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# Market-Based, Universalist, and Emancipatory Logics of Study Abroad

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## Abstract

The study abroad experiences of low-income ethn racially minoritized students contribute to, challenge, and extend our understanding of the social and academic effects of study abroad in higher education. The purpose of this contribution is to examine how and to what extent scholarship within the field of international higher education discusses ethn racial and class disparities in study abroad. This conceptual article presents a typology, a thematic sorting of themes in the literature of three distinct approaches to the study and practice of study abroad. The article problematizes market-based and universalist approaches to study abroad and adopts Critical Race Theory and intersectional lenses to identify the structural constraints and interpersonal challenges that low-income ethn racially minoritized students contend with.

## Abstract in Spanish

Las experiencias de estudio en el extranjero de estudiantes de grupos etnor raciales minoritarios de bajos ingresos contribuyen a, desafían y amplían nuestra comprensión de los efectos sociales y académicos del estudio en el extranjero en la educación superior. El propósito de esta contribución es examinar cómo y en qué medida la investigación dentro del campo de la educación superior internacional discute las disparidades etnor raciales y de clase en el estudio en el extranjero. Este artículo conceptual presenta una tipología,

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una clasificación temática de temas en la literatura de tres enfoques distintos para el estudio y la práctica del estudio en el extranjero. El artículo problematiza los acercamientos universalistas y orientados hacia el mercado para estudiar en el extranjero, y adopta teoría crítica racial e interseccional para identificar las restricciones estructurales y los desafíos interpersonales con los que se enfrentan los estudiantes de grupos etnoraciales minoritarios de bajos ingresos.

### **Keywords:**

Barriers, critical race theory, intersectional identities, minoritized students, study abroad

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## **Introduction**

The number of United States (U.S.) American students studying abroad is at an all-time high. The number of students receiving academic credit for studying abroad participation has more than tripled over the past two decades (IIE, 2017). Despite this growth, between 2015 and 2018, 70.8% of U.S. study abroad students were White, and 67.3% of them were women (IIE, 2019). In that same period, Black students represented 6% of study-abroad participants, while Hispanic/Latino participation comprised 10% (IIE, 2019). For decades, professional organizations and universities have looked to study abroad as a primary mechanism for teaching students cross-cultural skills and knowledge (Fry et al., 2009; Haas, 2018; Mapp, 2012). The impacts of study abroad have proven to be attractive for students who seek a global experience, yet those benefits are not equally available or distributed across different student demographics.

The population of study abroad participants is primarily White, female, young, single, financially comfortable, and without disability (Clay, 2022; Harris-Weedman, 2022; Nyunt et al., 2022; Patterson et al., 2022; Quan et al., 2023; Twombly et al., 2012). Historically, stark disparities in study abroad participation are due in part to the high cost of participating in these programs, among other factors, including the elitist perception of study abroad, the duration of programs (often a semester or more), and the fact that study abroad was only offered at the most exclusive schools, which overwhelmingly had wealthy White students (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). While participation in study abroad has grown since 1990, that growth has been negligible for Black, Latino, and Native American students.

The racialized and material disparities in study abroad point to a critical issue in international higher education: the need for enacting pathways for more equitable study abroad participation. The creation of these pathways would challenge dominant depictions of study abroad as a universally distributed and consumed good with uniform consequences across social groups. Therefore, the following question guides this article: How do the study abroad experiences of low-income, ethnoracially<sup>1</sup> minoritized students contribute to, challenge, and extend our understanding of the social and academic effects of study abroad in international higher education? This article introduces the reader to a conceptual framework that identifies distinct thematic approaches to the study and the practice of study abroad as reflected in the existing literature<sup>2</sup>. This conceptual framework enables future empirical examination of each of these themes. This article synthesizes differing currents of thought in study abroad literature around participation in study abroad in a typology, a thematic sorting of themes in the literature consisting of three distinct approaches: 1) market-based, 2) universalist, and 3) critical and intersectional approaches to study abroad.

