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# Multiple Lenses on DEI: An Education Abroad Case Study Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines an education abroad case study in Spain that lies at the intersection of intercultural competence and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). It examines the real challenge on-site professionals face when U.S. students use their American lens as the sole perspective for interpretation of possible discriminatory incidents abroad. In some of these cases, students committed to social justice at home and attuned to power dynamics in the United States inadvertently repeat the colonial attitudes they mean to challenge and bring with them what could be called “social justice imperialism.” Previously, this topic has been discussed in informal settings, such as conferences and social media; however, it is something on-site faculty and staff increasingly grapple with as they seek to be bridge builders that support students with empathy but foster intercultural growth and perspective shifting as well.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past several decades, the field of education abroad has been discussing the topic of diversity, starting with the notion of how we recruit and encourage underrepresented students to go abroad. In the fall of 2003, when Brian Whalen, long-time president of the Forum on Education Abroad (2006-2018), relaunched the journal dedicated to study abroad (*Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*), featured in the renewed publication was Van der Meid’s study on Asian Americans studying abroad with suggestions on how to increase their participation. A review of Van der Meid’s reference list points back to as early as 1991, when scholars and international education organizations were discussing increasing “minority” participation and access (Carter, 1991; CIEE, 1991; Gantz, 1993). As the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has developed in higher education, so has DEI within the context of study abroad. There is even a professional organization dedicated to the intersection of DEI and education abroad: diversity abroad. A quick review of the major international education professional conferences, whether sponsored by NAFSA, the Forum on Education Abroad, or AIEA shows equity, inclusion, or, most recently, justice or belonging, among the themes (Sandiford & DeGuzman, 2023).



It is not surprising that the field has made conversations around DEI a central theme as the number of students who could be considered underrepresented in study abroad continues to trend upward (Spanish Studies Abroad, 2023) along with the diversifying demographics of U.S. college students (Seltzer, n.d.). The traditionally “represented” population for study abroad is considered to be White, heterosexual, cis-gendered women of at least a middle-class background (TOCA, n.d.). At the same time, national conversations around anti-racism and justice have grown more mainstream since the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020 and the responsive worldwide protests in June of 2020 (Nieto, 2021). In higher education circles, the work of Ibram X. Kendi and his book, *How to Be an Antiracist* (2020), along with Robin DiAngelo and her work, *White Fragility* (2018), have been pivotal in campus conversations and training for students, faculty, and staff. Many higher education institutions in the United States, such as Dickinson College, a private liberal arts college in central Pennsylvania, have used Kendi’s antiracism framework to guide the mission of their centers for race and ethnicity (or equivalent).

Several years ago, the Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the University of Vermont, Amer Ahmed, began presenting Kathryn Sorrells’ Intercultural Praxis Model (2022), which advances a non-linear approach to communication across cultures, challenging us to contextualize our identities and those of others within historic systems of inequality that have shaped our positioning in the world today. Intercultural praxis is made up of six dimensions: inquiry, framing, positioning, dialogue, reflection, and action (Sorrells, 2022). In promoting this model, Ahmed had a central thesis that he shared based on his background as a DEI educator and an interculturalist: many DEI practitioners and scholars were lacking in knowledge and understanding around intercultural competence and international comparative study and, conversely, many interculturalists and international educators were viewing intercultural interactions as neutral – without accounting for power, privilege, and positionality when preparing sojourners to go abroad or dissecting intercultural critical incidents (Ahmed, 2019).

Drawing on inspiration from the Intercultural Praxis Model, I, as an educator and practitioner in education abroad, have sought to take the framework provided by Sorrells and Ahmed to focus on the role of



faculty and staff members who work with U.S.-based college students in the host country abroad, specifically as bridge builders and intercultural educators involving what could be termed “DEI incidents abroad.” I acknowledge that “DEI incidents abroad” is not a perfect phrase to capture something so complex, but it is an easily understandable term. Given my research and practical interest in this area of international education, my chosen case study, therefore, offers an example of a DEI incident abroad. This case study took place in the summer of 2021 on a four-week Dickinson program in Málaga, Spain. This is a short-term language immersion program with homestays that the Dickinson in Spain (semester and year program) faculty director led in 2021 .

