor that could empathize with them and their felt experiences. It was helpful if this supervisor understood the U.S. system as well as the system and culture of the country they were studying in, whether that be someone from U.S., an ex-patriot from a different country, or a native of the country. But the key element that shaped meaningful experiences with supervision was having a supervisor with whom they could trust and feel comfortable, while helping them grow in their cultural understanding and understanding of social work practice.

Melissa said she had meaningful experiences with her main supervisor, but a less comfortable experience with a different supervisor in the country. Through this contrast, she made suggestions for supervision of international practicums:

I think you have to be someone who students feel comfortable talking with, so down to earth, having that compassion. (One of the supervisor's) personality was pretty cold and she had a harder time having just a, an open relationship where students felt like they could come and talk with her. I would not, I would say that students did not feel like, hey I'm just gunna (sic) go and have a little chat with (her)... whereas, my direct supervisor was much more, I felt like this person is not going to be critical of me and this, I don't feel like I have to impress this person or be fake.

This importance of having a supervisor a student felt comfortable with could be seen as allowing them a crutch to hold on to their own comfort and culture when looked at from a superficial level. For some it may have been at first; however, the participants that seemed to have the most effective supervision experience, were the ones that had at least one supervisor that was readily available, that they could trust, and that they felt comfortable freely talking with about their experiences. Having this type of relationship helped them to be able to work through both uncomfortable experiences and relationships. It also helped participants navigate their immersion experiences in order to provide more depth of understanding of those experiences, which will be discussed further in the "Elusive Nature of Immersion" section. Furthermore, supervision often helped participants cope with the transition home, which at times was uncomfortable. Even with this support, the transition home was often more challenging than participants had expected.

5.2.4 Home is Not Comfortable Anymore

Once participants transitioned home, some experienced reverse culture shock, and now found themselves experiencing discomfort within their own culture. Some participants who said they experienced a thorough debriefing by a supervisor or professor did not feel their transition home was as difficult as they had expected, but many participants who did not have an extensive debriefing said it would have been helpful to have been offered more in order to process their experiences and assist them with the transition.

Michelle is one who had an extensive debriefing; she was warned that she would have reverse culture shock. To her surprise, she did not. Michelle stated:

It was just a lot easier than I anticipated. I think part of that is my personality, I'm just naturally really easy going and really adaptable to a lot of situations, so like even going there, like I didn't really struggle to adapt to like living in a new country, it wasn't very difficult for me.

Even though some adapted well and did not feel uncomfortable with the transition home, most participants still identified ways they have changed; feeling a level of discomfort with some aspects of what seemed normal and comfortable before their international practicum experience.

Many participants felt different than their friends and family when they returned home. Carla described this by stating, "I felt like I was so different and then I came back and my family expected me to just be the same person again, and I just wasn't."

Some, including Michelle who adapted well, still struggled with knowing how to process their experiences and found it difficult to discuss their experiences with others. Lori said:

It's also strange when you go back to your campus and you'll see people in passing and they will be like, "how was it?" And all they want to know, they want to hear you say, "Oh, it was great, I had a good time." That's all they want....we debriefed a couple days before flying home and they talked about preparing like a two second response and preparing a 30 minute recap for certain people and preparing more for different levels of friends who wanted to know things. But it was still really hard. I think stories came out more in the weeks and months that followed. And some of my closer friends and family have said that I talk about it a lot more now than I did a year or so ago.

Many of the participants who had studied in poorer countries and came home at Christmas time felt particularly uncomfortable with the focus on materialism. Heather was one of the participants who felt this shock, not only related to the Christmas season, but also other aspects of her daily living as compared to Romania:

That transition was difficult, very difficult. I came home and I was very glad to see my family but I was definitely feeling like I went into a culture shock, even greater than when I went to Romania, that wasn't really my everyday reality, this was in the United States, and just made me feel, made me realize again, just how much we have, how much

I have, and it made me want to change, to make a lot of changes as far as, it was difficult going back and having a car, just for me, I didn't have to share with anybody and I could go wherever I wanted and I could just burn through fuel, just the things that we take for granted. And just the things that I have, the amount of clothes, it really did a number on me, and it never, it didn't, I never really went back, I guess it just really stuck. Always still thinking about how the rest of the world lives now that I've seen it, and I can't pretend that it doesn't. ...It was hard coming home, but also not being angry about it and not saying "oh I don't care about any of it," my education was expensive and had a hard time accepting it, "this is such a waste," but it's not, you look at the numbers but it looked like it.

In addition to feeling uncomfortable during the transition, participants' feelings of discomfort experienced during and after their study abroad experience have affected their understanding of their clients and their practice choices and practice approaches upon their return home.

5.2.5 Being Different Helps One to Understand Others Who are Seen as Different

Participants who noted the felt the experience of being a minority during their international experience consistently said how their experiences of feeling uncomfortable have positively impacted them since coming home. They now empathize more with others.

Participants who drew from these experiences of "being able to put yourself in someone's shoes," as Lori stated, utilize this learning in their social work practice now. They feel that they are now able to build a more understanding relationship with clients and discover commonalities in the midst of their differences.

This has positively impacted both their practice choices and practice approaches.

Heather says:

I would say just having that experience, just being by yourself, and feeling like a fish out of water, I can spot it more easily in people. And I always pattern a desire to bring people, even before that experience, it's kind of my nature, to bring people into the fold. To kind of make people feel more comfortable where they are and with who they are without being changed or trying to be different necessarily, but I definitely think that just heightened that sense for me, I can pick them out if I saw somebody...I think it's one of the reasons why I chose to go into what I went into, especially working with adults with disabilities, people with disabilities, even students with disabilities, I think I have always

been, those differences are really in your face sometimes, the big differences and abilities and speech abilities and just how somebody looks sometimes. I think that's probably the reason I've chosen that in a way.

Along with the general impact on their understanding of those who are marginalized in society, more specifically, many participants described how the experience of stepping out of their own shoes and experiencing discomfort was a positive experience and helped them to better empathize with immigrants in the U.S. Lindsey's words emphasize this learning:

I think it's just it makes you so much more aware of what it's like to be a minority and just aware that the little things that you take for granted as being a member of the majority, that that exists who are in the minority, especially you know when I work with immigrants or refugees, just knowing what it's like to come to a different country and try to live and set up your life, it's like it helps a lot to know, to have done something similar

5.2.6 Summary of Experiences with Comfort vs. Discomfort

In summary, many participants felt less comfortable at the beginning of their study abroad experience and developed more comfort over time. They felt they had more in common with local people, as time went on and they embraced their experiences. Upon their return home, they felt less comfort at home compared to before their trip. Their experiences of feeling some level of discomfort with being a minority during their international practicums, has helped most of the participants to develop a better understanding and empathy for clients who live the experience of being a minority on a daily basis. In contrast to this developed empathy for minority groups, many participants now feel less comfortable with ideas and practices from dominant American culture. Participants' feelings of comfort in the midst of discomfort relate to their immersion experience, which will be discussed further in the next section.

5.3 The Elusive Nature of Immersion

Related to participants' experiences with comfort and discomfort, participants found that their learning experiences were impacted by their level of immersion in their host community.

Although at times overlapping in nature, participants experienced immersion in two main areas: 1) their social/cultural environment, and 2) their academic/practicum environment. Within these areas experiences either facilitated or impeded upon their immersion experience. Because most participants were part of formal study abroad programs which involved other foreign students or faculty, no matter how fully immersed they seemed, they had periods of oasis from the immersion experience. Opportunities for immersion, combined with a protective oasis, appeared to encourage the greatest degree of learning. First, experiences within their social and cultural environment will be discussed, followed by discussion of the practicum and academic environment.

5.3.1 Social/Cultural Environment

Participants had a variety of social and cultural experiences during their study abroad experiences, including interactions with locals, foreigners from other countries and people from the United States. The social environment included relationships with fellow students, those with whom they lived, and relationships within the broader community. However, participants' housing situations appeared to contribute to their experience with immersion. Those living with host families, not surprisingly, became the most immersed on a daily basis, while those living in dorms with other Americans appeared to have the least immersion. The impact of the various types of housing experiences will be discussed, followed by a discussion of other immersion experiences in the community that were significant to the participants. In the midst of the immersion experiences, many participants had oasis with other students, which intruded upon or facilitated the immersion. The nature and value of the oasis experiences will be discussed after analysis of the immersion experience.

5.3.1.1 Housing Impeding upon Immersion

Participants seemed to experience the greatest degree of tension when choosing between more immersion-focused relationships with local people versus socializing with people from their own culture. Lori described this tension:

It's easier to make friends with Americans and plus when you're in the environment where everything is new, I think it is easier to bond together. Which was hard at first because we really wanted to, you know, have friendships with Ugandans, but it's just so much easier to gravitate towards the Americans It's something you fight against but you want so badly because, you know, you're going through all this culture shock only certain people can understand and you want to be able to talk to people who understand.

In addition, those who were in a housing situation with a combination of Americans and local people experienced cultural learning through activities that were not necessarily native to the host country's culture. Exemplifying this, Michelle stated her experiences with the Ugandans she related to the most:

...they didn't feel like I was as much of like this foreign, weird person and so the relationship seemed more natural, I mean they were still very different from me, but I think it was significant just to have friends from another culture. We would do things like watch movies on a laptop together and have a girls' night and paint nails and eat snacks. it was kind of the same as here but just in a different culture and with people who were very different from me. I think I appreciated just the chance to like just hang out with people and to feel like it was normal and feel like it was natural....they would ask questions about my culture, my experiences, or my family, but I could ask them about their culture as well. I think those were the closest relationships.

The tendency to stay around people like oneself – seem to impede opportunities for a greater immersion in the local culture.

5.3.1.2 Immersion through Housing Experiences

Participants who became most immersed in the local culture participated in either smaller study abroad programs or were placed in an internship that was not part of a formal study abroad program. Some of these participants did live with one or more American students, but the groups were smaller. In these circumstances, the degree of immersion still varied; however in order for

these participants to do required day-to day activities, such as shopping for food, traveling or developing friendships, they required more independent cultural experiences and relationships within the local community. This meant that these participants became more immersed in the local culture and they had increased and varied more opportunities for cultural learning. The most significant learning through immersion in housing, took place amongst those who lived with host families.

Many of the participants who lived on their own with locals and who had experiences typical to how locals lived, described their immersion and the relationships built as particularly significant to their learning, most predominantly their cultural learning. Heather stated: “If I would have been staying with other Americans or by myself, I think I would have been only with English speaking people. I probably wouldn’t have learned as much as I did.”

Language is certainly one part of culture. Participants in home environments with people who did not speak English gained the best understanding of local language. John describes the benefit he received through the language immersion experience:

If you’re by yourself (without a native family), you can kind of avoid and you don’t really have to participate in much...I definitely recommend it. It was hard at some times, we’d both have dictionaries, you’d have the Romanian to English and English to Romanian and, so it was fun trying to figure out how to communicate, but they were a great family and I wouldn’t have changed it.

Although the immersion experience was enjoyable for most, and viewed as valuable by all the participants, it was also challenging for many. Melissa describes the challenge and the value of living on her own with a Romanian family.

I think it’s hard to live with any family...(but) I think it was a really good experience. I think it gave me a much better understanding of how a typical Romanian family works and lives...I think that I would not have felt as connected to other Romanians if I hadn’t lived and had that experience because they were able to connect me with people who the agency didn’t necessarily...it broadened the amount of people in my community, you

know, it broadened who I could meet with. So that was good. You know, it gives you, it's a very stretching experience to live with another family and then to live in another family within another culture is stretching.

Further exemplifying the learning participants experience about the culture through their immersion experiences, Karen describes significant practical learning through living in a guest house where her hosts were like local “mothers” to them, and taught them important practical skills such as washing their clothes by hand like the locals did. Through a close relationship with one of the women who had AIDS, she observed that this woman “really helped to reduce the stigma of individuals living with AIDS and (influenced) local community members thinking ‘you can touch them, you can love them, you can still be close to them’ ...I just really respected her. She had given her life to turning Kumi into a different community.” This woman has also influenced Karen’s attitude about AIDS.