I argue that these approaches enable a critique of the deficit-driven understandings of study abroad that rest on the idea that low-income ethnoracially minoritized students fail to gain access to study abroad due to deficiencies that characterize historically excluded communities. While market-oriented and universalist approaches to study abroad research tend to neglect questions of identity and inequity, I look to critical and intersectional approaches as the strongest points of departure for examining the lived experiences of low-income, ethnoracially minoritized students abroad. In this article, I adopt Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectional lenses to discern between approaches to study abroad that essentialize and exclude minoritized students and those that center their experiences and seek to identify and subvert the barriers to their participation. Below, I detail the theoretical tenets

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<sup>1</sup> I operationalize Bean's (2018) definition of ethnoracial status to refer to "the ways that various people distinguish themselves, on the basis of ancestry and/or color" (pg. 230). This contrasts with a narrower understanding of racial and ethnic relations and considers the ways in which groups self-identify that may distinguish them from other social groups within processes of racialization (Warren, 2020). I use the term minoritized to reflect the processes of minoritization as an action, the process of minoritization, and the social construction of marginality (Benitez, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> I view the study and the practice of study abroad as mutually constitutive, stemming from and informing each other.

that undergird CRT and intersectionality as analytical lenses for critiquing market-based and universalist approaches to study abroad.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings**

### **Critical Race Theory**

Inspired by the work of W. E. B. DuBois, among others, CRT evolved out of critical legal studies pioneered by Derrick Bell in the 1980s as a movement seeking to account for the role of race and the persistence of racism in American society. CRT has grown to meet the need for social inquiry that engages with questions of racial inequality in education and in society (Lynn et al., 2002). Solórzano (1997) argues that CRT provides a unique lens for educational scholarship because it explicitly focuses on how the social construct of race shapes university structures, practices, and discourses from the perspectives of those injured by and fighting against institutional racism. Moreover, CRT theorists argue that only by looking at the stories and having access to the experiential knowledge of those victimized by racial inequities can we understand the socially ingrained and systemic forces at work in their oppression (Pizarro, 1999).

Existing research on study abroad centers the experiences of groups that dominate within the study abroad setting (i.e., middle-class, White, female) as the point of reference for those studying abroad (Clay, 2022; Harris-Weedman, 2022; Nyunt et al., 2022; Patterson et al., 2022; Quan et al., 2023; Twombly et al., 2012). I draw from CRT to uncover the engrained disparities that support a system of systemic racism, privilege, and oppression in U.S. study abroad. Critical race theory is a lens that shines a light on the practice of producing knowledge that centers dominant voices. In the area of international education, CRT approaches identify how these dominant knowledge production practices deny autonomy to a multitude of students with complex identities, all of whom often remain unnamed and unimagined in study abroad literature. Critical race theory calls attention to the tendency whereby the views, understandings, interpretations, and framings of dominant group experiences determine the production and validation of knowledge. These epistemological practices that center the experiences of dominant groups reify and reproduce hierarchies of power and oppression. I build on various tenets of CRT to unearth the logics deployed in study abroad literature and practice that supports a system of systemic racism, privilege, and oppression in U.S. study abroad. These tenets

include the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, and critique of liberalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

### The Permanence of Racism

A basic premise of CRT is that “racism is a permanent component of American life” (Bell, 1992, p. 13). Whether consciously perceived or unconsciously manifested, racism plays a dominant role in peoples’ lived experiences through the racist structures that govern political, economic, and social domains (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Analyzing study abroad disparities through a lens that recognizes the permanence of racism is central to examining the universalist assumptions that have historically privileged white, middle-class females as the primary beneficiaries of study abroad.

### Whiteness as Property

The right to high-quality education in the U.S. was designed to be exclusively possessed and enjoyed by Whites (Zamudio et al., 2011). Study abroad arose to facilitate the international mobility of the privileged (Hoffa, 2007). For the purposes of this article, I refer to whiteness as property to describe study abroad as a form of property for which Whites retain the right of possession, the right to use, the right of use and enjoyment, and the right of exclusion (see DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, and Harris, 1995, for further discussion on whiteness as property). This notion is further reinforced and perpetuated by the market-driven, universalist, and deficit-oriented approaches to study abroad constructed on the belief that only White individuals can benefit from global experiences.