## CASE STUDY NARRATIVE

The faculty director for Dickinson in Spain hired a professional tour guide, a male who presented as White and was a native of Spain, to conduct a visit to a cathedral in Southern Spain during a summer program excursion. During a discussion around how the cathedral was built, a student in the group asked if it was built by slave labor, to which the tour guide responded that there was no history of slavery in Spain. The students, who had previously learned about slavery in Spain, were consequently angry at the tour guide’s lack of knowledge. Additionally, the faculty member took the only Black student in the group aside after the tour guide’s statement and whispered, “we can discuss this later,” which another student overheard. Unbeknownst to the students, the Black student had recently written about slavery in Spain in a journal assignment and so the director knew she had specific knowledge and interest in this topic. The students concluded that the tour guide was racist and expressed outrage that the faculty leader would hire someone “like that” as well as tokenize or single out the one Black student in the group. It is worth noting that the most vocal student in this incident identified as American, Latinx, and female.

In response to the incensed students, the faculty director made time to call the students together to discuss the issue as well as bring in a speaker who could address both the history of slavery in Spain and spearhead a conversation as to why the tour guide would be ignorant to this aspect of his country’s history. Her goal was to illuminate the historical context at play and share how national conversations around



race in Spain differed from those within the U.S. Despite her best efforts to engage the students in an in-depth conversation around these topics, students were unreceptive to the conversation and remained angry with the director over the incident. The one Black student, who was a woman in her 40s originally from a country in sub-Saharan Africa with a graduate education and auditing the class for professional development, was not part of the student group that was angry over the incident and was open to engaging in discussion regarding the larger context.

## RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

While there is not a database to keep track of DEI incidents in education abroad, anecdotally, it can be said that these types of incidents are fairly common during the course of a study abroad program. Over the course of an eighteen-year career in the field, I have attended dozens of sessions and workshops, or even presented them myself, where stories have been shared that centered around a perceived bias, microaggression, prejudicial language, or any other matter of DEI incident in the education abroad context. Additionally, websites for organizations such as Diversity Abroad, The Institute for Study Abroad (IFSA), Spanish Studies Abroad, and countless others share student narratives, blogs, and videos highlighting students' firsthand experiences in navigating their identity(ies) in their host countries and challenges they have faced. Diversity Abroad's website has as its "mission is to create equitable access to the benefits of global education by empowering educators, engaging stakeholders, and connecting diverse students to resources and opportunity." It has been asserted by Engstrom and Tinto (2008) that "access without support is not opportunity" (p. 46), which attests to the importance of the plethora of resources, workshops, trainings, articles, and research that has gone into supporting students of marginalized and underrepresented identities in the study abroad experience.

Within the field, the focus has historically been on the preparation of underrepresented students for the abroad experience through pre-departure orientation and connection to resources as well as on supportive advising and inclusive handbooks, program structures, and procedures. The other focus has been on U.S.-based faculty facilitation of short-term programs, relying heavily on intercultural paradigms or



pedagogical approaches to building an inclusive short-term academic program and course. Within the literature, little attention has been paid to the role of the onsite faculty and staff, and it is only in recent years that U.S.-focused DEI-related professional development has been offered for those working with U.S. students in the host country, with IFSA, University of Minnesota, DIS, and Dickinson College being notable examples. For the first time in the fall of 2023, the European Association of Study Abroad (EUASA) partnered with the Forum on Education Abroad to offer a joint European Institute, where an extensive portion of the content was focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, with Dickinson College faculty directors from Germany and France spearheading the conversations.

This case study is ideal because it showcases the essential role that on-site faculty and staff must play in being the bridge for students who are navigating a DEI incident abroad. It is in the abroad context where students are faced with unexpected challenges to their perceptions and previous experiences that will leave them uncomfortable and searching for ways to make sense of it. It also highlights that even when students attend pre-departure sessions focused on identity, cultural perceptions, power, and privilege (which Dickinson students do), they may still choose to double down on the lens and experiences they bring with them. It is the role of those on site to have the skill, knowledge, and capacity to assist in turning what could be solely remembered as a negative experience into a learning opportunity and chance for growth and self-actualization.

