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# Two Countries, One Goal: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Development of Study Abroad Sojourners' Cultural Identification in Japan and Korea

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## Abstract

The number of students expanding their academic programs to include learning experiences abroad had been, prior to the recent outbreak of the Coronavirus, steadily increasing over the past two decades. This mixed-method study investigates the cultural identification of short-term study abroad participants and its influence on their acculturation process. Quantitative data from a widely-used acculturation scale were collected from participants before and after the program. In addition, qualitative data from participants' journals were examined, elucidating the role the study abroad experience played in their cultural identification. This investigation revealed statistically significant effects of cultural experiences on cultural identification, specifically decreases in cultural identification scores. This study supports the concept of cultural identification as a continuum rather than as a dichotomy. Implications suggest that a deeper understanding of students' cultural identifications can be helpful in developing study abroad programs that promote the goals of student awareness, cultural sensitivity, and global competence.

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**Introduction**

With the continuing increase in student global mobility, educators are faced with the challenges of understanding the concepts that are related to enhancing intercultural learning and minimizing cultural differences of study abroad (SA, hereafter) sojourners on their SA programs. Such concepts include acculturation, defined by Berry (2006a) as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p.13). Sojourners, one of the groups constituting plural societies that Berry (2006b) enumerated, are those who relocate to a new country temporarily for a particular goal, with full intentions to return to their country of origin after completing their assignment. Among examples of sojourners are students studying abroad and their acculturation through intercultural contact is the focus of our study. A number of critical factors can influence a SA sojourner’s success of acculturation, not the least of which are strength of cultural identity (Dolby, 2005; Fugita & O’Brien, 1985; Gieser, 2015; Mayer, 2009), degree of interaction with the host culture (Gieser, 2015; Peng, Van Dyne & Oh, 2015), and program length (Dwyer, 2004; Hamad & Lee 2013; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). Studies of such factors are often an attempt to implicitly or explicitly address the goal of most SA programs, which is the success of participants’ acculturation process that is a necessary step towards becoming global citizens who can respond to the challenges affecting our global communities and world.

Acculturation, according to Schwartz, et al. (2013), represents changes in one’s cultural identity, which they define as “the ethnically or culturally based practices, values, and identifications that one maintains” (p.1). It denotes an individual’s self-definition in relation to a culture and includes one’s psychological reaction to cultural exposure. Culture can be viewed as a self-sustaining system that consists of meanings, beliefs, values, and norms that guide behavior domains or society (Navas, Rojas, Garcia, & Pumares, 2007), and cultural identification may refer to the act of relating to or identifying with another culture (Oetting, 1993; Schwartz, et al., 2012; Wan, 2015). Oetting, Swaim, and Chiarella (1998, p.132) define cultural identity as “a person’s affiliation with a specific group”, and therefore more permanent than the

related concept of cultural identification, which is referred to as a more malleable “personal trait” that “derives from an ongoing social learning process involving the person’s interaction with the culture”. Another acculturation-relevant term that may require some definition and clarification is ethnicity, which has become an integral aspect of the acculturation process (Schwartz et. al., 2010). According to Phinney (1996), ethnicity refers to membership in a group that holds a specific heritage and set of values, beliefs, and customs. Finally, an additional factor particularly relevant to the present study that must be considered is language and the role it plays in the acculturation process. It is evident that previous experience or knowledge of the language of the host society could ease the acculturation process in relating to or identifying with the culture (Schwartz et. al., 2010; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

While the significance of investigations into the cultural identification and acculturation of SA sojourners goes beyond meaningful SA experiences, they are staggeringly scarce. Therefore, this research investigated the cultural identification of students on a short-term (four weeks) SA program and its influence on their acculturation process, utilizing a mixed-methods data analysis. Attuned to issues of SA that highlight the role cultural identification plays in successful SA programs and student acculturation, this study is an attempt to measure the level of cultural identification of SA participants before and after their intercultural interactions in order to ascertain the effects of those interactions on their cultural identifications and ultimately their acculturation processes. The overarching goal of this research is to pursue the development of SA programs that promote intercultural competence, broadly defined as “the overall capacity of an individual to enact behaviors and activities that foster cooperative relationships with culturally (or ethnically) dissimilar others”, for students in global learning contact situations (Kim, 2009, p. 54). Based on Oetting and Beauvais’s (1991) Orthogonal Cultural Identification Theory, which asserts that cultural identification with one culture is independent of cultural identification with another culture, together with acculturation literature focusing on the context of SA, the following research questions were addressed through appropriate quantitative as well as qualitative analyses:

1. Is there a significant change in students’ cultural identification following participation in the SA program of this study?
2. Is there an increase in Asian ethnic identification with increased interaction with Asian culture?

## Literature Review

### Cultural Identification and Orthogonal Cultural Identification Theory

There is an inherent correlation between cultural identification and cultural identity, and their impact on acculturation has been investigated in numerous studies over the past several decades, mainly among immigrant and minority populations (Angstman, Harris, Golbeck & Swaney, 2009; Bornstein & Cote, 2006; Campesino, Belyea, & Schwartz, 2009; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, & Sammut, 2014; Lawton & Gerdes, 2014; Moore & Barker, 2012; Schwartz, et al., 2012; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). In their exploration of the relationship between acculturation and identity, Schwartz, et al. (2006) studied non-White, non-Western immigrants moving to Western nations. They argue that acculturation is intricately interwoven with identity in that changes that occur as a result of acculturation may be viewed as changes in identity, postulating that identity develops and changes when one and/or one's context changes in ways that do not mesh with one's current configuration of beliefs, goals and values. Oetting's study (1993) investigated cultural identification and substance abuse and found that high cultural identification with a culture is equated to a strong adaptation or adjustment to that culture, and "like other personality traits, develops and is maintained through interactions with the environment, in this case, the cultural environment" (p.33). Zak (1973, 1976) and later Der-Karabetian (1980), Sayegh and Lasry (1993), and Oetting and Beauvais (1991) then broke from the traditional stance that heritage and host cultural identities were placed at either extreme of one linear bipolar dimension by advancing the concept of an orthogonal cultural identification, in which the possibility exists for individuals to identify with more than one culture without necessarily sacrificing one cultural identification for another. Put simply, cultural identification dimensions are independent of each other.