5.3.1.3 Immersion through Community Experiences

Participants had varying degrees of social and cultural experiences within the community they lived outside of their housing environment. Those choosing to become involved in community activities described valuable relationships with people outside of their living situation. While some found this difficult due to differences in culture or language, those who pushed themselves to engage with people in the community developed meaningful interactions and relationships with locals. Many of these relationships developed through activities outside of their practicum and included a range of people: members of the community who helped to organize their practicum, co-workers at their practicum, and people met through activities in which they participated within the local community (e.g., sporting groups such as hiking and volleyball teams they joined, going to bars and pubs, or meeting people while traveling on their own). For example, Karen had played volleyball in college. She noticed some men playing

volleyball one day and joined them, even though she was unsure if it was culturally appropriate to play as a female. She developed a significant friendship with one man, with whom she stayed in touch through letter writing after returning home. He told her that through their conversations he became inspired to work with people-in-need through the agency she interned at, and now was working there. Many gained interesting cultural learning through deliberately making effort to further immerse themselves through developing independent relationships with local people in the community. John said “it was great building relationships with Romanians, someone outside of your culture, your norms, but still having a genuine friendship with someone who grew up in a different background...I think it was one of my favorite experiences.”

5.3.1.4 Oasis Experiences with Other American Students Facilitating Immersion

Those that were more fully immersed during most of their experience appreciated having time to process their experiences with other American students or ex-patriots whether one-on-one or in a group setting. These significant experiences could be considered a non-immersion “Oasis” in the midst of immersion experiences, which facilitated participants growth and learning through giving the opportunities to process with their peers, in between times of immersion.

An example of this was Katrina’s discussions with her American room-mate. Katrina was immersed in the culture working with local people in a local agency all day long during her internship, but she appreciated the informal conversations and support during “nightly walks” with her American room-mate. She said it “actually was very helpful to have somebody who was in the same major and it was just interesting to hear her perspective.” She said they would challenge each other’s perspectives on their experiences.

Other participants who were living with local host families, working in local agencies, and developing relationships mainly with local people, benefited from a time during the week that they were able to step away from the immersion experience to process in a group setting with other ex-patriots. For some participants this was an informal time of gathering with other students at the end of the day. For others, it was a time organized through their study abroad program, with the goal of supporting the students' in their immersion experience. Related to the organized meeting time his study abroad experience provided, John said:

It helped out a lot because it gave us an opportunity to talk about the differences and to vent a little bit if you needed to and it was just nice to be able to talk with a group who kind of related to this is a new experience and kind of knew what you were going through.... I think it just helped knowing that there's other people there that you could talk to and that you can actually communicate with, cause a lot of the times I spent with people that English was their second language, and so we were always trying to have to figure out what each other was trying to say.

Along with these more informal, yet significant, cultural and social experiences that both intruded upon and facilitated the participant's growth and learning, participants were also involved in more formal experiences through their practicum and academic requirements. These experiences had a tendency to either facilitate or impede their growth and learning, moving them towards the development of new insights that influenced their practice after the international practicum.

5.3.2 Practicum and Academic Environment

The degree to which participants were immersed in local culture varied with different practicums because some agencies were fully staffed by local people and others had a combination of local staff and foreigners. As is a requirement of the Council of Social Work Education, all student participants were supervised by a social worker who holds a professional social work degree. In most cases supervision was provided on site, however when a qualified

social worker was unavailable supervision was provided by an ex-patriot, by a local person in a different agency, or by a person at their home university. If supervision was provided by someone from their home university via technology, a local agency person supervised their day to day internship activities. Individual supervision experiences, at times, allowed participants a time that pulled them back from full immersion – what was described above as an oasis.

5.3.2.1 Supervision as Bridge to Understanding Culture

Many participants completed practicums in agencies that had a mixture of local staff, along with some ex-patriots on staff and/or involved in their supervision. These experiences were normally effective at giving the participant a balance between the immersion experience and some kind of oasis experience with someone who could bridge the gap of understanding the cultural context they were working within. Lori described the beneficial experience of having two supervisors, one from Uganda and one from the U.S:

I think it was good because I had a field instructor, Ugandan, at my agency, but because of the cultural barriers, he wasn't really supervising me in a social work kind of aspect....I think the American (supervisor) was just really good at relating things back to what this would look like in the US or what this would look like in other international settings... she was really good for our sanity I think, just helping us to realize that it's ok that it's different. Because I think a lot of us came with the idea that, "Oh, we'll be doing American social work in Uganda." That's not really what it's going to be like, you know. So I think she was very good at helping us make that difference, make that change.

Like many other's significant experiences with supervision, Lori benefited from working alongside local staff members, but her meetings with her American supervisor emphasizes the importance of the supervisor having an understanding of the local culture. Although part of the formalized immersion experience, if participants had a trusting relationship with this supervisor and could honestly reflect on their personal experiences and feelings related to their immersion and experiences with comfort and discomfort, this supervisory experience provided a professional oasis that increased their learning through immersion. More significant learning

seemed to take place when their supervisor helped act as a cultural bridge to inform their understanding of their immersion experience, as well as challenge them to a greater degree of immersion.

Many of the participants who had this more formal oasis experience with a supervisor who understood social work in the United States feel that this experience has helped to expand their learning, helping them to embrace and understand the immersion experiences they were having to a greater degree. This experience, in turn, contributes to their ability to be a more effective cross-cultural practitioner, which enhanced their practice skills during the practicum as well as beyond the practicum experience. Lori stated:

She really stressed the fact that Americans often come into another culture and think that they're going to save the world and bring in their programs and their style. And she really stressed the idea of just being humble and going with that culture. That's going to help so much more than bringing in our ideas. It's not going to help in that culture if I brought in my American treatment plans and DA's and that kind of thing...that's going to be a loss there... I think it all gave us much less of an imperialistic kind of sense that like we have this white man's burden and we are going to come in and save the world that maybe we subconsciously had beforehand.

5.3.2.2 Immersion Facilitating the Learning of International Practice Models

In addition to formal supervision, many of the participants benefited from learning models of international social work when working alongside ex-patriot staffs who were working strategically alongside local staff to support sustainable indigenous leadership. Along with working with Romanian staff, Heather also worked with American and British ex-patriots. She stated:

I really liked how (the foreign staff) were working themselves out of a job, always trying to empower and promote the Romanians that were there to be doing what you're doing so that became theirs and not just a mission thing. It was just like equipping them, I saw that so much...it's very similar (to what I am doing now) and part of that reason I'm feeling released from this area (of community development work).

Participants also benefitted from working alongside local staff who facilitated learning on a daily basis while at the same time further immersing them in local society and culture. Heather had an American supervisor she met with weekly who helped support her learning from a perspective outside of the immersion experience. She also gained culturally appropriate practice learning on a day to day basis through her work with Romanians; they helped facilitate her understanding of how to practice within this new cultural environment:

Ovidiu was working in the orphanage...I went into the orphanage not really knowing what to expect, and of course it was very shocking and it was kind of emotionally overwhelming. He also worked with the elderly club. Just watching him interact, he was he was great with the children and the elderly. He had such a kind spirit about him that put me at ease, and kind of model how I should be acting and treating them, and not just fragile and scared, but like people. That just sounds silly now, but at the time there was a language barrier, and (I was experiencing) this dire situation...and he was there and just very calm and reassuring. And working with Maria implementing the foster care...we did a lot of home visits together ...she maintained professionalism, even in places that were shocking, she always treated everybody very professional (sic), but at the same time very compassionate, not just professional, but also with lots of just love really.

These relationships with local staff members during their practicum facilitated further immersion experiences for some of the participants. These immersion experiences took place during their personal time and through invitations to become involved in more practicum related activities beyond the typical practicum. Lindsey described that through developing relationships with local staff members, she gained more learning opportunities that furthered her ability to form relationships outside of the typical work day.

I think I had good relationships with the caseworkers that I would approach with social work questions especially. And then I also got to travel with some of the case managers. They took all of them on a retreat to do training. They invited us to go with the executive director, some case managers, and the women leaders of the community. So that was actually a really good experience because I think I formed a lot of relationships with the clients just by being on a crowded bus with them or sleeping in the same hostel. And I also got to see the director kind of in her own element and not in the administrative position.

Although each participant had unique and varying experience with immersion and non-immersion experiences there tends to be a tension between immersion and oasis experiences for participants. However, despite the different ways participants embrace and learn from their immersion experiences, the oasis experience is an important anchor that allows those desiring further immersion to embrace it more fully. As they embraced the oasis as a learning experience, greater learning took place through their immersion experiences. These oasis experiences could be extended through supervision from an ex-patriot, as described above, or through a local supervisor, as is discussed in the next section. Participants also benefited from immersion experiences through having a local supervisor; however the benefits of these experiences varied depending on the communication between the student participant and their supervisor.

5.3.2.3 Immersion through Local Supervision

Some participants who had a more fully immersive experience without an American supervisor had most of their on-site supervision from local people. The most significantly positive experiences involved supervisors who gave feedback and helped them to understand social work in the cultural context they were working. The participants who seemed to benefit from these more immersive experiences with a native supervisor were in situations where there was no language barrier, allowing discussions to take place at a deeper level. Alison described the benefits she experienced through her local supervisors:

I felt like I had both professional supervision and professional supervision mentorship and also personal ...Personally, it was really good to have that support and professionally, I liked to talk through things as I'm thinking about them so they helped me kind of think about context of a post conflict situation and how that affects child wellbeing... they helped me kind of plan (my research project) and gave me feedback on it and they always made sure I was able to come to all kinds of different meetings even if I wasn't necessarily contributing anything but so that I could learn from the experience and they would talk through it with me and kind of give me feedback on what I was

experiencing or what I was thinking. So they were really, they were great. I felt very supported and very much like they were very interested in my professional development.

Those who had a local supervisor expressed great benefit when these supervisors had some degree of familiarity with American culture or enough understanding to bridge the gap the students had between the differences. This ideal supervision experience helped participants gain insight and understanding to these differences. Lindsey described the benefit of such an experience during her practicum in India:

She was much more familiar with North American culture so that she could explain the differences that we would bring up in practice. For example, she encouraged me to look up and compare the code of ethics in India for social workers so we talked about some of those differences, like if there were any concerns about cultural things or things that went on we would kind of talk through that. I remember sharing a concern when I was shadowing and listening in on cases where there were domestic violence situations it was just much more relaxed and confidentiality was not as serious as it is in the US and so we just kind of talked through that and some of the things were just kind of cultural things like if, like if a female counselor was in the room with a male client then they wouldn't shut the door because other things might be assumed instead of privacy, so, just kind of like cultural things that were going on that we might think was a breach of confidentiality or unethical whereas maybe there was something going on or maybe there really was an issue.

In summary, participants who had either American trained social worker and local social workers with local training had both positive and negative experiences, but the key to learning was having support, someone to talk to and to give feedback, to challenge them and bridge the gap of learning between home and their study abroad experience. If the supervisor understood American social work or could dialogue with the student participants to learn more about American social work as compared to local social work in the country of the practicum benefited the most from this learning experience. These conversations between supervisors and participants allowed them to expand their learning in a critical way. This created some of the most meaningful learning experiences from their practicum and other outside cultural

experiences. Most of the participants expressed how the experience stepping away into an oasis and having discussions with someone from his or her own culture, who also had an understanding of international social work and the cultural context they were in, helped enhance their experience and deepened their level of understanding within their immersion experiences. This suggests that an oasis experience that provided personal, professional and academic support directed towards learning, which pushed participants towards deeper levels of immersion experience outside of these oases, created opportunities for increased learning. Although there were many opportunities for learning from supervision, supervision experiences also had the potential to intrude upon students' learning.

5.3.2.4 Supervision as an Intrusion on Learning

Most of the participants had a positive experience with supervision that facilitated their learning; however some participants had negative experiences. Their suggestions, combined with the experiences that were perceived more positively, offer insight into the importance of supervision on the participants learning outcomes. First negative experiences with native supervisors will be discussed followed by negative experiences with ex-patriot supervisors. These experiences included situations where the participants felt the supervisor was not available, they did not feel safe or respected, or they were not challenged professionally.