### Critique of Liberalism

CRT scholars also confront and critique the ideas of color blindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The notion of color-evasiveness<sup>3</sup> is centered around the view that race is not an element people see or consider. CRT scholars posit that colorblindness ignores

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<sup>3</sup> A color-blind racial ideology has been recognized as an inadequate descriptor and has been expanded to acknowledge the deficit framing language inherent in “color-blindness.” Shifting the term color-blindness to color-evasiveness confronts the ableist language that overlooks the disabled community (Annamma et al., 2017). As a racial ideology, the term color-blindness upholds ableism by equating blindness with ignorance, perpetuating the problematic tendency to position people with disabilities as a metaphor for undesirable (Annamma et al., 2017). Moreover, Annamma et al. argue that ableist language, such as color-blindness, overlooks the intersections between being socially constructed as the other and dis/abled.

that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not easily be remedied by ignoring race, nor does it eliminate the fact that racism persists; therefore, arguing that laws are neutral and opportunities are equal is a mechanism by which structural racism and inequity are reproduced (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Further, CRT scholars reject the notion that marginalized groups have made incremental gains. Often, those in society who are most satisfied with incremental gains are typically those who are least affected by oppressive conditions (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Commitments to these liberal ideas of equality fail to address deeply embedded racist policies and practices and acknowledge the means needed to subvert racism. Frequently, institutions tout that global opportunities are available for all students regardless of race or income. This tenet exposes superficial discourse in study abroad that claims global access and equality for all and unpacks the deficit-framing narratives that position minoritized students as the cause of barriers to access and opportunities rather than the inhibiting structures in place.

### Intersectional Analysis

CRT and intersectionality share a common goal of understanding and challenging social injustice by recognizing that systems of power and oppression are interlocking and affect people differently based on their social identities (Watkins Liu, 2017). Intersectionality extends the CRT framework to include the following tenets grounded in Black feminist activism and scholarship: intersecting categories, multilevel analysis, power, reflexivity, time and space, diverse knowledges, social justice, and equity (Crenshaw, 1991). In the educational landscape, adopting an intersectional approach to studying disparities entails moving beyond single-axis analyses of inequality, such as class inequality, to examine the interaction of class, race, and gender, among other structures (Crenshaw, 1991).

The CRT tradition of intersectional analysis centers the student's subject position at the intersection of various identities (Hill Collins, 1998) and how this positionality influences the phenomenon of study abroad. Studies in the CRT tradition have prioritized examining the barriers, meaning making, and identity formation (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014) processes that characterize the phenomena of study abroad (Lu et al., 2015; Wanger et al., 2012). When minoritized students enter study abroad, they do so with fluid conceptions of

their intersectional identities (Wick, 2011; Willis, 2015). Rather than taking these identities for granted or assuming that they are fixed, CRT scholarship with an intersectional lens calls for their further exploration to improve our understanding of how individual and collective experiences during study abroad may shape a student's conception of self, cultural norms, and sociopolitical phenomena. This approach allows scholars to gain a more nuanced understanding of the various and interacting structures that mediate students' educational experiences and outcomes from marginalized social identity groups.

Particular to this article, histories of exclusion of low-income, ethnoracially minoritized students from study abroad overlook the unique narratives of intersectionally oppressed individuals, thus perpetuating exclusive practices and policies in the field of international education and study abroad (Acevedo, 2022). An intersectional analysis requires contending with the fact that categories of social difference (i.e., race, class, gender, ability, nationality, age, etc.) within an unequal social system interact, thus producing new and complex forms of identity that cannot be understood in isolation from each other. This, in turn, creates distinct experiences of social space, institutions, and processes. This approach breaks with essentialism, the notion that a unitary lived experience exists for any given social group. Essentialist notions of study abroad forward portrayals of study abroad as a singular global experience without regard for social group differences or historical context.

To avoid diluting the foundational elements of intersectionality, an adherence to combining critical thinking with social and political activism is necessary, as is centering Blackness and anti-Blackness as organizing features of our societies. That is, Blackness and anti-Blackness<sup>4</sup> are essential determinants of the distribution of resources and opportunities, as well as access and exclusion from societal institutions. This commitment is intended to uncover and transform systems of power and domination. In the case of this article, I integrate CRT and intersectionality to present a critical praxis (i.e., a

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<sup>4</sup> Often rooted in histories of colonialism, slavery, and racism, Anti-Blackness refers to the attitudes, norms, institutions, and structures that prevent Black people from being recognized as fully human by excluding them from the same considerations, institutional access, and respect that are afforded to non-Black individuals (Dumas, 2016). This exclusion is often perpetuated using technologies, policies, and cultural narratives and reproduced through institutional arrangements designed to subjugate Black individuals through extraction of labor, exploitation, and racialized immigration (Bashi, 2004; Dancy et al., 2018; Wilderson, 2010).

unity of theory and practice) to challenge the existing approaches to the study and practice of study abroad. Below, I examine the market-based approach as a possible mechanism that has helped shape the exclusionary nature of study abroad. I hypothesize that study abroad is treated as a consumer good only accessible to those who can pay the price for it.