Oetting and Beauvais (1991) arrived at their Orthogonal Cultural Identification Theory, which acknowledges the influence of a pluralistic environment and normalized experiences of identification with multiple cultures and reflects the dynamic and fluid nature of cultural identification. Through their theory and its related measurement scale (hereafter, OCIS), they propose that identification with any culture can be assessed, as long as the culturally related items on the scale are carefully constructed so as to be familiar

to those taking the test. A total score can be created for each individual culture and then combined or used separately.

The theory and OCIS have made significant contributions to research in the fields of health, counseling, and behavioral and social sciences: Oetting and Beauvais's (1991) investigation into the cultural identification of Native-American and Mexican-American youth; Angstman et al.'s (2009) investigation of the relationship between cultural identification and smoking among American Indian adults; Campesino et al.'s (2009) study of spirituality among Latino and non-Latino College students; Strunin and Demissie's (2001) study of alcohol use among African-American and Haitian Black adolescents; and Zane and Ku's (2014) research on effects of ethnic match, gender match, acculturation, cultural identity, and face concern on self-disclosure in counseling for Asian Americans. Research employing this theory and the OCIS to investigate cultural identification and its impact on acculturation in the area of SA could potentially contribute to the development of more successful students' acculturation processes and more effective SA programs.

### Acculturation Within Study Abroad

The concept of cultural identification aligns with Berry's (1980) bidimensional model and his definition of acculturation, which centers on the process of change that results from contact between two or more cultural groups (Berry, 2006a). Berry, Kim, Power, Young, and Bujaki (1989) go further to propose that acculturation attitudes constitute the critical variable which explains individual differences in people's way of orienting themselves in their acculturation processes. More recent research now embraces this bidimensionality (Birman & Trickett, 2001; Oetting & Beauvais, 1991; Schwartz, et al., 2012), in addition to multidimensionality, in order to account for participants who traverse two or more cultural heritage traditions and mix cultural elements into hybrids (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Felix-Ortiz, Newcomb, & Myers, 1994).

Similar studies on the interconnectedness of cultural identity and cultural identification with acculturation are slowly increasing in the area of SA journeys as the number of SA programs have been growing in the past few decades and more evidence on the significance of cultural identification's interconnectedness with the degree of intercultural competence, intercultural effectiveness and success of one's acculturation while abroad is coming to light.

In his review of sojourner acculturation, Bochner (2006) claimed that the degree and quality of culture contact and culture learning are significant determinants of the SA students' sojourn experiences and that SA students often develop meaningful relationships with their peers and teachers of the host society, although there are many SA students who do not, resulting in somewhat isolated lives. Peng, et al., (2015) in their study of undergraduate business students on a short-term SA, found that the beneficial effects of motivational cultural intelligence (or CQ), defined by Ang & Van Dyne (2008) as the capability of functioning effectively in culturally diverse settings—a concept closely related to intercultural competence—are contingent upon the strength of an individual's cultural identity. The relationship between identity and its influence on the SA journey is also illustrated in Gieser's (2015) study of American SA students' approaches to and negotiations of their encounters with various sociocultural practices at a university in South Africa, and the role their cultural identities played in the sense-making process. In his interviews with the American subjects, nearly every one raised the issue of their American identity impacting their SA experiences, yet whether that issue actually benefited them or not depended on the individual. These findings are furthered by Mayer's (2009) study on the relationship between identity, conflict and its management in the work context, which finds how a person reacts to cultural and group conflicts, and in a broader sense, challenges in the differences in culture in a SA experience, and that this depends largely on the strength of their cultural identity. It is this cultural identity, and the critical factors of ethnic values, beliefs, and practices encompassed within, that significantly influence the degree of success of acculturation of SA participants (Dolby, 2005; Fugita & O'Brien, 1985; Gieser, 2015).

The symbiotic relationship between acculturation in the SA setting and intercultural competence is evident and explored in numerous studies, the focus of which range from Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, and Buki's (2003) five factors of cultural domains (e.g., language, identity/self-identification, affective skills, etc.) considered to be functions of acculturation, the topic of what and how students learn in a SA context (Dunkley, 2009; Vande Berg, 2007), the critical element of pre- and post-management of SA programs (Chinnappan, McKenzie, & Fitzsimmons, 2013; Santoro-Major, 2012) and factors that lead to the development of cultural competence (Campbell & Walta, 2015; Cots, Aguilar, Mas-Alcolea & Llanes, 2016; Nguyen, 2017; Palmer, 2013; Song, 2020), to the

obvious topics of effects on L2 proficiency, motivation, attitudes, and other affective outcomes (Hardison, 2014; Jackson, 2016; Song, 2020).

The duration of SA programs and its impact on the learning outcomes of its participants has also received much attention in the past decade (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Campbell & Walta, 2015; Cots et al., 2016; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Pesakovic, 2015; Schenker, 2019; Song, 2020). An overwhelming number of studies that include Dwyer (2004), Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004), and Kehl and Morris (2007) have produced findings that support conventional wisdom: the longer the SA program, the more significant the students' academic, cultural development and personal growth. However, according to the 2020 Open Doors Report (Institute of International Education, 2020) on American students studying abroad for academic credit, much of the growth in the number of students pursuing SA has been driven by short-term programs (i.e., summer or eight weeks or less), with the number of U.S. students participating in these programs between 1998/99 and 2018/19 increasing from 44.7% to 64.9%, and researchers are finding that short-term programs of less than one academic year have a positive impact on cross cultural development and intercultural competence (Anderson et al., 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Di Gregorio, 2015; Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Schenker, 2019; Song, 2020). Cots et al. (2016), for instance, found that a SA of five to ten months proved to have a stronger impact on some aspects of intercultural competence, specifically the knowledge component, than on others, such as the behavior and attitude components. Similarly, results spanning three summers from Schenker's (2019) eight-week German summer program, four weeks on a U.S. college campus and four weeks in Germany, also indicated statistically significant improvements in several dimensions of global competence, such as open-mindedness, attentiveness to diversity, and historical perspective. Likewise, in her study of a six-week SA program, Song (2020) found that improvement in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of students' intercultural competence impacted gains in their language use skills.