One participant felt sexually harassed by her local supervisor, so did not feel safe to discuss issues related to her internship or social work learning. A couple of participants experienced supervisors who they perceived as dishonest or corrupt in the way they handled donations from international locations. Others felt their supervisor was not prepared enough to facilitate their growth and learning. Based on her experiences working with a native supervisor, Alison said:

I wish he would have made me take a bit closer of a look at what I was trying to accomplish...I don't feel like he really gave me any ways that I could improve...I know that there are always ways that you can improve on what you're doing.

Negative experiences with supervision were not isolated to experiences with local supervisors. Although most participants who were supervised by American trained ex-patriots experienced positive experiences with supervision, some had negative experiences. Many participants shared the value of an international practicum supervisor having an understanding of the culture they were working in, or at the minimum, enough knowledge of international social work to support students' understanding of their work environment. Those who did not have this experience noted that it was a weakness. Sam's supervisor was from the U.S. and had the appropriate credentials to supervise him, but did not have knowledge of social welfare in Mexico. When asked what the ideal supervisor would have been like he said:

I think a better situation would have been somebody who had either practiced or worked in Mexico if they were a foreigner or a Mexican person who understood the social welfare system in the U.S. so they could have helped deal with some of the differences.

Participants who had valuable experiences with supervision suggested areas for improvement. Some said it is extremely important that the supervisor be approachable, available and trusting. Melissa's words support the overall feeling participants had. She had worked with two foreign social workers with experience in international social work. Comparing both experiences, suggested it was extremely important to have someone "who students feel comfortable talking with, down to earth, and has compassion." When speaking about one of these social workers, she said, "I didn't feel like I could just complain about, you know, this is, I haven't had a shower or I certainly wasn't going to talk to her about if I was having digestive issues because the new food I was eating, or you know, not like real talk." In comparison to her direct supervisor who she said was "not going to be critical of me" and that she did not have to

“impress this person or be fake.” Although these negative experiences were few, they shed light on the benefit to supervision that helped participants learn and grow towards greater experiential learning, leading to positive outcomes beyond the international practicum experience.

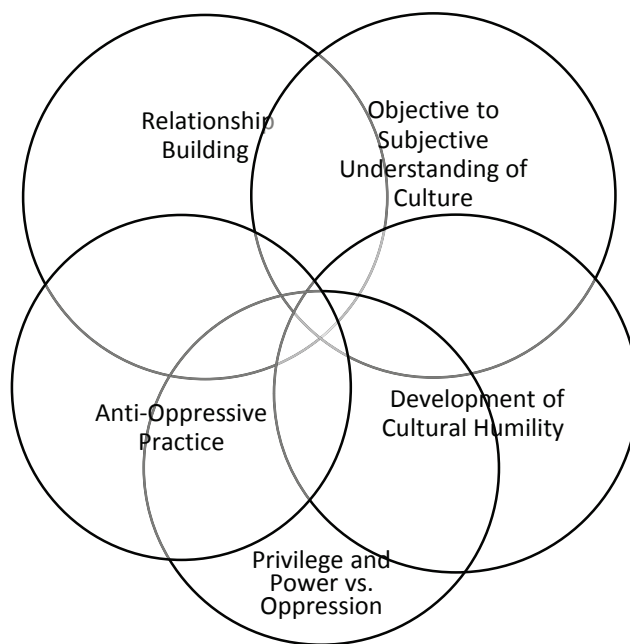
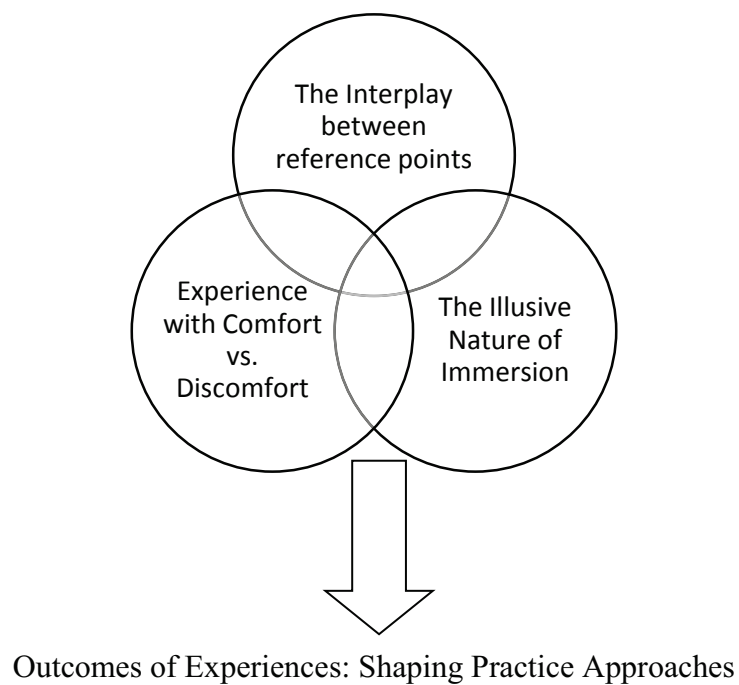
5.3.2.5 Summary Immersion Experiences

Participants had a variety of experiences with immersion within both their social/cultural and practicum and academic environment. These immersion experiences and oasis from immersion either intruded upon or encouraged further learning through their immersion experiences. Participants have benefited from having a variety of immersion experiences through their living and social experiences and practicum and related academic experiences. The felt outcomes of their more positive experiences combined with participants’ felt negative experiences, confirm the value of having supervision where the students feel safe to process their experiences. Their growth and learning is maximized when facilitated by someone knowledgeable about social work and cultural issues, so that they can bridge the gap of understanding and move the students towards positive growth and learning that lasts beyond their international practicum.

5.4 Significant Experiences and their Meaning for the Participants

Once participants returned home, they were able to see how their experiences with shifting reference points, comfort and discomfort and immersion impacted their social work practice. Three major themes developed as outcomes of the participants’ experiences, which all related to their ability to practice in cross cultural settings. As summarized in Figure, 5.1, these included: the importance of relationship; the development of a more subjective understanding of cross-cultural practice; cross-cultural humility; a greater understanding of privilege and oppression; and the development of anti-oppressive practice principles in their practice methods. These areas will now be discussed.

Figure 5.1 Outcomes of Significant Experiences



5.4.1 Shaping Practice Approaches

Participants feel their experiences have shaped their career choices and practice approaches in significant ways. Although each participant had different lived experiences, both during their practicum and through their career choices since returning home, the common threads of practice outcomes include the importance of relationship building, a more subjective view of cross-cultural practice, a deeper understanding of power and privilege vs. oppression, and developed anti-oppressive practice perspectives.

5.4.1.1 Relationship Building

The importance of relationship building in practice was a common thread that participants discussed throughout their interviews. These included relationships with other students, supervisors, colleagues, clients and community members. Almost all of the participants discussed significant relationships that have positively impacted their growth and learning in considerable ways, both during their experience and after their return home. The deeper, most honest and trusting relationships seemed to affect participants learning outcomes to the greatest degree. Participants also stressed the importance of relationship building as the most important aspect of successful social work practice with clients.

When asked about important practice outcomes of their experiences, participants also focused much of their attention on the importance of relationship building above other aspects of social work practice that they did not experience as much during their international practicum. For example, many of the participants feel that their social work experiences abroad were not as organized and structured as they would have been in the U.S., therefore, they missed the experience of certain practical aspects of U.S. social work practice and learning of theory. However, this negative did not cause regrets, as the majority mentioned they gained greater learning of what they felt was the key to successful social work practice – the developed

relationship, or therapeutic alliance, between the client and the social worker, which Threvrick (2003) discusses as an important aspect of social work theory and practice that must not be forgotten in the midst the development of new theoretical approaches. Lori summed this learning outcome by stating:

As long as I can build a relationship, it's good....I think that was very impactful to me, just not thinking about people as numbers or graphs or charts, but thinking of people as people. And I never thought that I did that, but going there kind of helped me to realize that, you know, I do....I was worried about, "Oh, I'm never going to learn a computer system, I'm never going to learn how to write treatment plans, write progress notes, and I was like, that's really not what social work is about...just realizing that social work is about relationships, it's not about paperwork, it's not about clinical terminology and diagnoses and that kind of thing....I think it's really turned me off from labeling.

Participants discussed the importance of developing trust as a key factor in successful outcomes. This was spoken of generally, but also discussed as being particularly important when working with people different from oneself. Heather discussed how her experience feeling different while studying in Romania helped her to understand this to a greater degree:

It's all about the relationship that you build and you build that trust, I've found that it helps you professionally. It doesn't matter that you look differently (sic), because you're going to...I worked in mental health, and worked with adults with disabilities and there was big differences there but again those relationships just getting to know people, those types of barriers don't matter as much after a while.

An important aspect of building a trusting relationship with clients who are different from oneself is the importance of understanding their culture. Participants feel that their experiences abroad have helped them to develop a more subjective understanding of culture compared to what they had learned in the classroom.

5.4.1.2 Objective to Subjective Understanding of Culture

As a requirement of the U.S. social work education programs accredited through the Council of Social Work Education, participants would have gained knowledge and practice skills focused on developing cultural competency prior to their study abroad experience. Cultural

competency education involves teaching the importance of understanding the role of culture in a person's lived experience. Culturally competent practice includes a combination of knowledge, awareness and understanding of the culture one is working with (Este, 2007; Sue, 2006; NASW, 2007). Intersecting with one's knowledge, awareness and understanding, one's values and attitudes of respect, equity and social justice against oppression are an important part of being culturally competent (Estes, 2007; Sue, 2006). Participants in this study perceive that they developed a greater understanding of themselves and others as well as forces of oppression, which indicates growth in culturally competent practice, but participants even grew beyond culturally competent practice, which focuses more on objective understanding of culture and less of subjective view, according to critics.

Critics of cultural competency models suggest that cultural competency is focused more on the objective facts of a culture and does not focus enough on the subjectivity of the unique lived experience of each individual and their personal identity in the midst of their cultural background (Dean, 2001; Estes, 2007; Carpenter-Song et al., 2007). Participants in this study seemed to move from this objective understanding that cultural competency teaches, to a more subjective understanding of culture compared to what is learned in the classroom. Amy described how living in a culture helped her to understand culture differently when learning outside of the classroom.

You actually live in a different culture where you're very uncomfortable a large percent of the time, so it's like you can understand, like "oh yeah, like I can totally see how people are doing things differently, it's not just saying it or talking about it in a classroom... I think it just kind of opens you up too, to understand that people do things differently and things aren't always going to operate how you think they should because that doesn't make it right.

Although most participants are now working with cultures different from the ones they practiced within during their international practicum, they are able to apply their cross-cultural

learning abroad, to their work with diverse cultural groups in their current practice. This understanding has helped participants to recognize the danger of how stereotyping can prevent one from truly understanding a person. Lori stated:

realizing that one person doesn't speak for an entire culture. You know, you can't read some sort of book or pamphlet or website on a certain culture and think that that applies to a specific client, so I think, when I was in Uganda, just realizing that one Ugandan is completely different from another Ugandan. That gathers culture, but there's also personality. And so personality and culture kind of interplay quite a bit.

Lindsey expressed how her learning in India has influenced her current practice with other cultures to move beyond a general understanding of culture towards understanding individual experiences of culture.

I think if I hadn't gone to India I probably would have related more of my general experiences with other people's cultures to the people that I work for now, which probably wouldn't have been a good representation (but) a general crowd... might be more advantaged than the people I work with and that might have been like an erroneous kind of conception to match them together.

As participants developed a more subjective view of culture, they also have developed more culturally humble approaches to social work practice.

5.4.1.3 Development of Cultural Humility

Some critics of cultural competency suggest that one can never be fully competent in social work practice cross culturally as culture is not fixed or static, but is a moving target as it is impossible to understand all aspects of a culture (Dean, 2001; Estes, 2007; Carpenter-Song et. al, 2007). The international practicum experience has helped some participants to gain this understanding of culture in order to display cultural humility in understanding culture. They realize they will never be fully competent, but need to continually learn and listen to gain more learning, which is supported by the concept of cultural humility. Cultural humility has a client-oriented focus, where the helper takes an approach that lacks superiority over the client.