The location of Spain for this case study is important because for academic year 2018-19, Spain was number three in popularity for U.S. study abroad students, with the top 6 countries all representing Western Europe (Spanish Studies Abroad, 2023). By virtue of the numbers, most DEI incidents will, therefore, happen when students are studying abroad in Western Europe. Spain offers a complex setting as one of the great colonizers of the world where race, color, and language intersect with the marginalized identities of students from a Latinx/Hispanic background. An excellent example of this complexity can be seen in a National Public Radio (NPR), a U.S. non-profit media organization, article that we use at Dickinson College in student pre-departure orientations, entitled *Why Labeling Antonio Banderas A 'Person of Color' Triggers Such a Backlash*. In the 2020 article, Benavides discusses the problematic characterization of Banderas as an





Oscar nominee of color because he often plays Latinx characters, when in reality he is a White native of Spain. Although Spain colonized Latin America, he is seen as appropriating the “clout” of a marginalized demographic. On the flip side, White natives of Spain are offended that Banderas is called a *persona de color*, which, in the Spanish context, could mean a Black person.

Finally, the case study offers a bit of a flip on typical DEI abroad case studies, where students are directly impacted by a microaggression or a bias incident perpetrated by a member of the host community, a staff or faculty member, or a fellow participant, that then must be analyzed and interpreted. In this situation, students are offended by a lack of knowledge of the tour guide’s own country’s history and extrapolate that ignorance as racism, thereby placing their own U.S. perceptions on their expectation of how all people no matter the cultural context or history should think, act, and feel. The irony is that these students have perpetuated the same actions they would repudiate in those of majority backgrounds upon minoritized persons back in the United States or in a country in the Global South.

## THEORETICAL LENS

There are several theoretical lenses that may be appropriate in which to analyze this case study, but the most appropriate would be postcolonial theory. I draw inspiration from a recent comment by a White, female education abroad faculty colleague from Germany, a country that was a colonial empire in the 19th and 20th centuries. According to International Monetary Fund data, Germany is the fourth richest country in the world (Rodriguez, 2023). While discussing the “U.S. perception” and emphasis on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in study abroad coming from U.S. students and U.S. institutions, she communicated that the approach and various discussions in the field had felt both colonial and imperialistic towards those onsite in Europe. It is worth noting that there is no one, unified U.S. perception of DEI. Instead, it may be thought of as a reflection of the general framework and language used in mainstream U.S. higher education circles, including in U.S.-based international education professional organizations and campus DEI offices. Some of the U.S. DEI cultural norms have been influenced by Kendi’s and DiAngelo’s work referenced at the beginning of this paper. In conversations with other



colleagues based in Europe, as well as in many other countries around the globe, it has become apparent that my German colleague is not the only one who thinks that Americans within the study abroad context (students, faculty, staff, as well as provider organizations) impose a hegemonic discourse on what DEI means with the expectation that those in the host location do the majority of the learning and adapting.

Elena Corbett, a long-time international educator and Director of Education Abroad at Amideast since 2017, has been a vocal critic of a colonial mindset in U.S.-based study abroad and an advocate for onsite faculty and staff. In February of 2023, she made an argument regarding asymmetrical colonial structures within U.S. study abroad that extracted uncompensated labor from overseas partners when a short-term program did not run. In an October 8, 2023 LinkedIn post, Corbett wrote, “Just like that, the US international education community went immediately silent on decolonization.” She has called on the field, particularly those based in the U.S., to stand behind our espoused social justice values and to extend those values to better understand and support those doing the integral work at our host sites abroad in their own local communities.

Professionals such as Corbett and others representing programs based in the Global South share stories of “social justice imperialism” that are reminiscent of the case study in Spain. Another example of this comes from a colleague who works for a program in a sub-Saharan African country and is a native of that country. He shared his experience of a particularly difficult semester that was characterized by students coming with a singular U.S. DEI lens. One anecdote is of three U.S. students having to go to the doctor for medical treatment at the same time. Two identified as White (woman and man) and one as a Black woman. When the local doctor examined the Black student, he was able to quickly diagnose her condition and give her medication for the ailment. The medical cases for the two White students were less easy for the doctor to diagnose, and the students needed additional testing before the doctor could determine an appropriate course of treatment. The Black student found out that the two White students received additional testing. Shortly after the medical diagnoses, the parents of the Black student called the program director and accused him of being racist as their student did not get the same number of visits and the same amount of medical support as the two White students.