Other studies on short-term programs have led to new knowledge in areas such as how the type of program and destination have an effect on global citizenship as seen through volunteerism (Horn & Fry, 2013), and how program length is associated with both changes in cultural identification as well as in the cross-cultural adaptation process (Hamad & Lee, 2013; Kim, 2001). Hamad and Lee's (2013) study of 78 SA participants aimed to assess the degree to which SA

program length affects individuals' ethnic and cultural identification, participants' willingness to engage in intercultural communication, their intercultural communication competence—one aspect of cultural competence—and overall cultural adaptation. They found that although SA program length was not correlated to cultural adaptation (and by extension, acculturation), it was associated with changes in cultural and ethnic identification. This suggests that even short-term SA programs may influence participants' acculturation. Finally, they concluded that the more individuals communicate with host country members, the more competent their communication was and the weaker they felt toward their own cultural identification. The implication here may be the importance of integrating a variety of cultural components and providing opportunities of interaction on acculturation in the development of SA programs. It is evident that a deeper understanding of the interconnected relationships between cultural identification and acculturation can clearly have significant and beneficial impacts in the development and administration of both long- and short-term SA programs.

## Method

### Research Context

This study was based on a sample of university students participating in a semester-long SA program beginning in January 2016, culminating in a 24-day trip to Japan and Korea (12 days in each country) in May-June 2016. The objectives of the program were to explore contrasts of traditional and modern cultures of both countries through observations and interactions with Japanese and Korean people and society. The intense credit-bearing program included requirements of extensive readings, internet researching, film viewings, online and in-class discussions, quizzes, and a service learning project preparation conducted in four 4-hour pre-departure meetings during the spring semester. In addition, students were required to maintain a daily journal throughout the trip. Upon return, they participated in a 2-hour post-trip meeting, and submitted a written and a photo essay as two final projects.

### Participants

The participants in the study were 17 students at a large university in the Southeast U.S., enrolled in a short-term SA program to Japan and Korea in the spring of 2016. Consistent with the national trend of SA student profiles (Institute of International Education, 2020), there were 12 females and 5 males



with a mean age of 21.4 years and with various majors. Thirteen participants were born in the U.S. The four foreign-born subjects came to the U.S. at the ages of 8, 4, 2 and before 1, and all had been living in the U.S. for at least 16 years. None had ever traveled either to Japan or Korea, with the exception of one Japanese heritage student who once traveled in Japan for 2 months since she left Japan at the age of 8, and another student who traveled in Korea for 1 day. In terms of their first language, 14 of the subjects listed English and three listed Spanish. Regarding their parents' language and birthplace, four Spanish-speaking parents were born in Mexico, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, Japanese-speaking parents were born in Japan, and Cantonese-speaking parents were born in Vietnam and Malaysia. Considering this background information, participants were grouped into White and Non-white for a summative variable of ethnicity. Information concerning their previous experience with the target languages of Japanese and Korean was gleaned from their responses to their self-assessed proficiency of the target languages. Participants were then divided into two distinctive groups—those with experience and those with none—for further descriptive statistics in terms of their previous experience with the target languages.

## Instruments

The OCIS, designed for cross-cultural use, was used to measure subjects' ethnic and cultural identification. This empirically validated instrument measures identification with five American ethnic groups in the U.S. (Asian, Anglo, Latino, African, and Native American). The term "ethnic group" refers to broad groupings of Americans on the basis of both race and culture (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). The six base questions of OCIS incorporating attitudes and behaviors include items on family way of life, personal way of life, family success, personal success, family cultural traditions, and personal cultural traditions. Each set of questions was asked separately for different cultures. It did not, therefore, focus on specific culture-related behaviors but on general attitudes toward involvement in a culture. Respondents used a 4-point scale from 1 (none at all) to 4 (a lot) to answer each item, and separate scores for each ethnicity were averaged from the six base questions. High identification with a given ethnicity is indicated by a score of 3 or more, medium identification by a score of 2, and low identification by a score of 1 or less. A high score on OCIS indicates a strong identification with the culture. In addition to this acculturation measure, all participants completed a demographic questionnaire that served to provide their background information.

## Procedure

All acculturation questionnaires were self-administered online by the subjects twice: (1) immediately prior to the beginning of the SA coursework in January, to assess their initial level of acculturation (pre-test); and (2) upon return from their 24-day SA program in June to assess their exit level of acculturation (post-test). The demographic questionnaire was administered once in January. At the completion of the survey, the responses were scored, with 1 through 4 assigned to the response entries where 1 was associated with the least identification with the culture (“none at all”). These data were then imported into SPSS for statistical analyses. Although the limited amount of data did not permit the use of many statistical tests for significance, the data were then subjected to a number of inferential (probability-based) statistics.

All the participants were required to record daily journal entries throughout the course of the program, chronicling opinions and perceptions important to them. Instructions on effective journaling were provided during one of the pre-departure sessions. The quality of each journal entry varied from rich accounts detailed over several pages to sketchy reports of just a few lines. Journal entries were used for the supplemental purpose of qualifying and amplifying findings in a qualitative fashion and of enriching the understanding of participants’ cultural identification, when applicable.

## Results

### Cultural Identification of Study Abroad Participants

Based on the participants’ responses to their ethnic and language backgrounds in the demographic questionnaire, the ethnicity variable was classified into White and Non-white and Japanese and Korean language variables into With Experience and No Experience for further descriptive statistics. Table 1 displays the distribution of participants in terms of the four background variables.

**TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF SA PARTICIPANTS.**

		N	Percent
Gender	Male	5	29.4
	Female	12	70.6

Ethnicity	White	9	52.9
	Non-White	8	47.1
Korean language	No Experience	8	47.1
	With Experience	9	52.9
Japanese language	No Experience	5	29.4
	With Experience	12	70.6

**TABLE 2. MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR SIX OCIS GROUP MEASURES.**

	Pre		Post	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
White	3.2157	.90791	2.9706	.87264
Asian	2.0980	1.11257	1.8333	.97578
Mexican	2.1078	1.25000	1.8627	1.20263
Black	1.8137	.99235	1.6765	1.00653
Native	1.5294	.80476	1.3431	.73787
Other	1.5588	.93949	1.4412	.73893
Total	2.054		1.855	

Participants exhibited various combinations of cultural identification, such as a single identity, a bicultural identity, a high identification with one culture and a modest one with another, and a weak identification with all cultures. However, as Table 2 presents, inspection of cell means revealed that there was a slight decline in the level of cultural identification with each of the six cultures after the SA program.