## **Participation in Study Abroad: A Market-Based Approach**

I follow Giroux's (2014) conceptualization of market values in higher education, whereby higher education is driven by a neoliberal paradigm that encourages a culture of hypercompetitiveness, self-promotion, and accumulating profits at any cost. I am also informed by Moreno (2021), who calls for critical and decolonial interventions through pedagogies that question neoliberal and neocolonial discourse in study abroad. I apply this notion of market logics in higher education to provide an understanding of the market-based approach to study abroad that treats the field as a commodity whose consumption rests on successful marketing strategies, supply and demand market dynamics, and price adjustments that meet the "consumer's" purchasing power (i.e., students). In this view, study abroad participation will increase as universities develop sufficient study abroad programming to meet increasing demands, and students, viewed as consumers, are persuaded to purchase the product (i.e., study abroad).

Viewed through the market-based lens, the low participation of minoritized students in study abroad is a function of the low profitability of this small sector of the study abroad consumer market. Given this view and the perception of minoritized students as a minute segment of the market, this sector of the student population is not seen as worthy of investments in marketing or subsidies (see for example, Doerr (2018) and Moreno's (2021) analysis of marketization of the global and rhetoric of marketing steeped in neoliberal discourse). Giroux (2014) refers to this as politics of disposability, where those marginalized by class, race, ethnicity, or immigration are viewed as unworthy of investment and have become the unmentionables of neoliberalism. The subsequent research review highlights trends in promoting study abroad, including recruitment and marketing strategies, minor-market interventions, and commoditization of study. I highlight these studies to present



a typology that can serve as a resource to the field to recognize how practices and research contribute to neoliberal discourse.

An example of the market-based approach includes scholarship that links the success of global programs to the quality of a program's marketing and recruitment strategies. A study by Lukosius and Festervand (2013) suggests that the overall cost and funding of a program represent one of the most significant factors for study abroad recruitment, followed by the factors of time and duration of the program and promotion and marketing of study abroad programs. Based on this model, they forward strategies to increase participation in study abroad. These include recommendations to start early and develop an integrated marketing communication, promote constantly and consistently, use multiple promotion methods, promote all salient aspects of study abroad, be aggressive, and sell memories. These recruitment strategies treat students as a monolithic group and neglect the implications of serving a diverse student body. Consequently, this approach fails to account for the impact of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic disparities in study abroad participation (Lörz et al., 2015; M'Balia, 2013).

By linking student intentions to study abroad and university recruitment strategies, Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay (2015) argue that various factors impact a student's decision to study abroad, including general perceptions held by students about study abroad programs and the student's level of intercultural awareness. Other direct influences likely to impact intention to participate include program duration and cost, educational policies, and student demographic characteristics (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015). While their focus on the political economy of study abroad and educational policies sheds much-needed light on the processes by which students gain entry to study abroad experiences, this framework does not contemplate other factors that drive study abroad participation and motivational trends among students, such as acts of subversion, social networks, cultural capital, heritage programming, among other factors (Lee & Green, 2016; Tsantir & Titus, 2006; Willis, 2015). Instead, this study calls for minor market interventions to ease minority financial constraints and offer lower-cost short-term programs (Bandyopadhyay & Bandyopadhyay, 2015).

Market-based approaches tend to call for minor market interventions to increase the demand for study abroad (e.g., policies to ease the cost of study

abroad), treating study abroad as a commodity while failing to account for the systemic barriers to access that low-income, ethnoracially minoritized students face. Giroux (2014) argues that poor minoritized youth, low-income White students, immigrants, and others are considered “failed consumers” and are in direct contrast to the ossified logic of the market and its principle of risk (p. 85). Accounting for the systemic barriers neglected under the market-based approach may provide further insight into low participation amongst minoritized students beyond the apparent role of this sector’s low purchasing power. The third market-based analysis I discuss in this manuscript provides recommendations of best practices for recruitment efforts for study abroad host institutions and agencies aiming to attract student participants.