This was part of a pattern of accusations towards the staff member of racism or bias every time the student did not like something he did or a decision he made. Eventually other students joined in, both students of color and White students (acting as allies to their friends), questioning the highly experienced staff member's education and credentials to be working there and viewing all of his actions through the lens of discrimination. The students proceeded to complain to their parents, their home study abroad offices, and their home faculty. This left the long-time professional bewildered and wondering how he as a Black man from an African country ended up both as a racist in the eyes of the American students and as someone whose own expertise was constantly under attack as a local person. Once again, students used their own singular U.S. perspective on social justice to make sense of incidents and behaviors without taking into consideration history and context. They were also unable to grapple with how their own identities as Americans fit into global North-South power dynamics. In other words, this story could be seen as furthering the case of a colonial student mindset in tension with student beliefs that what they were doing was advocating against hegemony and discriminatory actions.

While it may be unique to analyze the Spain case study through a postcolonial lens when breaking down an incident between two wealthy countries and historic colonial powers, the United States and Spain, it still is the most appropriate fit. Postcolonialism emerged and was consolidated around the work of Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri C. Spivak (Bhambra, 2014). Bhambra writes in his work *Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues*:

Postcolonial scholarship has been integral to the exercise of opening out and questioning the implied assumptions of the dominant discourses by way of which we attempt to make sense of the worlds we inhabit. It has further provided the basis from which to reclaim, as Spivak argues, 'a series of regulative political concepts, the supposedly authoritative narrative of whose production was written elsewhere. (2014, p. 117)

In the context of this case study, it can be argued that the Dickinson students are using the dominant discourse of a U.S.-based DEI framework to assume that the tour guide must be labeled a racist if he



did not know about the history of slavery in Spain. Despite the faculty director's attempt to explore those assumptions, many of the students insisted on the authority of their U.S. context narrative, where a lack of awareness around slavery could reasonably be argued was ignorance born out of racial hatred. This in no way suggests that racism does not exist in Spain; it does. What students were missing is that Spain does not have the same history of slavery as the United States nor the same national conversations around slavery and racism that have taken place within the U.S. context. Students are seeking a simplistic U.S.-centric explanation for a complex incident, rooted in their now Spanish context, which they do not realize they do not fully understand.

An argument for using postcolonialism to examine this case study can also be made from a 2009 international workshop on intercultural collaboration, hosted by the Association for Computing Machinery. While focusing on intercultural collaboration among professionals that was increasing with globalization, Irani and Dourish posited as follows:

Postcolonial Studies may offer richer frameworks for analysis than taxonomic models of culture such as Hofstede's dimensions of difference. A postcolonial perspective sees culture as dynamic and always changing, stressing the importance of colonial histories, uneven economic relations, and local knowledge systems in framing, and designing information technologies. (2009, abstract)

This statement that advocates the use of postcolonialism proceeds and supports the work of Sorrells and Ahmed and recognizes that intercultural differences cannot be understood as wholly neutral interactions, as in Hofstede's dimensions, but instead must take into account power differentials (historic and economic) and local knowledge. Related to this case study, one can argue that the U.S. became the greater imperial power compared to Spain post World War II, and from that power came the dominance of the U.S. study abroad industry. The U.S. is the richest country in the world, with Spain being number fifteen (World Bank) and study abroad students form an important part of the tourism economy that Spain is dependent upon (Lopez, 2023). Additionally, the students in the case study context disregard the local knowledge system and rely on their U.S.-based perception and knowledge to interpret the tour guide's statement. They refuse to explore with the faculty director the possibility that within the



Spanish education system or national consciousness it may not be common knowledge that there were slaves in Spain and then look for explanations of why that might be the case. The question unfolds: Why do some students lose their ability to be curious and open to other interpretations of an incident when they see it as a question of social justice first and foremost?