In relation to the purpose of studying the set of cultural identification groups, the basic questions are whether there is a relationship between cultural identification groups, and, if a relationship in fact exists, how strong or weak that relationship is. Therefore, as a preliminary step to conducting analyses of the effects of demographic personal variables on both pre- and post-OCIS scales, correlations among the six composite cultural identification groups were calculated in order to determine the degree of collinearity among these groups. These correlations are reported in Tables 3 and 4. The conventional alpha level of .05 was used as the criterion for statistical significance. The results of the correlational analyses of pre-OCIS scores presented in Table 3 show that in all cases except for the White group, correlations of all the other groups with each other were statistically significant at the .01 level, and all correlations were positive. All the correlations of the cultural groups on post-OCIS showed the

same pattern of relationships as those of pre-OCIS. Moreover, the identification with White culture and that with Native American culture were moderately and positively correlated with each other at the .01 level.

**TABLE 3. CORRELATIONS AMONG THE SIX GROUPS ON PRE-TEST.**

	White	Asian	Mexican	Black	Native	Other
White	1.00	.110	-.032	.124	.231**	.112
Asian		1.00	.343**	.418**	.534**	.625**
Mexican			1.00	.266**	.388**	.548**
Black				1.00	.511**	.447**
Native					1.00	.755**
Other						1.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

**TABLE 4. CORRELATIONS AMONG THE SIX GROUPS ON POST-TEST.**

	White	Asian	Mexican	Black	Native	Other
White	1.00	.145	.110	-.164	-.063	.066
Asian		1.00	.419**	.313**	.472**	.582**
Mexican			1.00	.352**	.336**	.420**
Black				1.00	.521**	.410**
Native					1.00	.692**
Other						1.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

### Relationships Between Pre- and Post- OCIS Measures

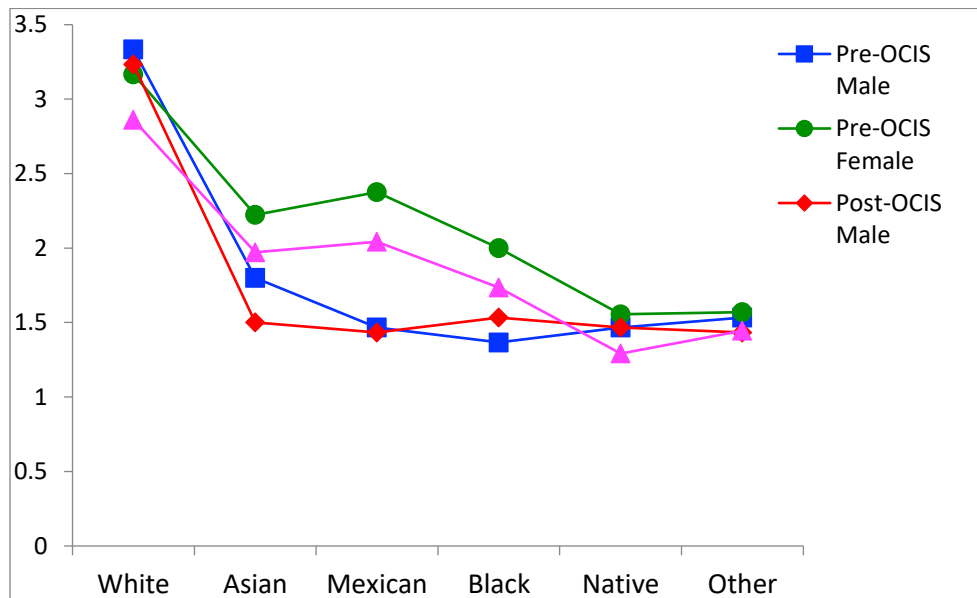
By looking at the mean difference between pre- and post-OCIS scores for each cultural identification group shown in Table 2 to find out which set of scores is higher or lower and how much they differ, it was found that all the post-OCIS scores were lower than the pre-OCIS scores. A univariate mixed factorial 6 (ethnic group) x 2 (pre-test, post-test) ANOVA on the OCIS scores showed a significant difference ( $p < .0001$ ) among the six cultural identification groups as rated by all participants. There was also a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the pre-test and post-test. However, the tests indicated that there was no significant interaction between the two tests (pre vs. post) and the cultural identification groups. In order to determine if these differences in the mean scores were statistically significant, a paired sample  $t$  test comparing means was conducted. The results of the paired sample  $t$  tests revealed that the mean difference between the pre-test ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) and post-test scores ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) of students' identification with White American culture was statistically different,  $t(16) = 2.453$ ,  $p < .05$ ; the mean difference between the pre-

test ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and post-test scores ( $M = 1.83$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) of students' identification with Asian American culture was statistically different,  $t(16) = 2.636$ ,  $p < .05$ ; the mean difference between the pre-test ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) and post-test scores ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) of students' identification with Mexican American culture was statistically different,  $t(16) = 2.554$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and the mean difference between the pre-test ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) and post-test scores ( $M = 1.34$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) of students' identification with American Indian culture was statistically different,  $t(16) = 2.206$ ,  $p < .05$ .

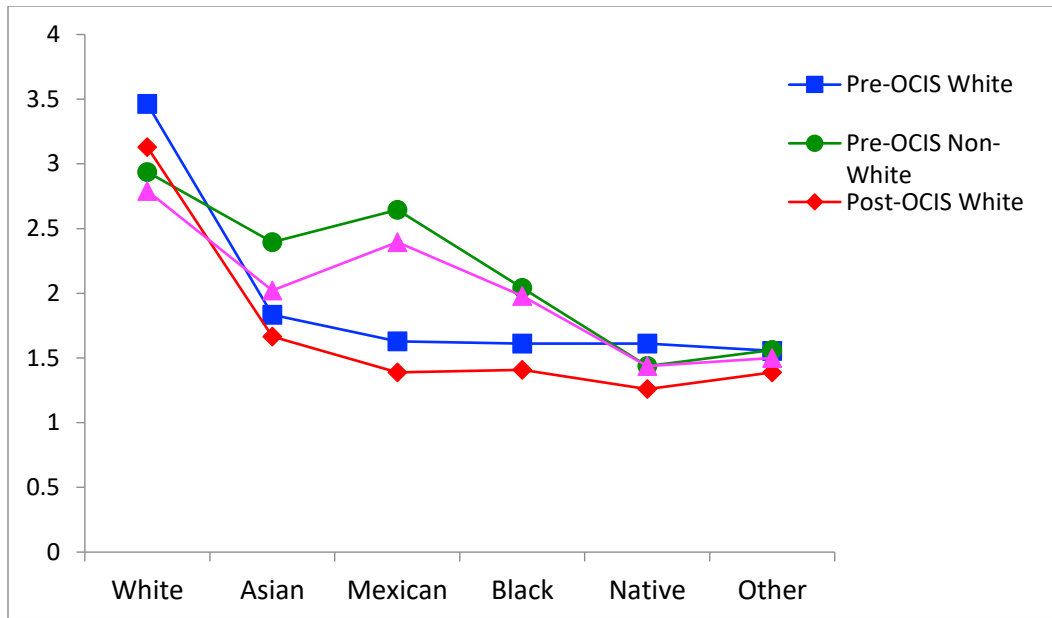
### Relationships Between Participant Background and OCIS