Through a convergence of tourism and education literature, Shin et al., (2018) study focuses on the consumers’ (i.e., students’) decision-making regarding study abroad programs by analyzing benefits and risks. The study posits that tourism factors, such as cultural activities, tourist attraction visits, and rich experiences, significantly impacted student decision-making more than academic enrichment opportunities. The study claims that students aspiring to study abroad consider tourist attractions as the primary decision-making criterion and the level of risk associated with their decision. Further, they found that the appropriateness of housing accommodation was the second criterion in students’ decision-making process. Consequently, study abroad administrators or service agencies are recommended to emphasize tourist attractions followed by housing conditions to increase the percentage of students studying abroad (Shin et al., 2018). Commoditizing international education through market-driven efforts has led researchers within this typology to focus on the financial value rather than the quality of programming (Adkins & Messerly, 2019; Moreno, 2021; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Ramírez, 2013). Next, I examine literature reflecting universalist discourses that dominate the field of study abroad, which put forth universal benefits that extend to all students, neglecting questions of identity and inequality.

## **Benefits of Study Abroad: A Universalist Approach**

The number of scholarly articles on study abroad increased by more than 300% at the turn of the 21st century (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012). The profound growth in literature analyzing this phenomenon has led to inflated

universalist claims about the benefits of study abroad. I define universalist assumptions as the tendency within study abroad literature to tout the benefits of study abroad as extending universally across identities and subject positions<sup>5</sup> (Acevedo, 2022; Glass & Gesing, 2021). This assumption, shared by the studies reviewed in this section, leads to the portrayal of study abroad as universally beneficial and to the usage of this discourse for student recruitment without regard to the racial and ethnic disparities of study abroad participation (see Goldini, 2015; Goldstein, S.B., 2022; and Roy et al., 2019 for scholars who call on greater attention to individual differences in shaping study abroad outcomes).

This growing body of work identifies several benefits of study abroad, including improved college graduation rates, increased self-efficacy, and employment and labor market-related benefits. Xu et al. (2013) found that semester-long study abroad had a positive effect on the degree attainment of undergraduates and argued that encouraging more students to participate in semester-long study abroad programs might improve graduation rates. Given that 70% of students in their sample were White and only one student was Black, the underrepresentation of minoritized students introduced bias in their study, limiting the study's generalizability and its claims about the impact of study abroad on graduation rates across different social groups. While studying abroad was a significant predictor for five and six-year graduation rates, the study's conclusions stem from an empirical examination of a largely homogenous, predominantly White population.

The phenomenon of forwarding claims about the effect of study abroad generally without specific examination of its impact on ethnoracially minoritized groups persists in more recent literature (see for example, Bhatt et al. 2022). Under-sampling ethnoracially minoritized students limits a study's ability to forward generalizable claims about the benefits of studying abroad. Increasingly, studies focus on the specific benefits that minoritized students experience from studying abroad (see, for example, Acevedo, 2022 and Bell et al., 2021). This emerging body of research contributes to efforts to identify the similarities and differences in study abroad outcomes across social groups and challenge the tendency to assume that the experiences of the populations that dominate study abroad participation mirror those of minoritized groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Subject positions are vantage points that shape how we understand social reality, how we act in it and how we might influence it (Hall, 1997; Törrönen, 2001).

In examining the impact of study abroad on self-efficacy beliefs and perceptions among foreign language learners, Cubillos and Ilvento (2012) find that participants in short-term programs experienced significant self-efficacy gains despite the brevity of their program. The findings, however, may hold little promise for understanding the effect of study abroad on self-efficacy across students of various identities, given that 82% of their sample consisted of female participants, and they failed to report on the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic breakdown of their sample. Neglecting the nuances of identity differences in the process of developing self-efficacy perpetuates the notion that the identity category of students exists as a unitary identity that lacks internal social group heterogeneity<sup>6</sup>. In their view, various mediating factors and circumstances contribute to students' perceived self-efficacy, specifically in their beliefs, goals, and expectations of themselves as learners. Despite increasing evidence that different socio-demographic groups experience social structures in different ways (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Buchanan & Selmon, 2018; Young, 1990), this universalist approach fails to consider whether the impact of social group identities on self-efficacy is contingent upon race or other mediating demographic factors.