Within the literature specifically related to international education, a final supporting argument for a postcolonial theoretical lens in examining this case study can be in Major and Santoro's work (2016), where they advocate for viewing an international teaching practicum and the associated partnerships through a postcolonial context. They state, "[w]e use a postcolonial stance to problematise the relationship between the teacher education institution, its students and staff, and host institutions and teachers, and to investigate the complexity and contradictions in these relationships" (p. 461). Their findings also assert that an unintended consequence of study abroad can be the tendency to be unaware of one's own form of imperialism that one is bringing to the experience. What the case study highlights is the need to look at the relationship and indeed investigate the complexity between the Dickinson students and the onsite faculty director, along with host community members, like the tour guide, in a way that interrogates assumptions and acknowledges varying definitions of DEI and imperialistic tendencies.

## DISCUSSION

The narrative of this case study illuminates the idea that even when U.S. study abroad students have the intention of advocating for equity and calling out discrimination and bias, if they rely only on their U.S. perceptions and experiences to interpret incidents, they may be perpetuating colonial patterns. This can be the case regardless of whether they come from a marginalized background or not, as it is possible for people to hold both target and agent identities at the same time (Hammer, et. al., 2016). Being an American studying abroad in most cases is associated with an agent identity. At least from my experience in the field and from being an avid reader of the literature, this concept has not yet been coined, so I have found a helpful shorthand for the phenomena, which I call "social justice imperialism."



This uses the definition for social justice proposed by social work scholar Brittanie Atteberry Ash in her dissertation:

Social justice means people from all identity groups have the same rights, opportunities, access to resources, and benefits. It acknowledges that historical inequalities exist and must be addressed and remedied through specific measures including advocacy to confront discrimination, oppression, and institutional inequalities, with a recognition that this process should be participatory, collaborative, inclusive of difference, and affirming of personal agency. (GSSW, 2020)

The word *imperialism* is defined by Merriam-Webster as “the extension or imposition of power, authority, or influence” (n.d.). This term captures the irony of this case study, the experience of the African education abroad professional, and a host of other anecdotes and narratives that have made their way into the discourse of the study abroad field, where students are confronting discrimination, oppression, and inequality as is encouraged on college campuses around the U.S. However, in doing so in a host country context, they are using their U.S. perspective and U.S. experiences to interpret events and often may not even realize that their interpretations are built upon their own cultural lens and identity within a U.S. context. This by no means negates the fact that students can be discriminated against or face microaggressions when studying abroad. There is bias, marginalization, and discrimination in every society, but it will not always look the same as it does in the U.S. The goal for international educators should be to help students understand their own identity and perceptions and how those intersect with the history and cultural context of the host country when interpreting a DEI incident.

This goal circles back to the crucial role of the on-site faculty and staff members that host U.S. study abroad students. While students can participate in comprehensive pre-departure workshops that encourage them to focus on their identity as well as the context of their upcoming host country, from years of experience, I would assert that they cannot fully understand those concepts until they are on site. It is, therefore, incumbent on the education abroad professional, faculty, or staff to be prepared to be the cultural bridge builder with a toolbox that includes empathy for the student and an understanding of the U.S. context, knowledge of local context around diversity, equity, and inclusion, an understanding of their own power and positionality, and the facilitation skills, to dig into the complex historical and cultural context necessary