The population means for the scores on the pre- and post-OCIS differed for participants from different backgrounds: (1) gender (Male and Female); (2) ethnicity (White and Non-white); (3) past experience with Korean language (No Korean and Korean); and (4) past experience with Japanese language (No Japanese and Japanese). Figures 1-4, descriptive presentations of interactions as well as cell means of both pre- and post-OCIS scores for all four personal variables, indicate some interesting patterns.

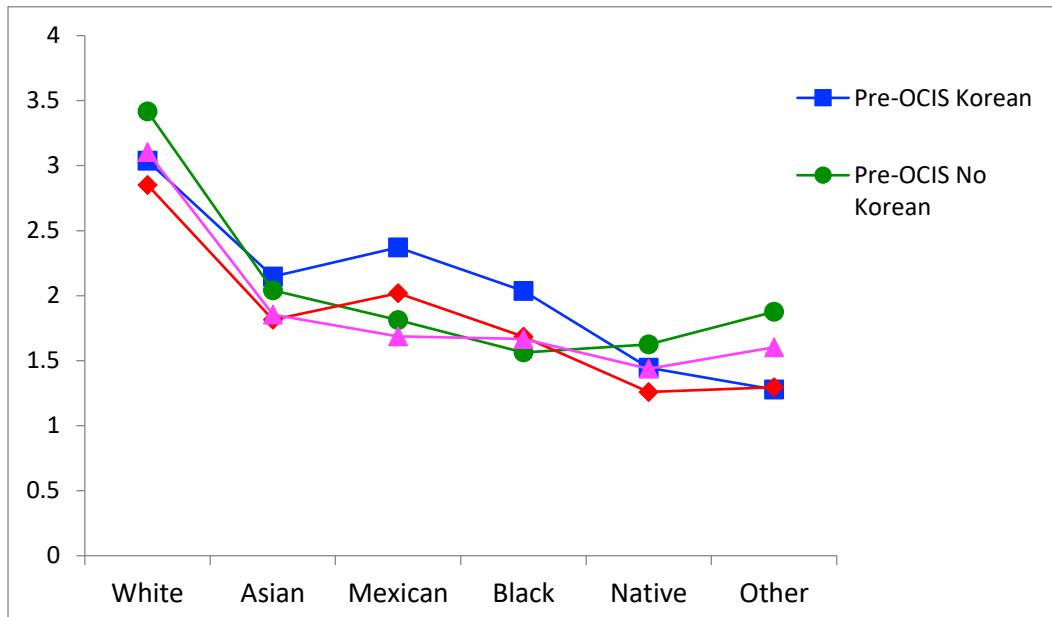
**FIGURE 1. INTERACTIONS OF GENDER AND CELL MEANS OF CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION ON PRE- AND POST OCIS.**



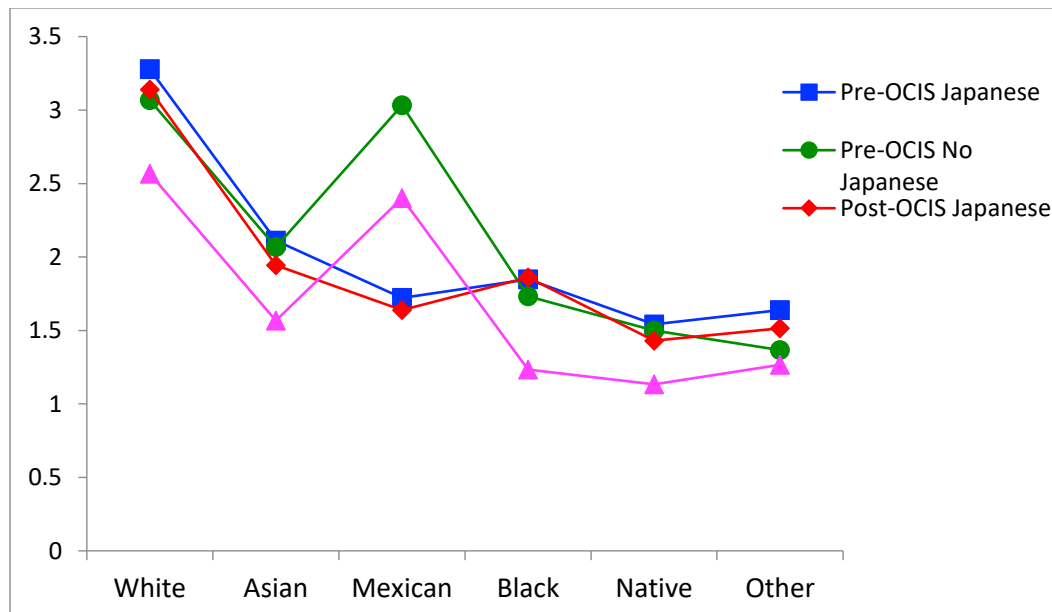
**FIGURE 2. INTERACTIONS OF ETHNICITY AND CELL MEANS OF CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION ON PRE AND POST OCIS.**



**FIGURE 3. INTERACTIONS OF KOREAN LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE AND CELL MEANS OF CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION ON PRE AND POST OCIS**



**FIGURE 4. INTERACTIONS OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE AND CELL MEANS OF CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION ON PRE. AND POST OCIS.**



### Qualitative Considerations

In addition to the quantifications of the questionnaires, we examined journal entries for further insights into participants' cultural identification. Providing complementary evidence of the effects of their cultural experiences and interactions during the SA program on their cultural identification, journal entries were carefully examined and deliberately selected for qualitative presentations to illustrate broader concepts and/or aberrant cases of cultural identification that were of particular interest.