According to developers of this concept, cultural humility “rarely assumes competence (i.e., letting prior experience and even expertise lead to overconfidence)” and focuses on “respectful openness” through collaborative work with clients (Hook et al., 2013, p. 2). Alison stated, “I don’t think anyone ever necessarily gains cultural competence, I think you’re always continuing to learn about just everything because it’s just so, so many things to take into account.”

In addition, some participants discussed how their experiences helped them to understand why people do the things they do, as it relates to being from a minority group or being from a culture other than one’s own. Lori described how her experience of being a minority while studying abroad gave her greater empathy for minority groups and an understanding of why they do the things they do, such as staying together and wanting to experience their culture with people from their own group. This is something she would have criticized previous to her experience. This type of learning has helped participants to have a more humble view of their own cultural attitudes and ways of living, leading them to understand and respect differences to a greater degree.

One of the most common direct examples expressed by participants was that experiencing other ways of living has directly affected their current practice related to poverty. Most of the participants who experienced more extreme poverty than they had seen in the U.S. feel that this experience has affected their cultural understanding of those in poverty and improved their assessment skills. They have become less focused on their own cultural upbringing and more focused on what was safe and healthy for the family. When comparing themselves to peers who have not had these experiences, participants feel they have a greater understanding that what is generally considered as normal, safe and healthy in the U.S. may be different in different cultures. Michelle expressed this by saying she had a new “openness to

different ways that families look.” Melissa gave an example of how she perceived differences compared to someone else working with refugees:

They thought that the way that the person had the house set up was not appropriate cause they had the bread in the closet... they had gone through and thrown away some watermelon rinds and some things that the family had purposely kept and they were going to pickle them or something. And the volunteer was like, “well that is just not sanitary to keep these things.”

In summary, through these experiences participants learned that when working cross-culturally, it is important to realize that clients are experts on their own cultures, therefore it is important to learn and listen to those from the culture one is serving. This requires more than just knowledge of the culture alone, but a relationship and continual growth and learning through cultural humility.

5.4.1.4 Privilege and Power vs. Oppression

As participants developed a deeper understanding of working cross-culturally, they also have developed a greater awareness of their position in society compared to those they work with, which has given them a greater sense of power and privilege, an important aspect of cross-cultural social work practice (Kendall, 2006). This significant experience positively impacted participants during and after their international practicum. Many of the participants experienced being a minority for the first time during their international practicum and expressed a greater empathy for those who experience being a minority on a daily basis. Either during their international practicum or once they returned home and began practicing, many of the participants recognized that even though they were a part of a minority when living abroad they were still are still a privileged minority, which was not the same as what most of their clients experienced being from more oppressed people groups. Amy said:

I always think that and have before that you’re a minority (when living abroad), but you’re a privileged minority there, so people are looking up to you and are trying to

engage in a friendly manner when a lot of the times that's not the case with our clients here, like women wearing hijabs; people make remarks or threaten them. It's not in a nice way, so in that way I can never understand what they go through because I have never had to face that, to be frightened or scared or that I'm in danger. So I think that's kind of just the difference, like I can understand that yeah, it stinks to stand out, and sometimes it's a negative thing... I have a client that's what you would think a stereotypical refugee from Africa, so we go places and people love to like talk to her but they don't really know who she is, like "oh it's someone who looks like what I think they should."

In addition to being more privileged due to being from a more dominant group in their own society, participants also recognize the privilege awarded them due to being an American.

Theresa described a significant experience she had with a Romanian friend who identified this privilege she had grown up with compared to him. From this conversation, Theresa learned:

It's like this American perspective that if we work hard enough or we do the right things, we might have to make a sacrifice here or there, but we can still get what we want and that wasn't the case in his generation in Romania or many Romanians have a very different mindset.

This position of privilege helped many of the participants realize the position of power this puts them in, and paradoxically the oppression others may feel that have not had this opportunity of privilege. Lindsey said:

I think I'm more sensitive to power even within your own members within a cultural group, because some people might come from very political positions in their countries and we like never know, or never think to kind of look at what that culture defines as power or what roles are powerful in that culture versus our culture.

Combining their newfound understanding of cultural competency with their understanding of privilege and power and oppression, participants developed some practice skills that align with anti-oppressive practice.

5.4.1.5 Anti-Oppressive Practice

Unlike much of the rest of the English speaking Western world, the U.S. system of social work education and social welfare practice does not commonly teach or utilize the language of anti-oppressive practice (Van Wormer, 2004). Consequently, participants did not use the

language of “anti-oppressive practice” as they discussed their ideas; however many participants had learned and developed elements of anti-oppressive practice through the experiences of their international practicum. As anti-oppressive recognizes power differentials and the danger of the one-up position in helping relationships, emphasizing the client as their own agent of change (Dominelli, 2002; Laird, 2008; Mullaly, 2002). AOP practitioners are aware of the unintentional oppression that can take place when in the role of the helper.

This anti-oppressive framework that participants developed began with participants developed understanding of cultural sensitivity and humility as well as privilege, power and oppression, as discussed previously. This has changed some of their attitudes and behaviors towards practice. Due to danger of oppressive tendencies in international practice when the practitioner is from a Western country, anti-oppressive practice is an important method to consider when one is doing international social work and development work (Patterson, 2012).

Some participants said that before going abroad for the semester, they felt comfortable with international models of practice and aid and development, but that their experiences abroad, including both discussions with supervisors and staff along with the lived experience of their internships, have helped them develop a more critical perspective on international work. Melissa stated, “I think very differently now about aid given to other countries, very differently of, you know, whenever I hear about someone going on a mission trip or someone going to another country.” More specifically, a dominant theme among participants was recognition that models of practice that may work in the U.S. with the dominant culture are not always the best models for working with marginalized groups in society and therefore can be unintentionally oppressive and harmful to the culture. Many participants critiqued Americans they saw going into other cultures with the mentality to “save the world” through using their models and methods of

practice, which were not always appropriate for the culture and not always wanted by the local people. Mathew expressed how at times foreigners try to change things that a particular community does not want to change:

Like no running water and things like that...And when you read about it I feel like there's always this very negative kind of down view (of such living), and then you see it, and you see the people aren't, they're pretty happy. And whether they want to change or not who knows but there's definitely a portion of them that are just not interested in being modern and so a lot of organizations that try to make them modern aren't doing a great service. It's very misguided.

Others discussed how even when change is desired, the way of helping that westerners bring can also be unintentionally oppressive as well. Lindsey said:

I think that when you're working with theories developed by westerners, and then you try to apply that to nonwestern societies that you, I mean you just can't blindly apply everything without accounting for culture.

Amy expressed a specific practice example of the anti-child labor push, that focuses on eradicating all child labor, instead of focusing on healthy, culturally appropriate forms of child labor that do not interfere with children's development. Discussing the potential harm of an outsider coming in to help, Amy expressed:

There was also the idea that like me as an outsider can come in, like I think I can tell you how you (can) change, to make this problem go away? ...clearly it's an issue that's plaguing your country, your culture, and your society as well and if you can't come up with a solution than surely I can't because I don't live in your culture you know, I don't live by the same norms and include all the same ways like if someone foreign came into my community here and told us like "this is what you need to do to stop the gang violence" and it's like "what do you know about the gang in my neighborhood?"

When discussing their critiques of cross-cultural and international social work, I asked the participants what they would see as appropriate models of practice that would be less oppressive and more empowering. Many identified the importance of reducing the position of power, which is supported in anti-oppressive practice literature, as discussed above. Lindsey discussed practice strategies she has learned through her experiences in collaborating with clients

to “minimize the position of power” as much as possible. Some participants recognize the challenge within the systems they are working in, that make it difficult to eliminate the power differential, but described ways they are, or can see themselves, applying these methods to their practice. Lindsey described some thoughts and research related to international social work through critiquing empowerment models that she feels are not as sensitive to these issues as they should be. Her experience in India has developed her continued research in this area. She stated:

I felt some discongruencies (sic) between self-help group empowerment models that are defined (and) so widely used in development in India, but they’re all really created by westerners and applied to nonwesterners... I started doing a lot of research about that, and especially for women in Hinduism, because the gender roles are very different and gender identity is very different in Hinduism. And gender-specific development programs that encourage women, or really pressure women into working and into taking these roles and measure their success based upon our standards was just really intriguing to me....that was something that I just really continued to wrestle with.....it’s something that I’m trying to go back and do some more research on because I just really think, would like to think about you know, those types of development programs and trying to find a more culturally appropriate way to measure you know, their success.

Through their practicum abroad, participants were able to experience international social work from an insider’s perspective. This experience allowed them to gain new understanding of cross-cultural practice, which has led them to a more subjective view of culture, cultural humility and anti-oppressive practice perspectives that informed their social work practice beyond the international practicum.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the analytical themes discovered through the participants’ lived experience of an international practicum. First, themes related to their lived experiences were explored. Participants’ reference points changed over time, moving from American being their primary reference point to the country of their practicum developing as a new frame of reference. Participants experienced varying degrees of comfort and discomfort during their experiences abroad, which impacted their learning outcomes. Related to their experiences with

comfort and discomfort, participants had experiences with immersion and oases from immersion. Participants benefited through experiencing immersion combined with a comfortable oasis experience that was learning based. This oasis acted as learning experiences that could push them towards deeper levels of immersion and greater degrees of learning. These experiences during their international practicum led to learning outcomes that have contributed to the way they practice social work. A key practice approach that participants developed is the importance of the relationship with the client as a key to the success of the helping relationship. Compared to the cultural competency models learned through their classes at home, participants also developed a more subjective view of cross-cultural practice, which led to an understanding of the importance of cultural humility in social work practice. Participants also have developed new understandings of their position of privilege and power as it relates to oppressed groups in society. These experiences during their international practicums led to a process of learning that has helped participants to develop anti-oppressive practice methods, which impact their view of social work practice and international aid and development work.

The lived experiences of these participants in study abroad teach us much about how international practicums can impact participants' career choices and practice approaches. Next a discussion responding to the research questions will be explored, followed by implications, recommendations, limitations, and areas for further research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.0 Introduction

The study explores the significant experiences within international field practicums and their impact upon participants in order to draw implications on how to maximize the positive outcomes of such experiences and minimize the negative outcomes. Specific questions addressed in this study are:

- What do participants perceive as the most significant experiences within their international practicums?
- How do participants describe these significant experiences?
- How do participants perceive that their international practicum and related experiences influenced them, their career choices and practice approaches since their practicum?
- Based on their experiences, how do participants view cross-cultural and/or international social work practice?

This study includes eighteen qualitative interviews of social workers who experienced an international practicum. The participants in this study are all Caucasian Americans that ages range from 19-40 years of age at the time of the interview. They experienced a variety of semester long international practicums in a total of eleven different countries. Their interviews were recorded, transcribed, data was presented back to the research for member checking, and then themes were developed and analyzed. This chapter presents a summary of the study through responding to the research questions. Then conclusions are drawn and implications are presented, concluding with a discussion of areas for further research.

6.1 Response to the Research Questions

The responses to the research question are summarized in three sections. First, significant experiences are described, followed by how their international experiences have influenced them, their career choices and practice approaches. Finally, participants' views of cross-cultural and/or international social work practice are summarized.

6.1.1 Significant experiences

Participants in the study describe a number of significant experiences that developed into themes that informed the analysis. These themes include: the value of an orientation experience, experiences with feeling different, immersion through housing, the value of relationships formed, and the importance of an organized oasis that contributed towards further immersion. These themes will now be summarized.

Although not all participants had an orientation experience, participants who had an orientation, either prior to their international practicum or in the country of their practicum, said that their orientation was important to their overall experience. Many who did not have what they saw as an adequate orientation said that more orientation specific to their experience would have been very helpful to their overall experiences of cultural adjustment.

During their time abroad the most frequently cited significant learning experiences discussed by participants was being a minority in another culture – this was different from the norm when they were in the U.S. Most of the participants expressed feeling different than the culture that surrounded them during their international practicum, and felt that the experience of being a minority was significant to their overall learning beyond the international practicum. Related to feeling different, participants often had feelings of discomfort, and they learned through this discomfort.