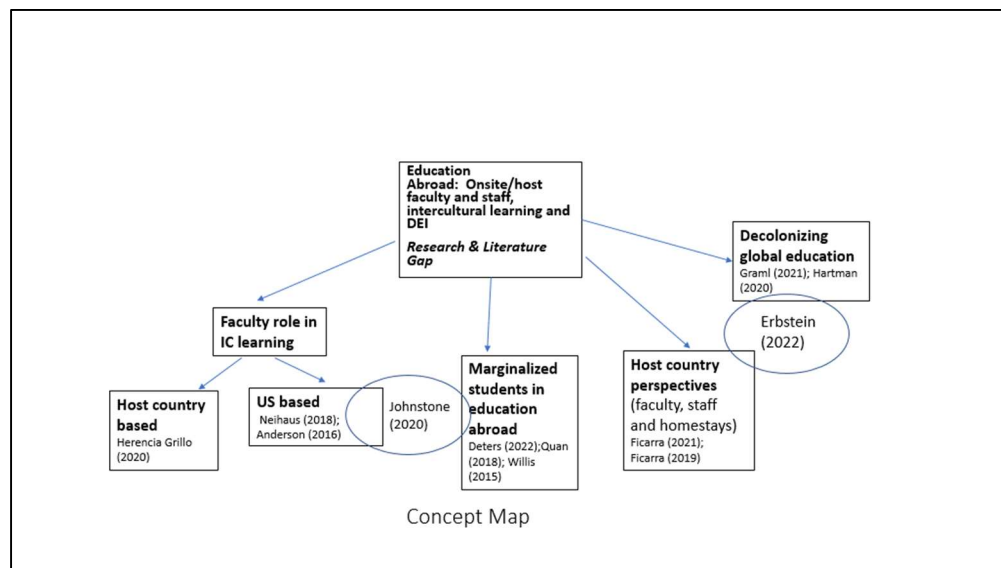
to help interpret a DEI incident abroad. It is also imperative that the staff and faculty have built-up trust with the students, especially those who have faced a lifetime of discrimination, by demonstrating the knowledge and willingness to talk about such topics as marginalization within the host country, difficult histories, advocacy work by local minoritized populations, and their own privileges. This trust is the foundation that will open a dialogue with students to imagine alternative explanations to incidents they are experiencing as opposed to immediately feeling gaslit, as might be an appropriate reaction in the U.S.

In this case study, the faculty director possessed many of these desirable abilities and characteristics to be an effective bridge builder. As an American academic, she was well aware of the U.S. DEI context prevalent on college campuses and understood the reasoning behind the student reactions. Having spent a number of years in Spain, she also had an intimate knowledge of the local context and complex history. From observation, she was a skilled facilitator and respected professor and, undoubtedly, would have done a good job in utilizing a local expert in her quest to have a productive conversation with students about the history of slavery in Spain and the possible explanations for the tour guide's ignorance. One theory as to what could have been missing was the time and opportunity to build trust as this was only a four-week program. Additionally, despite the pre-departure workshop and resources we give faculty, and their own expertise when thinking about equity in their teaching and scholarship, I do not know if there was a demonstration or previous conversation with the students regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Spanish context. Even if there had been, there is also the realization that a student may not be ready or willing in that moment to give up the certainty of their previous knowledge and experience in order to explore other lenses, acknowledge their own possible hegemonic perceptions, and seek growth while sitting with the discomfort and ambiguity of the incident.

## RELEVANT LITERATURE

In reviewing this case study, I found it helpful to incorporate a literature review I wrote in March 2023 for a doctoral class focused on the intersection of diversity, equity and inclusion, intercultural competence or related concepts, and on-site study abroad faculty and

staff (DeGuzman, 2023). In my search for relevant literature, I found a tremendous research gap in that I could not find literature that focused on this specific area of interest. To confirm my results, I consulted with Dr. Nancy O’Brien of the UIUC library to relaunch the search and again we found adjacent topics, but nothing in the exact area of interest. For further confirmation in identifying the missing area of research and literature, I consulted with Dr. Martha Johnson, the recent co-author of a book chapter entitled *Training “American” Identity: Engaging On-Site Staff in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Work*. This piece of practitioner literature that was published in January 2023 is a narrative case study about the University of Minnesota’s Learning Abroad Center and the workshops they have done with on-site staff. It seems to be the only published work around my topic of interest. Dr. Johnson (personal communication, Feb. 22, 2023) confirmed the lack of scholarly articles or books directly on the afore-mentioned topic by relating the extensive literature search she did for her publication and inability to find direct references. It is necessary then to look at research that has been conducted on adjacent themes, which, in the previous review, yielded the following: marginalized students in education abroad, the faculty role in intercultural learning, host country perspectives, and decolonizing global education. This concept map provides a helpful illustration of these themes (DeGuzman, 2023).