As the following journal excerpts reveal, participants exhibited stress and anxiety in the path of the transition across cultural identification space. They sometimes felt pressure from the environment, circumstances, and/or peers about their intercultural experiences while traversing two different cultures. That pressure was often a potent motivation for their experiences, but conversely, too much pressure seemed to provoke negative feelings toward the host country, its people, and/or the experience itself.

#### *Journal Excerpt 1*

“I had a good bit of culture shock when we landed in Korea.”

In Journal Excerpt 1 above, the participant illustrates her awareness of differences between her ethnic society and the host society and signals a shift in cultural identification.

*Journal Excerpt 2*

“One thing that stands out in my mind about this place was how typically Asian it felt. It conformed to the overcrowded, smelly and probably a bit dirty area that is associated with these areas.”

As seen in Journal Excerpt 2, the participant’s concern about conditions of the country revealed his discomfort with being outside his cultural comfort zone.

On the other hand, by noticing the differences between the culture of the host country and their own culture (Journal Excerpts 3-4) and the differences between the cultures of those two host countries (Journal Excerpts 5-6), participants were able to broaden their visions of each culture and beyond. In doing so, their culturally based choice of action seemed at times to have brought on negative sentiments and an anxiety about such experience. For example:

*Journal Excerpt 3*

“These are just things one would never see in America.”

*Journal Excerpt 4*

“It seems that Japanese people focus on comfort while Americans focus on appearances.”

*Journal Excerpt 5*

“Not like Japan where they were just random little stares, in Korea, they’re seriously not afraid to stare directly at you and stare for quite a while.”

*Journal Excerpt 6*

“In Japan, no one would say anything, but here in Korea, I felt that everyone is more expressive about their feeling [*sic*].”

While traversing two different cultures, itself often a stress-inducing experience, participants were constantly in positions of negotiating different sets of values, norms and identities that may have contributed to an increase in their level of stress and anxiety. Some participants were successful in adjusting and adapting while others were not, as the following excerpts revealed:



*Journal Excerpt 7*

“..while on the shuttle bus ...I got up and offered my seat to an elderly couple...”

*Journal Excerpt 8*

“...they [Japanese] have to be polite/respectful to others when on the train...”

*Journal Excerpt 9*

“I would assume it [taking off our shoes] to be a foremost respect towards the paintings of the artist.”

Our SA participants encountered one common cultural aspect of both Japanese and Korean societies—politeness. As the writers of Journal Excerpts 7-9 alluded, the concept of politeness is one of the keys to understanding the Japanese and Korean people and their cultures, a conclusion that might not be readily reached by this group of American students had they not experienced Japanese and Korean cultures first-hand. They, even as short-term SA participants, realized the necessity of this pragmatic knowledge of politeness in maintaining social relationships as well as cultural connections in both the Japanese and Korean societies. Coincidentally, the writers of the excerpts above identified with the Mexican American culture as their dominant culture on the OCIS, which may indicate the influence of their ethnic culture on the development of cultural identification.

*Journal Excerpt 10*

“...the driving in the country [Korea] was very poor. People seem to cut off one another, and people including our bus driver would drive between lines.”

On the other hand, the cultural encounter that the writer of Journal Excerpt 10 above experienced in terms of societal norms that seemed acceptable and commonly practiced in Korea but uncomfortable to him elicited some negative feelings toward the host country. Another participant even said that she felt excluded when she realized that her knowledge of Korea and its culture was marginal, compared to that of Japan and its culture and to other participants.

Participants' adjustment and adaptation efforts were noticeably challenging. Regardless, they appeared to sense the need to learn more about the society and its culture to enhance their enjoyment, and what motivated this particular group of students to learn about the society was a result of their cultural understanding and enhancement and their culturally-based choice of actions. The following several excerpts illustrate their efforts to adjust and adapt to the challenges they faced.

*Journal Excerpt 11*

"I learned how to use Pasma card [pre-paid card] and experienced my first squatty potty."

*Journal Excerpt 12*

"I simply mimicked what others were doing at the [Buddha] statue so I don't know if I made a fool of myself or not, hopefully not."

*Journal Excerpt 13*

"...so I felt I should behave better than I did in Japan to avoid those stares."

*Journal Excerpt 14*

"It was amazing and made me feel like an actual Korean since I tried a little of everything."

As evidenced in Excerpts 11-14, our participants progressively went from learning how to maneuver in day-to-day situations to acquiring a deeper level of strategies/approaches to culturally appropriate behaviors. As a consequence of their continued efforts, they were able to have a sense of integration into the host societies, as the writer of Excerpt 14 experienced.

Nevertheless, as Excerpts 15-17 reveal, participants still felt pressure—this time from their peers—while living, cooperating, and sharing daily experiences among themselves for 24 continuous days. In their journal entries, some participants expressed their expectations and disappointments toward other participants, and these mainly centered around consideration of one another.

*Journal Excerpt 15*

“I wish the group would be more respectful when visiting these locations of significance: talking less or not taking pictures when it is inappropriate.”

*Journal Excerpt 16*

“There was very little ‘wa’ [harmony] in the crowd and no one thought of others first.”

*Journal Excerpt 17*

“...a student couldn’t find her passport at the last minute, which shows she didn’t display ‘bae-ryeo’ [thoughtfulness], which screwed with our ‘jo-hwa’ [harmony].”

Learning the target languages (here, Japanese and Korean) also allowed SA participants a pathway into their intercultural experiences and interactions. While having traveled outside their own region and its culture, geographically and socially, they felt a need for some cultural and linguistic experiences or expertise that would help connect them more closely to locals. The following excerpts from journal entries give a clear idea of how their previous knowledge of the target language affected their cultural experiences.

*Journal Excerpt 18*

“I...found an English-speaking channel. Yes!”

*Journal Excerpt 19*

“I wish I understood more day to day language. I smiled and nodded a lot not saying anything.”

*Journal Excerpt 20*

“The subway and train system seem overwhelming, it does not help with the language barrier.”

The writer of Excerpt 18 displayed implicit anxiety from her lack of knowledge of the target language while explicitly demonstrating her joy and relief upon hearing her native language.

Similar to but to some extent different from the anxieties that participants usually had about traversing two different cultures, they also hinted at pressures from language barriers, as reported in Excerpts 19 and 20

above. As participants who did not have any previous experience with the target language, they came to this intercultural experience opportunity already aware of how important it was for them to speak the target language to enhance their learning experience. They had just not acquired the needed skills and exhibited signs of stress.