Study abroad can provide meaningful and long-lasting outcomes, such as helping individuals to become more adaptive and resilient to manage upcoming expected or unexpected career-related tasks and challenges (Jon et al., 2018). These authors argue that study abroad participation leads participants to develop a better understanding of themselves, allowing them to choose work environments more closely aligned with their interests and that they believed were a better fit. As with most studies that highlight the benefits of study abroad, most of these authors' study participants were White and female. It remains unclear, however, whether the labor market benefits of study abroad extend to minoritized students, given that Black college graduates of all ages and gender consistently have higher underemployment rates and lower wages than their White counterparts, even when Black students complete STEM majors (American Association of University Women, 2019; Jones & Schmitt, 2014; Porter et al., 2022). These disparities reinforce concerns that systemic racial and ethnic disadvantages remain a significant predictor of financial and professional

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<sup>6</sup> Homogenous and unitary treatments of identities fail to recognize the internal differences that abound among people who identify with a particular social group (e.g., Black race). In contrast, applying an intersectional lens to understand identity accounts for the multidimensionality of a social group (such as race and gender) (Acevedo, 2021).

success in contemporary labor markets. The unchallenged assumption that students experience study abroad in undifferentiated ways leads studies within the universalist approach to make categorical claims about the labor and employment-related benefits of study abroad.

Minoritized students travel a different path than their White counterparts; they expend energies (i.e., stress and anxiety related to racism, discrimination, and or microaggressions) that their peers may not experience while overcoming macro/micro-level challenges along that road. Without careful examination of the experience of minoritized students and the disruption of discourses that portray students as a homogenous population, racial stereotypes and microaggressions abroad can be ignored or downplayed, leading to distressing consequences that can potentially impact their intercultural development. Given that there are representative sampling issues in existing literature on study abroad, more research is needed to examine whether the benefits of study abroad extend to non-White minoritized students (see, for example, Bhatt et al.'s 2022 recognition of this sampling issue). If these universalist discourses continue to dominate the field of study abroad, a prevailing message may persist: Non-White minoritized students do not exist as study abroad beneficiaries.

## **Barriers in Study Abroad: A Critical Approach**

By disturbing the comfortable notions of a glorified study abroad experience and calling attention to the existing inequality within study abroad, this section explores the approach that critically frames many of the barriers persistent in study abroad. Discussions of beneficial outcomes fail to challenge uneven access to study abroad. This section employs the critical approach to study abroad to examine how existing literature has drawn on CRT and intersectionality to problematize dominant approaches in study abroad. This typology explicitly addresses the experiences that minoritized students face, calling for greater recognition of the unequal distribution of access, experiences, and benefits in study abroad.

Studies within a critical approach have used ethnographic methods to examine the in-country experiences of intersectionally marginalized study abroad participants and their motivations for participating in study abroad (Chang, 2017; Clay, 2022; M'Balía, 2013; Wick et al., 2019). For instance, M'Balía (2013) challenges how race and ethnicity are problematized in study abroad

literature. Categorizing bodies that do and do not participate in study abroad has been a longstanding tradition in study abroad research and evokes colonized ways of representing data, thus highlighting the hierarchical relationship between White participants and ethnoracially minoritized students. This practice of drawing attention to low levels of study abroad participation of ethnoracially minoritized students who study abroad fails to contextualize the share of students who study abroad (IIE (2022) estimates that only 2.7% of all U.S. American students who attend a four-year institution study abroad). This has the effect of normalizing the participation of White students, establishing low participation as problematic for ethnoracially minoritized students, and positioning failure to participate in study abroad as uniquely and specifically a phenomenon for them.

Studies have described study abroad participation barriers for marginalized students through deficit-oriented language, such as financial “constraints” (Association of International Educators, 2003; Doerr, 2018; Salisbury et al., 2011), a “lack” of interest, awareness, academic ability, structural support, or financial ability (Brux & Fry, 2010; Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004). These barriers are posed as unique circumstances for minoritized students but are in no way limited to this student group. The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reports that 81% of full-time undergraduates receive financial aid regardless of race. Moreover, ethnoracially minoritized students are just as likely as White students to know about and use available financial aid and scholarship monies to pursue study abroad (Acevedo, 2021; Clay, 2022).

In a study that critiques deficit-oriented scholarship that frames study abroad as the only way for marginalized students to develop global competence, Doerr (2018) finds that ethnoracially minoritized immigrants already have global competence when studying abroad, and they utilize it to enrich their experiences. Similarly, Wick et al. (2019) counter deficit narratives about marginalized students studying abroad by amplifying the pre-existing strengths related to family and language that further deepen the study abroad experiences of first-generation Latinx students. Challenging presumptions about Black student’s “lack” of interest or finances to study abroad, Clay (2022) surveyed Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and found that students did not present finances as a barrier, and they

overwhelmingly desired to explore their African heritage and enhance their studies through study abroad.