Housing experiences were also noteworthy for many participants, as this was an important part of their immersion in the local culture and in building relationships with local people. The housing experiences that participants describe as most valuable to their learning typically relate to developed relationships with local people, such as a host family. Many participants recommend that staying with a host family should be a part of study abroad programs.

Participants also built relationships with other people, outside of their housing, which they describe as significant experiences. Outside experiences contributed much to the participants' learning about the culture, increased the feeling of being different, but also facilitated interactions with people who were different than them.

The experiences within participants' international practicums varied, but the activities that participants found to be most valuable mostly relate to working with new population groups and learning models of practice and practice approaches that were different from what they had experienced prior to the international practicum. These significant experiences include learning about international development as well as models of practice that weren't necessarily specific to international work, but in which they can compare and contrast to models they experience in the U.S. Participants typically compared social work practice that they had learned about in the U.S. to their international practicum experiences as their frame of reference, and as a point of discussing these experiences. Their reference points began to shift over time, as they learned new cultural ways of understanding the world and social work practice. Through these learning experiences, and the related shifting reference points, many participants learned models of practice that they have found helpful for their future practice and in international and cross-cultural practice in general, which will be discussed in the next two sections. The significant experiences that have been discussed relate to their immersion experiences. In addition to immersion, participants experienced periods of oasis that contributed to their experiences, growth and learning.

Participants had variety of oasis experiences that were important to their overall study abroad experience. During these times, participants had the opportunity to step away from the immersion experience and step into a supportive environment of others from the U.S. where they

could discuss their feelings and related significant experiences with others. Often this was an official supervisor for their internship, but other valuable oasis experiences include informal and formal group activities with other students. The most meaningful oasis experiences were the times that students could honestly reflect their feelings, challenges and learning, and others could help them process, and interpret these experiences, towards greater learning. As participants described their significant experiences, they discussed the impact that these experiences have had on their career choices and practice approaches.

6.1.2 Influence of the International Practicum on the Participants, their Career Choices and Practice Approaches

As participants critically analyzed their experiences, thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, they developed a new reference point. By the time they returned home, many of the participants realized they had changed and their reference point and orientation to social work practice was not the same, and now different from many of those around them. They now view the world and social work practice differently than before their international practicum experience. Some participants experienced a shift in their career direction; however the most common beneficial outcomes that participants report include gaining new methods of practice that they can implement in their practice, a deeper understanding of the importance of the relationship as a key to successful outcomes with clients, a subjective view of culture that focused more on cultural humility than cultural competency, and anti-oppressive practice methods.

Some participants' international practicums have had a strong influence on their career choices by helping them determine areas of interest in social work practice. For some, the experience has increased their desire to work with a specific population groups. Some participants' experiences confirmed their desire to do international social work in general, or in a specific region of the world. Others decided that they did not want to do international social

work after their experience. The results of the study; however reveal that the international practicum has had less influence on most participants specific career choices related to job descriptions in social work practice, and more influence on their general social work practice skills.

When discussing what they learned from their international practicum that contributed to their practice, a few participants mentioned specific practice models or theoretical approaches learned through comparing social welfare methods between countries, and they discussed how they were now implementing practice models they had learned during their time abroad. The most commonly mentioned impact on practice for those who had interned in developing nations was their ability to assess their clients living environment with a new worldview that was less focused on their own experiences of what is considered safe and healthy, and more focused on what are fundamental basic needs that humans need. In contrast, those that studied in countries with more developed social welfare systems learned models of practice that were less focused on basic needs, as basic needs were more likely to be met through the social welfare system. Through these experiences, participants' learning has focused on models of practice that go beyond basic or crisis needs, such as how to have a child friendly city and how to help those who identified needs before they reached a greater severity of need.

Many participants, whether studying in a developed or a developing country, said they have had new learning experiences related to macro level social work practice, including program development, and they have used these methods in their social work roles post the internship experience. Along with general learning about program development, some participants specifically learned community development models that empowered indigenous

leadership. Those that have been involved in macro level work since their international practicum have utilized these learned methods in their own practice.

A key theme that transcends learning specific practice models is the importance of relationships above theory or practice models. Participants learned how trust is developed through building relationships with clients, which can lead to successful practice outcomes. Their experiences of feeling different and working cross-culturally have helped participants to develop empathy with difference. The value of developing a trusting relationship helps them to focus on building a solid relationship, or therapeutic alliance, with their clients, which they believe leads to successful outcomes. Participants' learning about cross-cultural practice during their international practicum has contributed to their ability to develop this trust.

Participants' understanding of cross-cultural practice during their international practicum has also contributed to their development of a more subjective understanding of culture that moved them beyond cultural competency to cultural humility. This helped them extend their practice skills beyond the value of general cultural awareness, increasing their understanding of the importance of the uniqueness of each individual. Participants are now able to apply their general cultural learning to work with difficult cultural groups of various settings, rather than seeing it in a more objective formulaic way, like they learned in classes. They can now translate these skills into their social work with diverse groups of people, including immigrants, refugees, and in international social work settings.

As a part of this cross-cultural learning participants have developed a greater understanding of privilege, power and oppression. They experienced being a minority during their international experience, but a privileged minority with a certain level of power through their position as an American compared to many of their clients who were in a situation of

oppression and lack of privilege. This has increased their empathy for clients experiencing oppression as a minority in their culture. This new understanding combined with their more subjective view of cross-cultural practice has helped many participants to develop practice methods that are anti-oppressive in nature. These learning experiences have impacted their perspectives on cross-cultural and international social work and international development practices.

6.1.3 Views of Cross-Cultural and International Practice.

Participants' views of international social work have shifted. Some participants are now working in internationally related social work positions, many are not, but most of the participants express their viewpoints shifted as they learned international practice perspectives from their experiences abroad. Many of the participants are now more critical of international aid and development efforts and now understand the dangers of inappropriate practice methods in international social work, aid and development efforts.

Some participants in the study who are not currently working with international populations hope to some day. For a few participants, this experience has led them to believe that their future practice roles were best suited for work in the U.S., as it is better for local leaders to develop programs within their own countries. However, most of the participants do not have viewpoints that are opposed to international social work and aid and development efforts by foreigners, but have become more aware of potential oppressive dynamics that did more harm than good. Through this learning they have developed more anti-oppressive perspectives on international social work, aid and development that are more focused on community development models of practice. Those that experienced international social work models of practice that were intentional about empowering local people to take over leadership express

positive learning from these models and recommend these models for international aid and development work.

6.2 Implications

Social work education today is placing emphasis on both field practicums as the signature pedagogy and on the development of global learning and practice competencies. The results of this study indicate that participants' cross-cultural and anti-oppressive understanding and practice can develop through international practicums in ways often not developed through typical American social work education. This study provides implications towards how international practicums can play a role in global learning and impact participants' career choices and practice approaches. Due to the limited scholarship on long term outcomes of study abroad, this study is a valuable contribution to the scholarly research on international practicums abroad based on the participants' experiences and their long term outcomes. As much prior research was anecdotal in nature, smaller in scale or based on short term outcomes, the outcomes that are present in the literature are further verified through this study.

The results of this study support the expectations that the type of living accommodation has a major influence on the participants' overall experiences. It also demonstrates the value of orientation, regular supervision, and debriefing as important methods of supporting students in their study abroad experience. This research also supports studies in the literature review that suggest international practicums as a method for the development of global learning and cross-cultural practice skills.

The study reveals that learning takes place through the experiences outside of the international practicum setting, such as through the experience of being a minority and through building relationships. Many of the participants in the study describe experiences with

discomfort, that although not natural for them, pushed them towards greater learning when they embraced the uncomfortable immersion experiences. This study demonstrates how supervision can impede upon or facilitate this growth and learning.

Previous studies indicate that international experiences prepare students for cross-cultural practice, as well as the development of new models of practice. However, as this study explores the long term outcomes of such experiences, the results contribute more depth of understanding to how their experiences abroad apply to practice with a variety of clients in settings they have been involved with since their international practicum. Although the results indicate that international practicums have some influence on participants' choice of career, it has more impact on their practice approaches, particularly in preparing them for practice with diverse cultural groups. The participants express that the positive outcomes of their experiences outweigh any of their personal negative experiences and they recommend international practicums for other social work students due to the potential for growth and learning that will positively impact them both personally and professionally.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the participants' experiences and outcomes of their experiences, it is important to discover how student participants can move up the ladder of learning towards positive outcomes of practice and minimize any negative outcomes related to their international experience. Although overlapping in nature, this study indicates three areas for recommendations related to the development of successful outcomes within international practicum experiences for the trifecta of stakeholders: the administration, the participating students, and the international settings of the practicum. A trifecta indicates the success of three winners. When organizing international field placement it is important to recognize three players

at stake in a successful outcome for all involved. The administration needs to successfully administer a program that satisfies their academic and accreditation requirements while keeping in mind the success of the student in outcomes that are beneficial to their future practice. Both the administrators of the international practicum and the participating students need to be mindful of the community the student is serving in, so that their relationship is anti-oppressive in nature. The international setting should help support the students' overall experience, while achieving their mission and goals as a community agency. A successful international placement cannot take place without all three stakeholders involved as “winners” to achieve both their own goals and overlapping purpose.

The following recommendations suggest ways to encourage a successful outcome for all three stakeholders. General recommendations that are overlapping in nature are displayed in Figure 6.1. Figure 6.2 displays a model for international practicum programs with suggested recommendations and responsibilities for each of the trifecta of stakeholders before, during, and after the international practicum experience. A description of related details is displayed in a narrative following Figure 6.1 and 6.2.