The cultural diversity that participants experience is a result of their cultural understanding and enhancement and may enhance their motivation for learning the target language. In the following excerpt, the participant found learning the target culture and especially target language difficult but at the same time inspirational.

*Journal Excerpt 21*

“I have forgotten my Japanese. It is a struggle already because I get a stutter when learning the language. Maybe being in Japan will give me new inspiration. I hope to better understand how the language is used. Maybe I will pick up some new knowledge as well. I need to review the words and phrases I have learned.”

In addition to acknowledging the value of acquiring or improving their proficiency in the target language, participants revealed the importance of direct contact and interactions with locals to enhance their experiences, as seen in the following excerpts. Specifically, one female participant expressed how much she appreciated the target culture through the interactions with her friend from the host country.

*Journal Excerpt 22*

“I made 10-15 friends on Facebook and/or Line on this trip. International friends are great.”

*Journal Excerpt 23*

“My day ends with meeting up with a childhood [native Korean] friend. She treated me the whole night. Such hospitality. It’s her finals week and she traveled an hour or two to see me! We had spicy octopus, cheese fondue, salad, soup and cream makgeolli [traditional Korean alcoholic beverage]. It felt as no time had passed.”

Participants constantly reflected on their national/ethnic/cultural identity and ruminated on who and what they are throughout the course of the program. Especially for those SA participants for whom this was a first

experience traveling outside the boundaries of their cultural identities, having to think about their cultural identities was both moving and powerful as evidenced in Excerpts 24-27.

*Journal Excerpt 24*

“When we were told that most of these immigrants were factory workers, that really hit home for me. I honestly felt like crying from recalling my family.”

*Journal Excerpt 25*

“My childhood entertainment helped bring me to the other side of the world. It really goes to show what an influence that a person’s early years have on a person’s life.”

*Journal Excerpt 26*

“Even if I do live there [Korea] and became fluent in the language, the natives will still see us as foreigners and get surprised when we speak and stare.”

*Journal Excerpt 27*

The cultural diversity that participants experience is a result of their cultural understanding and enhancement and may enhance their motivation for learning the target language. In the following excerpt, the participant found learning the target culture and especially target language difficult but at the same time inspirational.

“...we’re foreigners, so a lot of people may already have some preconceived ideas about us—especially me with the short hair, tattoo, and short shorts.”

Volunteering at an immigrant shelter as a service learning project drove the writer of Excerpt 24 to contemplate her cultural identity grounded in her family background, nearly moving her to tears. Similarly, the impact of her family background on the development of her being as well as her cultural identification through our SA program is shown in Excerpt 25. In addition, such participants as the writers of Excerpts 26 and 27 whose self-awareness of being a foreigner is heightened due to locals’ attitudes toward them are constantly reminded of their own cultural/ethnic identities.

Participants' constant ruminations on their national/ethnic/cultural identities played a role in contributing to their maintaining cultural identification with their own culture while also developing cultural identification with another culture. This supports the findings related to statistically significant decreases in cultural identification scores after the SA program.

In addition, participants expressed in their journal entries how rigid our SA program was in light of its duration. The challenges of traversing two countries and cultures over a brief 24-day period impacted our participants in spite of their enthusiasm and motivation. Numerous journal entries, as seen in the following excerpts, underscored the rigidity and brevity of our SA program.

*Journal Excerpt 28*

“Will write about later because I’m exhausted.”

*Journal Excerpt 29*

“I really needed more sleep but I got up and went out.”

*Journal Excerpt 30*

“I started getting bummed out about leaving Korea soon...”

*Journal Excerpt 31*

“We spent such a short time here...”

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The OCIS questionnaire, in conjunction with a demographic questionnaire, was used to assess levels of cultural identification of 17 American university students before and after participating in a SA program to Japan and Korea. The paired sample *t* test conducted to evaluate whether a difference existed between the cultural identification scores before and after the SA program indicated that there was a decrease in students' cultural identification with each of the six cultures following their participation in the program, and that the decreases in the cultural identification scores of White American, Asian American, Mexican American, and American Indian cultures were statistically significant. Thus, intercultural interaction during SA did correlate—negatively—with cultural identification scores. It was hypothesized that scores

of cultural identification with Asian culture on post-OCIS would show an increase from the pre-OCIS scores. As the paired sample *t* test revealed, however, there was a statistically significant decrease in students' cultural identification with the Asian American culture following their participation in our SA program, where they had both implicit and explicit interactions with the Asian culture.

### Qualitative Considerations

The changes in the cultural identification scores over time in this study support Oetting & Beauvais's (1991) argument that cultural identification is a social learning process and the result of the interaction between the individual and his or her environment. The fundamental premise of their theory—that cultural identification dimensions are independent of each other—is also supported by our findings as increases in identification scores with one culture did not result in subsequent decreasing identification scores with another culture, as one participant exemplified in one of her journal entries that she identified with more than one culture without sacrificing one cultural identity for another as a result of the influence of a pluralistic environment and normalized experiences of identification with multiple cultures that she was exposed to during our SA program.

In this study, we measured American college students' cultural identifications before and after their immersion in two societies, Japan and Korea, during a short-term SA program, reflecting degrees of effects of new experiences. Results of this study provide an index of the degree of immersion of students in their cultural identifications, illuminating how ethnic identification and acculturation are related within a SA experience. The findings from the quantitative analyses showed statistically significant decreases in scores of cultural identification with White American, Asian American, Mexican American, and American Indian cultures after the completion of the program, which were then supported by the qualitative analyses of participants' journal entries. What might be plausible explanations for these decreases in scores?

Our SA participants were in transition throughout the course of the program, and they moved in the path of the transition across cultural identification space. Although most participants continued to maintain a reasonably high level of cultural identification with one or more cultures in the path of the transition, there seemed to be a loss of overall identification, which

might likely have been accompanied or caused by stress, as claimed by Oetting (1993). It is likely that the challenges of traversing different cultures and negotiating different sets of values, norms and identities, as one does when experiencing a different country and culture, generate a certain level of stress. Traveling to not one but two distinctly different countries and cultures may have compounded the stress and anxiety levels for the SA participants. Not only were they expected to navigate differences in food, customs, and communication, and participate in cultural and social activities outside of their familiar environments, but they also had to contend with the within-group pressures of living, cooperating, and sharing daily experiences among themselves for 24 continuous days. Additionally, there were the demands and rigid requirements of the SA program pre-departure, in-country, and upon return to the U.S. The factors of pressure and stress may have created adjustment challenges, constantly occurring experiences that are a normal part of the adaptation of both the culture and the individual, and may have contributed to the unexpected decreases in cultural identification scores that resulted in this study. According to Oetting (1993: 38), people who demonstrate a decline of cultural identification “test their limits, get confused, construct inaccurate cognitions, deviate from cultural norms, try new roles, and grow and change.” Our participants throughout the course of the program experienced the same. The resulting decline in cultural identification, however, is not an adverse or harmful phenomenon as there was no sustained evidence of negative attitudes toward the cultures developed.