Literature on marginalized students in study abroad is fairly prevalent, especially in publications such as *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* published by the Forum on Education





Abroad. Most relevant for this case study is the work of Quan (2018) and Deters, et al. (2022), who bring forth the idea that some marginalized students will make meaning of perceived bias incidents abroad by relying on their past experiences in the United States. A key quote in Quan’s work is this:

...according to critical race theory (CRT), the prior experiences of people of color with macroaggressions and racism often lead them to ‘mediate life experiences and outcomes’ through a racialized lens and even in instances when the motivations may be ambiguous or unknown. (p. 301)

The international education literature also supports the notion of the key role a faculty or staff must play in intercultural facilitations when a DEI incident abroad occurs. According to Anderson, et al. (2016), the highest student intercultural gains were associated with facilitation in the moment of a critical incident, and they found that it was crucial for the instructor to address group tension associated with an incident before moving ahead with course content. Johnstone, et al. (2020) intentionally build on Anderson’s research and determined that faculty leaders who could cultivate inclusivity within the group, facilitate around the topics of identity and cultural sensitivity, and debrief on social justice issues were the most successful according to students.

The literature then takes us to what can be coined as host country perspectives. One of the lone researchers in examining education abroad and the host country perspective has been Julie Ficarra. Ficarra (2021), who calls attention to this gap by detailing the extensive work that has been done to focus on host communities within the context of global service learning and community-based learning, almost exclusively focused on the Global South. Ficarra focuses on the host community in Florence in her research, but within the context of the one-sided cultural adaptation made by the Italians to the American college students. While she does not specifically focus on DEI incidents, she does highlight the power of the U.S. students in Florence, who often do not study Italian language and where they expect that locals will do all the bridging work, hence affirming the imperialistic tendencies of many students. A recent publication, the *Frontiers Special Issue on Listening to and Learning from Partners and Host Communities: Amplifying Marginalized Voices in Global Learning* (2022), features a series of articles on host communities in



the Global South, notably in highlighting the sometimes-imperialistic structures and relationships of U.S. study abroad programs.

A final theme from the previous review included literature on decolonizing global education. In a seminal work by Hartman, et al. (2020), they assert that an integral part of decolonizing global education is to go beyond just intercultural competence, as that concept alone is insufficient for the intersections of identity in study abroad. Additionally, programs and practitioners must bring cultural humility, defined as intercultural competence, with a look at oppression and inequity, to the work and operate within a framework that historically underrepresented students bring cultural wealth to global learning programs. This article parallels both the work of Sorrells and Ahmed as well as supports the argument for a postcolonial framework in intercultural collaboration made by Irani and Dourish (2009). A final argument by Hartman, et al. is that U.S. international education must consider host country partners' perspectives on equity and inclusion within their own cultural context.

In branching out into the social work research literature, one finds that Villarreal Sosa and Lesniewski (2021) employ a decolonial framework for the structure of a social work study abroad program. A key assertion they share that perfectly underpins the Spain case study is that “effective international exchanges involve an understanding of the local social, economic, political, and cultural contexts (Brydon, et al., 2014) and avoid pitfalls related to imperialism and colonization (Brydon, 2009)” (p. 4). For this program traveling to Guatemala, they prepare the students by exploring the social construction of race in their host country and ask the students to compare it to racial inequality within the U.S. These important conversations and associated educational content focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the host and home contexts, along with structured work in self-reflection, at the beginning of a program, would go a long way to establishing trust and shared understandings to support student groups should a DEI incident occur later in the program.

In the Discussion section of this paper, I asserted that sometimes students may not be in a place where they can be open to another perspective that may contradict their U.S.-based lens and experiences. In pursuing one possible explanation for this intransigence, it can be noted that the non-traditional Black student in her 40s in the Spain case study is open to discussing the incident and considering the various



perspectives. One possible theory in the literature looks to student identity development models, which have long been integral to those studying higher education in the U.S. When looking at a number of the models, such as Black, Latino, and White student identity development (Project Ready), they all have periods in late adolescence when young people may become more aware of the injustice that has permeated the U.S. society in relation to their identity group or for White students to recognize their own unearned privilege and the inequality built into large U.S. societal systems. Minoritized students then often wish to embrace this identity wholly, and, for all students, it may be a period for activism and advocacy. While this is both necessary and laudable for the student's development, it can be theorized that students in this stage may be less receptive to alternative explanations and more predisposed to either/or thinking as opposed to a both/and framework. From their point of view, delving into the intercultural and host country complexities may look very similar to gaslighting they have experienced within the United States and would be inclined to resist it and call it out. It is impossible to draw any certainty from one case study with a small number of students; however, given the resistance of the 20-year-old Latinx student versus the openness of the Black woman in her 40s, who, one must note, was not originally from the United States, it may be worth exploring in the future whether a particular stage in identity development could provide some explanation for the intransigence to explore varying perspectives in DEI incidents abroad.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