Operating from deficit-oriented discourse strips ethnoracially minoritized students of their intersecting identities, beliefs, worldviews, and ways of knowing. Furthermore, minoritized students “do not operate from the point of lack, constraint, or even external barriers, but from social, historical and cultural contexts that differently shapes their relationship to and engagement” (M’Balía, 2013, p. 379) with mobility and study abroad. Treating the categories of minoritized students en masse obscures differences. It disempowers individuals, while ethnoracial group experiences are only meaningful inasmuch as they deviate from the unmarked norm of a White, middle-class, cisgender, non-disabled, heterosexual college student.

Furthering work underpinned by critical analysis, Chang (2017) analyzes the experience of four Latina students abroad in Guatemala amongst a group of predominantly White women. The study identifies a series of dynamics of their experiences, including cultural dissonance among Latinas, the disconnection of White students’ behavior relative to Latinas/os, a reflection of past, present, and privilege compared to Guatemalan citizens, and critical consumption of knowledge. By recentering the voice of Latina women, and minoritized women more generally, Chang (2017) departed from the market-based and universalist approaches to research on study abroad.

### An Intersectional Approach to Study Abroad

An intersectional analysis offers descriptive and explanatory power, particularly for understanding the complexities of experiences at the nexus of multiple dimensions of oppression and privilege (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). A focus on intersectional identities is not a question of adding one oppression to the next as distinct social hierarchies but rather an examination of how gender, race, class, and origin mutually construct each other (Collins, 1998). Such an emphasis on multiple junctures for intersectional identities suggests that issues of power and agency may be revealed through the performative nature<sup>7</sup> of the identity development experience (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). This approach offers a unique lens through which to learn about the influence of study abroad

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<sup>7</sup> Malcolm and Mendoza (2014) apply Butler’s (1990) performativity framework to underscore that identities are not passively received but are actively constructed and performed based on our unique combination of intersecting identities and the societal contexts that we navigate.

on the identity development of minoritized students, which is most often analyzed in a White normative and oppressive institutional context that fails to appreciate their heterogeneity.

Highlighting the salience of an intersectional approach to understanding possible experiences of Black women abroad through their collective counter-narrative, Willis (2015) employed a lens that argues that sexism, racism, and classism are inextricably linked. Therefore, their intersection must be considered for a more meaningful and accurate analysis of oppression (hooks, 1994). In her study, Willis (2015) examines the factors that influence how minoritized students experience their time abroad, particularly participants from community colleges. In focusing her research on community college students, Willis (2015) contributes by filling a gap in the literature that is even larger than that of research on minoritized students. In her qualitative study, Willis (2015) interviewed 19 women who were alumni from programs that studied in the regions of the British Isles, the Mediterranean, and West Africa. Exploring race and gender, Willis (2015) acknowledges that a fully intersectional gaze beyond these two dimensions was outside the scope of her research. Complexities in adopting intersectionality as a lens include challenging researchers to acknowledge what is brought into view and what is eclipsed (Dhamoon, 2011). While a particular focus in any given study can be appropriate, a pattern of limited attention across research studies can create implicit prototypes of intersectionality (e.g., race and gender) and render invisible some dimensions of people's experiences (e.g., class and sexual orientation) (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Accordingly, one way to challenge these implicit prototypes is to identify and redress the narrow focus on some axes of power, as demonstrated by Willis's acknowledgment of a limited intersectional gaze.

Findings point to emancipatory experiences that raised students' consciousness of themselves as potent agents in the world despite instances of microaggressions and feelings of racial isolation experienced by participants from their White peers (Willis, 2015). Other findings included everyday occurrences of sexual harassment or assault in the host country. Through intersectional analysis, her study revealed experiences that move beyond conversations of access to study abroad toward a discussion on the quality of the experiences of minoritized students while abroad. This leads her to make recommendations that consider structural implications of campus climate, staff preparedness, and diversity of peers in travel groups to meet diverse student



needs. Adopting an intersectional lens can help garner insight into aspects of participants' social diversity and how it shapes students' experiences with peers and others abroad. For instance, David Wick's 2011 study adopts both a CRT and an intersectional lens to amplify the narratives of minoritized students abroad.