Figure 6.1 Recommendations for Trifecta of Stakeholders

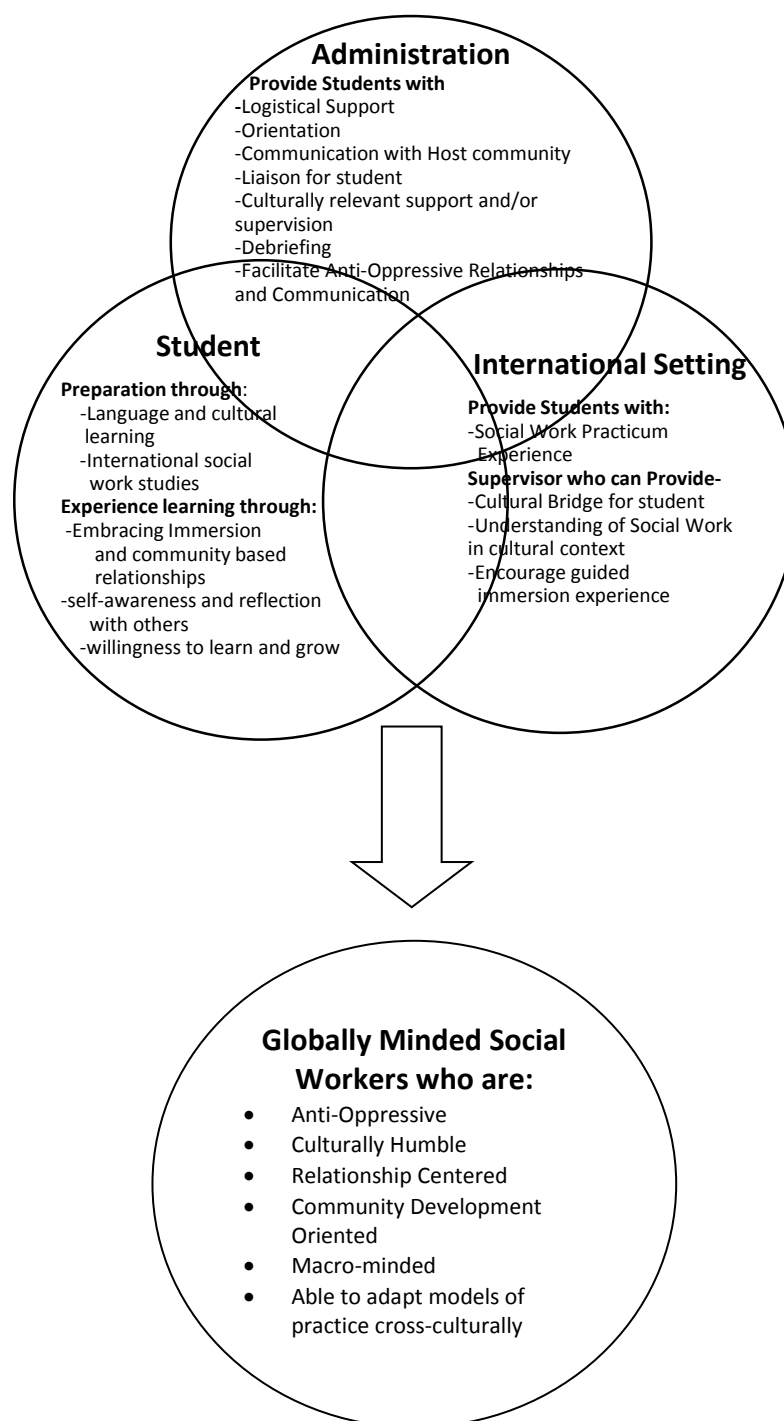


Figure 6.2: Model for International Practicum Programs

	Administration	Student	International Setting
Pre-Trip Departure	<p>Provide International Social Work/Development education to students</p> <p>Facilitate logistical needs re:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate supervision • Academic credit • Financial aid • Student housing • Practicum placement • Insurance <p>Communicate with host country and agree on anti-oppressive and mutually beneficial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic expectations • Student support expectations • Practicum Expectations • Living Environment <p>Provide Orientation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical to host setting logistics specific to country (including financial issues, packing & fitness expectations, etc.) • Includes cross-cultural adaptation training (general & specific to country) 	<p>Determine and Complete (with administration):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic approvals • Financial aid paperwork • Housing plan • Practicum placement • Transportation to host setting • Insurance needs <p>Learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take International Social Work or International Development course • History of host setting • Learn about social welfare system in host setting • Current events • Culture • Begin to learn language (if relevant). <p>Communicate with administration at home and international setting re:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistics of travel • Practicum information 	<p>Plan for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student housing • Practicum opportunities • Academic requirements • Financial logistics (cost of student experience) • Practicum supervisor knowledge of social work in both countries/cultures • Student transportation logistics <p>Communicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host setting needs • Opportunities for students that will support host setting needs • General student expectations • Practicum opportunities and expectations
During International Experience	<p>Provide student and host environment with communication and support</p> <p>Fill in any gaps of supervision not offered by host country</p>	<p>Embrace immersion through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicum • Relationships with local people • Community activities <p>Embrace opportunities for growth through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection • Supervision • Field practicum seminar and other coursework <p>Develop cultural humility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open-minded to different ways of being 	<p>Provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicum experience that facilitates student growth and learning • Supervision to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bridge cultural gaps ○ Support culturally based social work learning ○ Encourage guided immersion experience that will encourage relationship building through internship, housing, and community activities

	Administration	Student	International Setting
		and doing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discover what you are learning and how this impacts your growth and learning during the experience and beyond 	
Post-Practicum	Provide Debriefing Experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support student in adjustment home Help them discover ways their experience can positively impact their social work practice. 	Understand the change that has taken place in you Reflect on Learning through formal and informal debriefing Discover ways that your international experience can impact your current perspectives, career choices and practice approaches	Reflect on experience and communicate to sending universities how future experiences can support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local goals Local empowerment Sustainability Plan for student experiences that will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support local needs and goals Facilitate student growth and learning towards cultural humility

6.3.1 Recommendations for the Administration of International Practicums

An effective study abroad program with an international practicum component requires administration from the sending university as well as within the country where the international practicum takes place. The administration of the study abroad program is the key locus of control that can help maximize the positive outcomes and minimize the negative outcomes for both the student and the community they are serving within. Recommendations for the administration of the study abroad program with an international practicum experience involve orientation programs, efforts of the faculty field practicum liaison and practicum supervisor, and debriefing experiences as students return home.

It is important that the sending institution and those administering the international practicum work together in order to support the student in their learning goals and maximize the positive impact on the community in which the student does their practicum experience. This

process begins by organizing the students' experience while they are still at their home institution through providing orientation and logistical support to the student. This orientation should be both practical in nature so students understand the needed logistics (financial information, understanding of supplies needed); however should also prepare them generally for cross-cultural practice to increase their cultural understanding so they can more fully embrace learning through an immersion experience.

The faculty field practicum liaison at the sending university should also make clear to the student and the overseas supervisor what the learning goals/contract are for the student, but also be realistic of the cultural practice differences that may impact the goals. Therefore, some cultural understanding and "translation" may need to take place. This can require cultural sensitivity, openness and creativity on behalf of the students' university faculty liaison, as not to be imperialistic or oppressive in developing specific learning goals that are not realistic in the international setting. In order to do this, it is important for the faculty liaison to have some general global social work practice understanding. The administrators at the international practicum site and/or the on-site supervisor also have an important role in this process, in order to communicate their needs and how the student can best learn and work within their programs, without being intrusive to their ongoing work. Once the student is in the international setting their internship supervisor has a very important role of supporting the student in their growth and learning. As the practicum supervisor is typically in the host setting, details of their responsibilities will be described in that section. However, if the supervisor is not able to provide all of the needed support for the student, the faculty liaison at the home institution may need to fill in gaps to support the student in their social work and cross-cultural learning.

Finally the administration of the study abroad program should make sure that students participate in debriefing either right before they leave or immediately upon their return home. A couple of the participants in this study expressed that the interview process for this research served as a debriefing mechanism for them, even if years after the international practicum. Although not always realistic, further debriefing after they have been home and had a chance to process their experiences is also recommended.

6.3.2 Recommendations for Students doing International Practicums

Before the student participates in their international experience, it is important that they make sure that all the logistical details are taken care of. Although the administration carries some responsibility, it is also the students' responsibility to make sure the details of their experience are taken care of. These details include: academic approves, housing, a determined practicum placement, transportation to their host setting and insurance issues.

While preparing practically they should also prepare themselves for their international experience by embracing all opportunities for global learning before their experience. This can be facilitated through taking available courses on international social work or development, going on other short term international study trips prior to their international practicum, studying the language and culture ahead of time. They should also learn as much as they can about social work and social welfare in the culture and country they will be working in, including the differences and similarities to social work practice in their country of study, and any social welfare reform initiatives that are taking place. As stated previously, students should be prepared for immersing themselves in the culture as much as possible. They should be encouraged to take advantage of the oasis experience that can benefit their immersion experience, but also self guide themselves towards embracing the local culture, building relationships with local people in the

community and at their internship, and taking advantage of all opportunities they are given towards learning and immersion.

Students should also be prepared to not expect social work practice to be like it is at home; but to find ways to develop their critical thinking skills to embrace the unique learning that will take place through this international experience. The supervision expressed in the above section can help guide this learning; however encouragement in these areas can help them self guide towards this development as well.

6.3.3 Recommendations for the International Setting of the Field Practicum

The community of the international setting provides the learning experience for the student, but is also affected by the presence of the student and the related study abroad program they are part of. As administrators arrange international practicum sites, it is important for them to provide an experience that is appropriate for the student's learning, yet is also anti-oppressive in nature to the community and practicum setting. This is important whether the student does their international practicum within an organized study abroad program or local university, or on their own within a local agency that is not connected with a formal program or university.

Students will likely begin their experience with ethnocentric attitudes and behaviors as their reference point will likely begin with an American worldview. This has the potential to be oppressive to the local people they interact with in the community and in their field practicum. As discussed in the analysis, this reference point will likely shift with time; however the process of orientation and support can help the student with this shift to learn how to apply culturally sensitive anti-oppressive practice in their attitudes and behaviors and reduce their ethnocentricity. Supervision can be an opportunity to help the student to learn and practice more effective anti-oppressive practice models.

Ideally this supervisor is located in the international setting; however if not the administration is responsible to find adequate supervision at a distance. The supervisor has a key role in supporting the student by providing an environment where they can be honest about their struggles and challenges both within their international practicum and in the general experiences of living in the country they are studying in, while pushing their growth and learning through immersion experiences. This can be done through both individual supervision and also group supervision or field practicum seminar classes where the student or group of students can process their experiences and move towards deeper levels of immersion.

To maximize the positive learning through immersion, students' supervisors can help facilitate experiences that encourage further learning. Students should spend minimal time having oases experiences, and much more time in their immersion experiences. If necessary, assignments can be given or classes can be required to facilitate further immersion, and further push students out of their comfort zone. Language classes should be encouraged if the main language spoken is not English. Housing can also facilitate or intrude upon immersion. Based on the participants' experiences, host families or settings with local students that are not as familiar with American students would be ideal for maximum immersion in their living environment. In order to achieve positive outcomes, it does not necessarily matter if their social work supervisor is from the local host country, American or even an ex-patriot from another setting; however it is particularly helpful for them to be able to have enough knowledge of the U.S. system and global practice to act as a bridge to help support the student in their ability to understand differences between cultures, ways of practicing social work, and help the student to learn in a way that will equip them for their social work internship and prepare them for their future social work practice. Some literature suggests that effective social work supervision can

take place via the internet with a supervisor at home. This is often done due to academic requirements for supervision by a licensed social worker. Based on the participants' experiences, I think that this can be a positive situation for students if the supervisor in their home country is knowledgeable about global practice, and if they have someone supportive on site, even if that person does not have social work credentials.

As was discussed through the participants' experiences, some students may feel that agencies they are working with have imperialistic or oppressive methods of practice. Other students may work in agencies that have developed positive examples of community development and anti-oppressive methods. Either way, the supervisor has the opportunity to discuss the situation as a model to learn from to enhance students' current and future practice towards anti-oppressive practice methods.

If the student's international practicum is arranged by a study abroad program, the study abroad program should be cautious to reduce the risk of harm by their intrusion upon the community. They have an opportunity to model anti-oppressive practice methods in the community. This could be particularly important if the agency hosting the student's international practicum is fully staffed by local people in a developing nation. In this situation there is potential for the host agency to feel that they are in a less powerful situation, especially if they are receiving any financing or benefit for hosting the student. The host university or study abroad program administrators may need to facilitate anti-oppressive practice methods to reduce this potential dynamic of oppression. It may be helpful to make sure the agency knows that the sending institution values their work and does not want students' educational goals to impede up their work. It is also important to help them to develop clear goals with the student, then make

sure that these goals can coincide with the agency's goals and the requirements of the sending university.

When this takes place international practicums have an opportunity to help schools of social work meet their accreditation goals as a signature pedagogy of global learning, while providing uniquely powerful opportunities of learning for the students by bringing an exchange of information and ideas that can be mutually beneficial for the sending institution, student and international setting.

Implications of international practicum experiences were explored and recommendations were given on how to maximize the positive outcomes of such experiences and minimize the negative outcomes. Now the limitations to the study will be discussed.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

Although this study includes participants with a variety of experiences and developed strong themes, the study is limited due to the small number of participants compared to a larger study. This was appropriate for an exploratory study, but limited in nature due to small sample size. Furthermore, there are fewer participants in this study who studied in more developed countries as compared to countries with a less developed social welfare system. This decreases the transferability of the conclusions drawn on the comparison between developed countries and less developed countries as compared to the U.S. social welfare system. Also, this study was limited to social work students doing a social work practicum abroad, which may limit the transferability of this study in regards to other types of study abroad programs in other disciplines, especially those that do not have a practicum component.

The fact that the participants are from a variety of types of study abroad, allows for a variety of different experiences from diverse programs, but limits the ability to compare

participants' experiences within similar programs. Despite these limitations, the range of types of programs represented, allow for a broader number of experiences as a means of comparison.

Finally, the fact that participants were not in one geographic location limits the ability to do focus groups, as a means of member checking in a group setting. Despite this limitation, a summary of each person's story was utilized as an alternative method, which allowed participants to reflect upon and clarify my understanding of their own experience, which strengthens the credibility of the interpretation of the data.

6.5 Areas for further study

This study explores a gap in the literature regarding the long term impact of the study abroad experience on social work participants completing international practicums. The results of this study bring rise to further questions that are opportunities for further study.