Duration of the SA program might also be a factor in the decrease of participants’ cultural identification scores. Past research has shown that longer SA programs result in more significant students’ academic, cultural development and personal growth (e.g., Dwyer, 2004; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004) and this might be relevant to cultural identification as well. Perhaps more cultural activities and interactions with the target cultures for more prolonged periods of time may have produced an increase rather than decrease in the cultural identification scores as they relate to Asian cultures. Nevertheless, in spite of its brevity, the impact of our SA program on the participants’ cultural identification was indeed powerful in that the outcomes were reflected in their view of their cultures and served as a catalyst in shaping their cultural identification.



## Implications for Acculturation and Study Abroad Program Development

Duration of the SA program might also be a factor in the decrease of participants' cultural identification scores. Past research has shown that longer SA programs result in more significant students' academic, cultural development and personal growth (e.g., Dwyer, 2004; Hamad & Lee, 2013; Kehl & Morris, 2007; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004) and this might be relevant to cultural identification as well. Perhaps more cultural activities and interactions with the target cultures for more prolonged periods of time may have produced an increase rather than decrease in the cultural identification scores as they relate to Asian cultures. Nevertheless, in spite of its brevity, the impact of our SA program on the participants' cultural identification was indeed powerful in that the outcomes were reflected in their view of their cultures and served as a catalyst in shaping their cultural identification.

Acculturation processes can influence behavior. Acculturative changes have been documented in all the behavioral domains in this study to various extents, including family way of life, personal way of life, family success, personal success, family cultural traditions, and personal cultural traditions. In practice, however, the impact of acculturation on psychological and behavioral changes in students on SA programs is underestimated at best and ignored at worst. Thus, the quantitative and qualitative assessment of cultural identification with regard to SA participants in this study contributes to the advancement of ethnic identity and acculturation study to capture more of the complexity inherent in cultural identification.

Overall, this study supports the prevalent view in the field of acculturation that identification with any one culture is independent from identification with other cultures. Indeed, identification with any one culture was virtually a continuous dimension in this study.

Interpreting identification in this innovative manner is relative to the typical dichotomous categorization of identification found in many acculturation studies. This identification process reiterates the importance of integrating a variety of relevant cultural components such as participation in traditional activities, cultural behaviors, feeling successful within a culture, and family involvement in cultural activities. Duration of the cultural experience also plays an important role in the identification process.

The process can equally be applied to different cultural groups or communities in the U.S., such as SA groups to help to shape the cultural identification of participants and to provide insight into how to design and implement SA programs. This requires committed, sustained efforts from administrators as well as educators. Fundamental to these efforts is a clearer understanding of those who participate in the program and why they have chosen it as part of their academic, global experience. With an understanding of this fundamental background information through continuous professional development opportunities, we are in a better position to create more meaningful curricula for students all across the cultural identification continuum. In addition to professional development opportunities, a thorough review of past SA programs at both a personal and professional level can also be helpful in this regard. In short, the notion of cultural identification and acculturation relies heavily on the interaction of various factors and can be defined in a multivariate manner, as the present study illustrates.

### Limitations of the Study

Although this study has covered new ground in the fields of acculturation—especially with respect to cultural identification—and SA programs, it is not without its limitations. First, the assessment measures focused specifically on behavioral acculturation outcomes of a small, albeit diverse target group over a short-term program. Future research should consider a larger sample of participants to enable more sophisticated approaches to the measurement of acculturation, and be conducted over a longer-term SA program. Second, although this study did include diverse ethnic groups, (i.e., White, Asian, Hispanic, Native, and Black), the representations of each group were limited to a small number of subjects in which all ethnic subgroups were merged into one cohort group and compared with the majority ethnic group, White. This limitation coupled with the small target group size leads to a restricted generalizability of results. It would, therefore, be beneficial for future studies to evaluate the acculturation process among other groups of diverse ethnicities as well. Third, although this study constituted a deliberate attempt to connect quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analyses, it relied more heavily on self-rated questionnaires than on journals. In addition, the quality of journal entries collected in this study varied from rich accounts to sketchy reports, and therefore, is open to bias and inaccurate measurement of cultural identity and acculturation, both complex

subjects. Future research could include more rigorously designed studies supplemented and augmented by findings from more comprehensive qualitative analyses. Finally, it is imperative to consider the facts that changes in cultural identification are not only subjective across students, but also may continue within and beyond a single SA experience. To more accurately assess cultural identification within the timeframe of our SA program, an additional test following the semester-long on-campus instruction and prior to the intensive in-country SA experience could have provided valuable insights. Addressing cultural identification beyond a single SA program leads to the consideration of a longitudinal study, collecting and comparing cultural identification scores of various groups of SA participants over multiple years.

## Conclusion

Individual differences in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral determinants of acculturation are not highly researched. The present mixed-methods study of participants on a short-term SA program, which examined cultural identification as “a long-term underlying characteristic that organizes cognitions, emotions, and behaviors”, as defined by Oetting (1993: 34), revealed that cultural identification indeed develops and is maintained through exchanges and interactions with others and with the cultural environment. The individual and collective interactions of the program participants ultimately brought about alterations in their cultural identifications and shaped and altered subsequent behaviors, as clearly evidenced in their journals. The changes in post-OCIS scores were consistently lower across the cultures, supporting Oetting and Beauvais’s principle of independence of cultural identification dimensions, and may be considered a transformation towards a more divergent cultural identification. Although maintaining aspects of their original culture while integrating other cultures may indeed be stressful and challenging, it can also be an adaptive approach that promotes cultural competency, mental health, and the well-being of individuals living in multicultural environments as well as the dynamic nature of society. And as the U.S. becomes increasingly multicultural and the era in which we live more globalized, this cultural competency is not only an asset but also a necessity.

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