In addition to the CRT and intersectional framework, Wick also applied Yossos' (2005) community cultural wealth, Bhabhas' construct of Third Space (2004), and Delgado Bernal's (2002) multidimensional identity. These theories complement the theoretical interventions of CRT and the intersectional approach and propose a fundamental reexamination of the purpose and practice of study abroad (Wick, 2011). Recognizing the underrepresentation of ethn racially minoritized students in study abroad as a symptom of systemic inequity, Wick gained their perspective e by examining the process of negotiating the intersections of race, ethnicity, and other social locations through study abroad. Findings suggest that study abroad is a transformative process that begins when students believe it is possible and take steps to apply. In addition, Wick argues that time abroad creates a Third Space in which ethn racially minoritized students can leverage their community cultural wealth to negotiate a global identity and develop agency for global citizenship. Further, Wick posits that ethn racially minoritized student narratives in this study lend support to arguments that study abroad can promote citizenship, democratization, and humanization for participants and their host communities. In this way, I argue, the CRT and intersectional typology are suited to recognize, emphasize, and celebrate situated knowledge and multidimensional perspectives of those traditionally silenced in study abroad literature. As such, this is the approach that holds the most promise and relevance for future investigations of study abroad participation.

## Conclusion

I argue that international education scholars and practitioners can find direction in critical approaches if study abroad programs are to be organized and promoted with the goals of engendering critical thought and reducing disparities in higher education. Analyses that center race amplify traditionally silenced voices and challenge dominant discourses. These analyses provide a needed corrective to the uninterrupted history of exclusion of low-income, racially minoritized groups in study abroad. These analyses will inform and help advance practices and policies that make space for excluded groups in

study abroad and, thereby, contribute to addressing existing educational disparities.

Examining several examples of racist acts, practices, and rhetoric embedded in study abroad experiences, Baker and Talbot (2016) discuss potential strategies for subverting racism in study abroad programs. These include: meeting local needs via mechanisms the community identifies versus imparting colonialist power; addressing the intersections of race with other identities abroad so students can create a counter-narrative to the otherwise singular representation of the local community seen in advertisements, building on principles of inclusiveness for underrepresented domestic students, and critically examining the experiences of U.S. American involvement abroad with introspection on one's privilege. These subversive strategies suggest to scholars and practitioners the importance of intentionally engaging with race, structural racism, colonialism, and a more nuanced understanding of identity.

The field of international education should move away from seeing study abroad as a commodity and students as their consumers. The market-based approach tends to neglect social identity group relations, given that, in this view, students are seen as consumers, and their fit for study abroad is determined on the basis of their purchasing power. Accordingly, economic circumstances, cost-benefit analyses, and marketing strategies shape the composition of study abroad participation. To be clear, this article does not advocate for more inclusive marketing strategies as a solution to the root causes of the exclusionary nature of study abroad programs. Rather, this article calls for greater attention to the structural factors that shape inequalities in study abroad participation. Conversely, approaches that view study abroad participation as a multidimensional issue and are attuned to the diversity of perceptions and circumstances that shape study abroad participation will yield an increased understanding of the relationship between the barriers to participation and justifications for not participating (Nguyen-Voges, 2015). These understandings hold promise for informing the creation of policies and the targeted allocation of resources that reduce educational disparities in the field of international education.

The practice and scholarly field of study abroad should also resist universalist portrayals of study abroad as a unitary experience. A universalist approach shares the problematic assumption that there is a universal and

unitary “student” identity that informs how students experience and make meaning of study abroad. This assumption is too often unquestioned in dominant study abroad research. The prevalence of the notion of study abroad as a good with universally distributed benefits is a consequence of dominant ideological and discursive practices that permeate the production of knowledge and inequitable power relations in higher education. Using universalist notions of study abroad, the field of international education forwards an image of the ideal and exclusive beneficiary of study abroad as White, middle-to-upper class, traditional-aged female. The portrayal of study abroad as a producer of universally attained goods erases the experience of students from non-dominant groups and contributes to their exclusion. The universalist approach may result from a troubling tendency in study abroad research: the sampling bias of researchers who fail to draw a diverse enough sample that would allow them to explore the role of subaltern identities on a student’s experience and identity formation during study abroad.

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