While this case study is from 2021, it is not new that when traditionally marginalized students study abroad, they may grapple with DEI incidents or incidents they perceive to be influenced by their identity. As a student in London in the late 1990s, I, who identify as White and female, had several Black women as roommates, who, when faced with locals staring at them, assumed that it was because they were Black. I would try to offer the possible explanation that we were also a loud, group of Americans walking down the street, and, in response, my roommates often told me I was too quick to give people a benefit of the doubt, which they found to be annoying. We did not have the language around DEI in the 1990s that we have today, and, as a White woman, I have had the privilege of not being discriminated against because of my race, and so as a fellow American, I was not really in a good place to make fully informed judgements about what elicited those stares. I



do not think our faculty director at the time would have had the training or background to facilitate a productive discussion in this case. What has not changed since the 1990s is that students bring their U.S.-shaped perceptions and experiences with them when they go abroad and rely on their habitus to interpret critical incidents.

What is perhaps relatively new is the increased understanding and sophistication students come with to articulate concepts like microaggressions or macroaggressions while understanding more deeply the role power, privilege, and positionality can have in societies. This increased knowledge and willingness to advocate for a more just and equitable world is admirable and necessary in U.S. society; however, what can be problematic is when students combine the U.S.-framed DEI concepts with imperialistic tendencies and a lack of intercultural understanding and skills to assert only one correct interpretation of a DEI global incident. The question for the field is, how can we best facilitate productive conversation around inequity and social justice that can allow for greater intercultural understanding and toleration of ambiguity, while at the same time recognizing the privileged positioning of U.S.-based institutions, faculty, staff, and students?

From the education abroad practitioner world, great work is being done in the field to join the intercultural and DEI frameworks using both the deep experience of professionals and utilizing theories such as cultural humility or models as the Intercultural Praxis Model (IPM). The partnership between Dickinson College and IIE is a prime example of this work which has produced popular workshops for the field, *Moving From Inclusivity Talk to Equity in Action in International Education Leadership and Building Bridges: Committing to Global Equity and Justice in International Education* that featured the IPM and showcases actionable ways to bring both intercultural skills and concepts together with tenets of DEI, such as power and positionality, to holistically support inclusion work while incorporating global perspectives. These workshops led to a 2023 joint publication *Models of Change: Inclusion and Equity in Action in International Education*, that highlights work being done in the field modeled after the IPM for students, faculty, and staff. However, there is still too little input from those on site, outside the United States and a lack of research on global DEI as it informs education abroad practice that centers the experiences and viewpoints of those outside the U.S.



As previously discussed, the literature in education abroad has mostly focused on student preparation, intercultural facilitation, typically for U.S.-based faculty, and then limited host country perspectives typically unrelated to issues such as DEI and certainly not as on-site faculty and staff as the primary facilitators for critical incidents. Given this major gap in the literature, it is clear that future research needs to focus on on-site colleagues and their role in building supportive and equitable programs and the ways they can prepare to be effective bridge builders, especially when a DEI incident occurs. Given the dearth of previous work to build upon in the education abroad field, there are two simultaneous research strategies to pursue: One is a review of literature in fields or contexts other than education, international studies, intercultural studies, etc., where perhaps research has been done that can speak to the concept of social justice imperialism and the intercultural and postcolonial frameworks that can be used by those in the host country to be effective bridge builders. The second is to pursue original research, starting at the beginning (because that is where we are) on how on-site faculty and staff in study abroad make meaning of the “U.S. perceptions” of DEI that are often brought over by students or that are relayed from the U.S. institutions and providers, and how those that are U.S. based interact with their local perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. From this work, the hope is that the field can move in a just and equitable direction that values all voices in the education abroad endeavor and produces collaborative strategies for building bridges for effective support of all students.

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