First, further studies related to the roles and responsibilities of social work programs and national accrediting bodies (such as CSWE and CASWE) in supporting international practicums could be explored. Related exploratory questions include: Should there be a set of standards required for international practicums as well as for evaluating them? Should international experiences or international practicums be required as part of the curriculum?

Many of the participants in this study recognized themselves as being people of privilege. Are there ways to increase opportunities and eliminate barriers for students who grew up with less privilege to experience international practicums? Furthermore, are there ways to increase interest and opportunities for people of color and other minority groups? As the participants in this study were not visible minorities in their home country, a further study could also explore if the outcomes of international practicums are different for visible minority groups, due to different experiences of feeling different at home.

As study abroad is a growing field being recognized as important in many disciplines beyond social work, a similar study could be done with semester long study abroad participants who studied other disciplines beyond social work. Then points of comparison could be made between the studies and further conclusions could be drawn that would be more transferable beyond the field of social work.

As this study only looks at the perspectives of the participants, other useful studies could explore the value of the components of such experiences and related outcomes from the perspectives of the other key stakeholders. These stakeholders include the study abroad or practicum program coordinators and/or supervisors of these students, the perspectives of faculty, staff and administrators of such programs from the sending university, and the perspectives of the employers whose staff were participants in such programs as part of their studies.

In addition, this study reveals the importance of the impact of study abroad and international development on the communities served. Another area of further research might explore the impact of study abroad and international practicums on the communities served from the perspective of community members and the coordinators of study abroad programs.

Finally, qualitative research of this nature offers depth and breadth that cannot be discovered through quantitative research, which is an important starting point when there is limited research in an area. The results discovered from this study might be utilized to develop a broader study of more participants through a quantitative or mixed methods study of a larger sample size.

6.6 Conclusion

Globalization has led to increased interest and awareness in global issues, and the need for social work students to be prepared to work in our increasingly diverse world. This study

supports that experiences within international practicums can provide meaningful global education that influence students towards cross-cultural humility and anti-oppressive practice methods. Findings of this study indicate significant experiences that support these outcomes take place both within the formal international practicum experience as well as through informal experiences of immersion. Through combined efforts of the administrators of programs, the participating students and the host communities' involvement, anti-oppressive outcomes can take place that not only benefit the student participants and the host community, but also participants' future social work practice in our globalized world.

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Appendix A: Letter Requesting Participants

Dear _____

For my doctoral research I am exploring how participants who have completed a semester or longer social work practicum abroad perceive their experience has influenced their career choices and practice approaches. Participants must have completed a social work degree and now be working as a helping profession. This study will be a qualitative study where I will interview 12-20 participants individually for approximately 1-1 ½ hours. Please see attached information sheet for more details¹⁹. If you or someone you know may be interested in this study, could you please have them write to me at epatterson@malone.edu or call me at 330-471-8626 or 330-328-7767. Thank you so much!

Elizabeth Patterson, LISW-S

Memorial University of Newfoundland, PhD Student

Associate Professor of Social Work, Malone University

Ethics Approval

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Committee/IRB at Malone University. If you have questions about research ethics in this study or in human research, in general, please feel free to contact the Committee's chair, Professor Lauren Seifert at 330-471-8558 or email her at LSEIFERT@malone.edu

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

¹⁹ There cannot be an attachment on Facebook, so for Facebook or other similar posts this sentence will be deleted and the information sheet will be sent via email, after a person has responded expressing interest in the study.

Appendix B: Letter to Participate

Exploring the influence of international social work practicums on career choices and practice approaches

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “Exploring the influence of international social work practicums on career choices and practice approaches.”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation should involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any other information give to you by the research

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in the research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now, or in the future.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how experiences in social work practicum’s abroad influence participants. This informs the understanding of long term outcomes of such experiences and may help universities and study abroad programs shape experiences to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative outcomes of such experiences.

About the Researcher

This research is part of my PhD studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. I completed my Bachelor’s degree in Social Work at Mount Vernon Nazarene College and my Master’s of Social Work at Roberts Wesleyan College. I completed a field practicum abroad as part of my bachelor’s program. I currently teach social work and coordinate field placement at Malone University. Previous to teaching at Malone, I coordinated social services for Veritas, an NGO in Romania and supervised field placements for social work students through the Romanian Studies Program and acted as a liaison for students and universities interested in participating in this program.

Summary of Methodology

I plan to interview up to 20 participants who meet the criteria for the study. Participants will be accepted by purpose sampling, meaning that I am looking for participants with a variety of types of experiences abroad and time since the placement. If you agree to participate in the study, I will contact you by phone to find out more about your placement as part of the selection process. If you are selected I will email you a sheet to fill out before the interview and set up a time to

interview at a location that is convenient for you. If you are not selected I will send you an email letting you know. I will interview participants, record and transcribe the interviews and draw out themes to develop conclusions.

Description of Interviews

If you meet the criteria of the study and agree to participate a time will be arranged for you to meet with the researcher at a location that is convenient for you. You will participate in a one-on-one private interview for approximately one to one and a half hours. You will be asked how your social work practicum abroad has influenced your career choices and practice approaches. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question in the study. You may withdraw from participating in the study at any time without question or penalty and all of your data will be removed from the study.

Following completion of your interview, I will begin analysis of your interview, drawing out themes within and between interviews. Upon completion of this analysis, you will be given an opportunity to see these conclusions in written form and give any more feedback you have on these initial results. Your feedback will be included as final thematic analysis is developed and conclusions are made. If you would like, I will give you a copy of the transcription upon your request.

Confidentiality and Anonymity of Information

Your information will not be shared without your consent unless required by law. All identifying information will be removed from the data and be replaced with a pseudonym. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher or a research assistant who has signed an agreement to keep all information confidential. For the purposes of ensuring the proper monitoring of the research study, it is possible that my supervisor, Dr. Ross Klein of Memorial University of Newfoundland may also have access to your research data once your personal information has been removed.

Reporting of Results

The results of this research will be reported in a written dissertation that will be orally defended and published. The results of this research will also be disseminated through journal articles and professional presentations. Summaries of overall themes and direct quotations will be utilized while keeping confidentiality and anonymity as names and other identifying information will not be given.

Storage of Data:

All identifiable recorded and written information will be kept in a locked location only accessible to the researcher. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as per Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. If results of the study are published, your name and identity will not be disclosed.

Risks and Benefits

There are no foreseen risks to the study; however since you are being asked to share personal experiences if you find that you are experiencing distress after the interview, please contact me directly and can make a referral to an appropriate service or counselor in your local area.

The benefits of this study are believed to outweigh the risks. Through sharing your story, you may benefit through reminders of the impact of your study abroad experience on your development as a profession. It is also hoped that this study will benefit educators, field supervisors and program administrators to help them understand how field practicum experiences contribute to career choices and practice approaches of participants. This study could also contribute to the development of future study abroad programs in order to help maximize positive experiences and minimize negative experiences that lead towards positive outcomes of international placements abroad both for the participant and those that they serve professionally.

Ethics Approval

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Committee/IRB at Malone University. If you have questions about research ethics in this study or in human research, in general, please feel free to contact the Committee's chair, Professor Lauren Seifert at 330-471-8558 or email her at LSEIFERT@malone.edu

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Are you interested in participating?

If you meet the criteria for this study, have any questions about the study and/or are interested in participating, please contact me by phone at 330-328-7767 or by email at epatterson@malone.edu so that we can set up an initial phone call to obtain needed information before arranging an interview. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Ross Klein at 1-709-864-8147 or rklein@mun.ca if you have any questions or concerns about the study.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Patterson, MSW, LISW-S

Associate Professor of Social Work, Malone University

PhD student, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Appendix C: Sample Phone Call Script

Hello, I'm calling for _____.

This is Elizabeth Patterson. I am returning your message regarding the research study on participants of study abroad programs. Thank you for connecting with me.

Have you had an opportunity to look over the detailed information letter? If yes, do you have questions or are there things I can expand on?

- If no, review the study/ information in letter with them verbally. Questions?

May I ask a little about what brings you to this study?

Can I ask you a few questions to find out more information about your experience in order to determine your eligibility for the study (screen hereto make sure their experience meets the criteria for the study (a field practicum abroad for a semester or longer))

(If still interested) Do you have any concerns about participating in the study?

(If meet needed criteria) If you are interested in participating in the study, can I have either your address or e-mail to mail the participant information letter and consent form?

I live in Canton, Ohio but would like to meet you at a private location that is convenient for you. Is there somewhere you might feel comfortable with us meeting? (Obtain whatever details are needed to make arrangements for meeting/ offer my own suggestions).

I will send you the information and consent forms right away. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or e-mail if you think of further questions.

How can I best reach you over the next few weeks so we can make further arrangements?

Thank you, I will look forward to speaking with you further.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Exploring the influence of international social work practicums on career choices and practice approaches

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how experiences in social work practicum's abroad influence participants. This informs the understanding of long term outcomes of such experiences and may help universities and study abroad programs shape experiences to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative outcomes of such experiences.

About the Researcher, Elizabeth Patterson, MSW, LISW-S, PhD(c) at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada; Associate Professor of Social Work, Malone University

This research is part of my PhD studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. I completed my Bachelor's degree in Social Work at Mount Vernon Nazarene College and my Master's of Social Work at Roberts Wesleyan College. I completed a field practicum abroad as part of my bachelor's program. I currently teach social work and coordinate field placement at Malone University. Previous to teaching at Malone, I coordinated social services for Veritas, an NGO in Romania and supervised field placements for social work students through the Romanian Studies Program and acted as a liaison for students and universities interested in participating in this program.

Summary of Methodology

I plan to interview up to 20 participants who meet the criteria for the study. Participants will be accepted by purpose sampling, meaning that I am looking for participants with a variety of types of experiences abroad and time since the placement. If you agree to participate in the study, I will contact you by phone to find out more about your placement as part of the selection process. I will then interview participants, record and transcribe the interviews and draw out themes to develop conclusions. If you are not selected I will send you an email letting you know.

Description of Interviews

If you meet the criteria of the study and agree to participate a time will be arranged for you to meet with the researcher at a location that is convenient for you. You will participate in a one-on-one private interview for approximately one to one and a half hours. You will be asked how your social work practicum abroad has influenced your career choices and practice approaches. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question in the study. You may withdraw from participating in the study at any time without question or penalty and all of your data will be removed from the study.

Following completion of your interview, I will begin analysis of your interview, drawing out themes within and between interviews. Upon completion of this analysis, you will be given an opportunity to see these conclusions in written form and give any more feedback you have on these initial results. Your feedback will be included as final thematic analysis is developed and conclusions are made. If you would like, I will give you a copy of the transcription upon your request.

Confidentiality of Information

Your information will not be shared without your consent unless required by law. All identifying information will be removed from the data and be replaced with a pseudonym. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher or a research assistant who has signed an agreement to keep all information confidential. For the purposes of ensuring the proper monitoring of the research study, it is possible that my supervisor, Dr. Ross Klein of Memorial University of Newfoundland may also have access to your research data once your personal information has been removed. All identifiable recorded and written information will be kept in a locked location only accessible to the researcher. This data will be stored in a locked location and will be destroyed five years after the study is complete, per requirement of the Tri-Council Policy. If results of the study are published, your name and identity will not be disclosed.

Risks and Benefits

There are no foreseen risks to the study; however since you are being asked to share personal experiences if you find that you are experiencing distress after the interview, please contact me directly and can make a referral to an appropriate service or counselor in your local area.

The benefits of this study are believed to outweigh the risks. Through sharing your story, you may benefit through reminders of the impact of your study abroad experience on your development as a profession. It is also hoped that this study will benefit educators, field supervisors and program administrators to help them understand how field practicum experiences contribute to career choices and practice approaches of participants. This study could also contribute to the development of future study abroad programs in order to help maximize positive experiences and minimize negative experiences that lead towards positive outcomes of international placements abroad both for the participant and those that they serve professionally.

Ethics Approval

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. This proposal has also been reviewed and approved by Malone University's Internal Research Board. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

If you have any questions you may also contact me, Elizabeth Patterson, at 330-471-8626 or 330-328-7767 or epatterson@malone.edu, or you may contact the research supervisor, Dr. Ross Klein at 1-709-737-8160 or rklein@mun.ca

If you agree to participate in this study, please fill out the below signed form and send to me in the enclosed envelope. Please keep the above information for your records.

Once I have received your signed consent form below, I will be in touch with you in regards to setting up an interview. Thank you,

Elizabeth Patterson, MSW, LISW-S
Associate Professor of Social Work, Malone University
PhD student, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Consent Statement

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research
- You have been able to ask questions about this study
- You are satisfied with the answers to all of your questions
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights, and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Your Signature:

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.”

Signature of participant

Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Elizabeth Patterson, MSW, LISW-S, Associate Professor of Social Work, Malone University
Name and Title

Signature of participant

Date

Appendix E: Participant Demographic Facesheet

Exploring the influence of international social work practicums on career choices and practice approaches

Participant # ____ (for research coding purposes only)

Year and semester of Placement _____

Gender _____

Age at time of Placement _____

Location of Field Placement (City and Country) _____

What is your highest degree earned or in progress? _____

Prior to your placement were you fluent in the primary language spoken in the country of your placement? (Please circle) Yes or No.

If no, did you take language classes before or during your placement? (Please circle) Yes No

Who was your placement arranged through? (please check all that apply)

___ A Program affiliated with my university.

___ An independent study abroad program

___ An internship arranged through a university in the country of placement

___ A field placement agency not affiliated with a university

___ Other. Please Describe _____

Which of the following describes the level of practice within your placement:

___ Micro ___ Mezzo ___ Macro

Which of the following describes your placement setting (Check all that apply):

___ Children ___ Non-Profit Organization

___ Families ___ Governmental Organization

___ Older Adults ___ Policy Development

___ Human Trafficking ___ Community Organizing and Development

___ People with Disabilities ___ Other (Please describe) _____

Which of the following describes your role(s) within the agency?

____ Shadowing/Observing ____ Direct Practice
____ Program Planning and Development ____ Teaching or Training
____ Policy Development ____ Other (please describe) _____

Can you describe your supervisor's affiliation to the agency and/or study abroad program?

Were supervision meetings provided (Please check):

____ in person
____ via phone or internet
____ Other (please describe) _____

Which of the following describes your housing during your placement:

____ Host family ____ Residential campus
____ Boarding house ____ Private apartment in community
____ Other (please describe) _____

Please describe your current employment position:

Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement for Research Assistants

Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____, agree to hold in confidence all content of the audio-recordings and transcriptions I have access to during the transcription process for the dissertation research conducted by Elizabeth Patterson.

Printed name

Date

Signature

Witness

Date

Appendix G: Interview Guide

Exploring the influence of international social work practicums on career choices and practice approaches

Introduction

Give consent form, describe and obtain consent (If this wasn't received ahead of time). If received ahead of time review the fact they have signed it and ask if they have any questions.

Explain guidelines for how interview will be conducted

- It will be recorded
- You may ask to repeat or clarify information
- You may refuse to answer a question
- You may stop interview at any time

(The participants will have been given the facesheet ahead of time and will have been asked to send it in ahead of time. If they have not filled it out ask them to fill it out now)

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview? (After any questions, the interview process will begin)

I want to start off by asking you to tell me the story of your placement, highlighting specific experiences you had along the way. I want you to know, I am interested in hearing both the positive and negative perceptions as we talk.

Can you describe how you came about making the decision to do an international placement?

Describe your motivations for making this decision?

How was this specific placement arranged?

Can you describe what the process was like as you prepared to go? (potential probe: orientation, language study)

Now let's talk about your semester abroad.

Can you tell me about your semester abroad and placement experience, highlighting specific experiences that you feel were significant to you and your development as a professional social worker.

Do you feel there were any experiences or lack of experiences that were barriers to your development?

Potential Probes:

- Where there any issues with the language? Further probes: (Did you know the language? Did you study the language before or during placement? How fluent did you become?)
- Can you describe your housing?
- Can you describe your placement/internship experience? (Agency/Institution, Population served and student's role)
- Can you describe your supervision experience?

- How much did you feel alike or different to the people you interacted with (i.e. feelings of being a minority or majority)?
- Can you describe the relationships built during your time abroad?(in community, with other students)
- Can you describe how your transition was in coming home, including debriefing (either while abroad or after came home)
- Are there any other noteworthy experiences that relate to your field placement that haven't yet been discussed that were significant to your personal and professional development (or more specifically your career choices and practice approaches)?
 - (If not already discussed through the previous responses) How do you feel your experiences of your field placement influenced your: (ask one question at a time)Personal development?
 - Professional development, career goals?
 - Practice approaches?
 - Worldview?
 - Theoretical framework of practice?
 - Perspectives on social work?
 - Views of international and/or cross-cultural social work practice?

(If not already discussed) Let's talk more specifically about the field practicum itself. Can you describe any learning or models of practice that were unique to the culture/country you worked within? If so, how have they informed your social work practice? How do you feel your supervision influenced your overall learning?

Based on your experiences what are your perceptions of international social work practice? Are there any other ways your *overall* experience has influenced you personally or professionally? This could be positive or negative.

How do you feel your practice would be different if you had not had this study abroad experience? If so, how? (If relevant, do you have any regrets to taking this international placement as compared to a placement at home?)

Are there any aspects of your field experience that you feel could have been arranged differently in order to have helped prepare you for your future work?

A goal of this study is to offer suggestions to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative outcomes of international field practicums. Are there any other aspects of or experiences related to international field placements that you feel are important to consider for the future development of programs? (such as specific experiences that should be included or encouraged in future placements)

Is there any other information you would like to offer that you think would be helpful for this researcher or organizers of study abroad experiences to know as programs are developed?

Debriefing Statement:

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate. After all interviews have been performed and data has been coded for themes, I will contact you to ask for your feedback on themes that I develop from your interview before I draw final conclusions. Just as a reminder your information will be kept confidential as described in the consent for your signed. If at any time you would like your data to be withdrawn from the study, please contact me immediately. Do you have any other questions before we end our time together? (review consent form sheet if seems necessary).

Appendix H: Malone University IRB Approval Letter



Human Research Committee/IRB
Malone University
2600 Cleveland Ave., NW
Canton, Ohio 44709

May 16, 2012

RE: Protocol EPat/DISS#1 (Social Work Supervisor: Elizabeth Patterson)
"Exploring the influence of international social work practicums on career choices and practice approaches"

Dear Professor Patterson:

Thank you for sending us a proposal for your dissertation research involving interviews with social work graduates who have completed international practicums. Your degree-granting institution is Memorial University in Canada, and it is planned that interviews will take place in the USA.

This proposal received an expedited review and approval. Both the reviewer and I believe that there are appropriate safeguards in place in your study.

Given that participants will be interviewed in the USA, we believe that it is important for you to add the following information to your consent form, or alternately, to a debriefing paper that participants receive from you:

"This study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Committee/IRB at Malone University. If you have questions about research ethics in this study or in human research, in general, please, feel free to call that Committee's chair, Professor Lauren Seifert, at 330-471-8558 or email her at LSEIFERT@malone.edu"

Also, if the Memorial University research ethics board deems it appropriate, please, feel free to give participants their contact information, too.

Please, let the Human Research Committee know if there are significant changes to your project, or if there are any adverse events associated with the study. The approval instantiated in this letter is in effect for one year from the date on this letter and is renewable. Please, be aware that the Human Research Committee and Malone University do not accept responsibility for risks associated with the study. Responsibility rests with the researcher(s). It is the responsibility of researchers to be aware of local, state, and federal laws that apply to their methods, techniques, research, and record-keeping practices (e.g., 45 CFR 46; 21 CFR; HIPAA; FERPA).

Please, contact me with any questions you might have at 330-471-8558 or at LSEIFERT@malone.edu

Best regards,

Lauren S. Seifert, Ph.D.
Chair, Human Research Committee/IRB;
Professor of Psychology,
Malone University

Appendix I: Memorial University ICEHR Ethics Approval Letter



Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

Office of Research - IIC2010C
St. John's, NL, Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561 Fax: 709 864-4612
www.mun.ca/research

ICEHR Number:	20130132-SW
Approval Period:	May 25, 2012 – May 31, 2013
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Ross Klein School of Social Work
Title of Project:	Exploring the influence of international social work practicum on career choices and practice approaches

May 25, 2012

Ms. Elizabeth Patterson
School of Social Work
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Patterson:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) seeking ethical clearance for the above-named research project.

The Committee has reviewed the proposal and appreciates the care and diligence with which you have prepared your application. We agree that the proposed project is consistent with the guidelines of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2). Full ethics clearance is granted for one year from the date of this letter.

If you intend to make changes during the course of the project which may give rise to ethical concerns, please forward a description of these changes to Theresa Heath at icehr@mun.ca for the Committee's consideration.

The TCPS2 requires that you submit an annual status report on your project to ICEHR, should the research carry on beyond May 31, 2013. Also, to comply with the TCPS2, please notify us upon completion of your project.

We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Shute, Th.D.
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

MS/th

copy: Supervisor – Dr. Ross Klein, School of Social Work

Appendix J: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Participant	Period of Studies	Age at time of placement	University type	Country of Placement	Language Fluency	Time since placement	Current field of work
Katrina	Bachelor's in Social Work	21	State University	Dominica	Fluent in primary language (English)	1 month	After school tutoring program
Michelle	Bachelor's in Social Work	21	Private Christian University	Uganda	Fluent in Primary Language (English)	6 months	Home visitor for Head Start preschool program
Lindsey	Bachelor's in Social Work	21	State University	India	Fluent in one of languages spoken (English)	1 year	Job Development specialist for refugees
Susan	Bachelor's in Social Work	22	Private Christian University	Romania	Did not know-took class	1 year	Elderly care assistant
Carla	Bachelor's in Social Work	21	Private University	Northern Ireland	1 st Language (English)	1.5 years	Medical Case manager with primarily LGBT clients, Resident Advisor for college campus
Andrea	MSW	28	State University	Canada	1 st Language (English)	2 years	In-patient therapist
Lori	Bachelor's in Social Work	19	Private Christian University	Uganda	Fluent in one of languages spoken (English)	2 years	In-home counseling for children with behavioral health issues
Mathew	Bachelor's in Social Work	22	State University	South Africa	Fluent in primary language (English)	2.5 years	Employment social worker for non-profit working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
Rob	Bachelor's in Social Work	26	State University	Canada	1 st Language (English)	3 years	Project coordinator for statewide mental health initiative, provides technical assistance

Participant	Period of Studies	Age at time of placement	University type	Country of Placement	Language Fluency	Time since placement	Current field of work
Amy	Bachelor's in Social Work	21	State University	Ghana, West Africa	Fluent in primary language spoken (English)	5 years	Income generating programs for refugees
Victoria	MSW	28	State University	Guatemala	Fluent in primary language (Spanish)	5 years	Manager of Maternal Child Health Program and coordinator of water, hygiene and sanitation project in Guatemala
Karen	Bachelor's in Social Work	19	Private Christian University	Uganda	Fluent in Primary Language (English)	5.5 years	Executive director of a crisis pregnancy center
Alison (2 placements)	Bachelor's in Social Work; MSW	21; 25	Private Christian University; Private University (top research university)	Northern Ireland; Ecuador	Fluent in primary language; Fluent in primary language-2 nd language	6 years; 2 years	Program manager for U.S. based International Relief and Development organization within Latin American and the Caribbean.
John	Bachelor's in Social work	24	Private Christian University	Romania	Did not know-took class	6 years	Social Service Director at Nursing facility
Melissa	MSW	25	Private Christian University	Romania	Did not know-took class	9 years	Currently stay at home mom- previously worked for county with people with disabilities and as an adjunct prof.
Heather	Bachelor's in Social Work	21	Private Christian University	Romania	Did not know-took class	10.5 years	Past people with disabilities, currently community development

Participant	Period of Studies	Age at time of placement	University type	Country of Placement	Language Fluency	Time since placement	Current field of work
Theresa	Bachelor's in Social Work	22	Private Christian College	Romania	Did not know-took class	11 years	Coordinator of county Children first Council-direct services with families with multi-service needs
Sam	Bachelor's in Social Work	22	Private Christian University	Mexico	2 nd Language-fluent	18 years	Administrator for county juvenile corrections unit