

**Overseas Student Teachers' Reflections on American National Identity:
A Longitudinal Study**

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Abstract:

This study draws on narratives submitted between summer 2008 – summer 2018 by 78 student teachers across all grade bands [K-12] and content areas (Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Mathematics) who completed three months of student teaching in an overseas country through the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST) during their final undergraduate senior year. All student teachers were in their early 20s. Upon completing their student teaching each student submitted a written reflection in response to the following prompt: Now that you have finished your student teaching abroad experience, what did you learn about yourself as an American? What did you learn about others' perspectives of what it is that makes someone American? In other words, how do you answer Crevecoeur's question, "What is an American?" Our findings include 12 major themes categorized into three major categories, i.e. socialization, hegemony and individuation

Key words: National identity, social studies, global studies, education.

Introduction

Until recently, civic education has been predominantly focused on national citizenship. However, globalization has called into question many long-held beliefs about a narrow allegiance to one's nation of birth. The call for globalizing the curriculum challenges beliefs about concepts such as national identity. Amidst calls for internationalizing teacher education (Anderson & Landman, 2003; Colville-Hall & Adamowicz-Hariasz, 2010; Doppen & Diki, 2017; Merryfield & Wilson, 2005;

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Shaklee & Baily, 2016; Sharma, Phillion, Rahatzad, & Sasser, 2014), Cushner (2012) has argued that immersive experiences such as student teaching overseas provide an opportunity for “meaningful disorientation, reflection, and transformation” (p. 50). Similarly, Ames (2017) posits that in today’s world, we must focus on worldwide forces that transcend national boundaries and find advocates among those who embrace a modern and transformative worldview.

Most citizens never question the assumptions that underlie the use of the pronoun *we*, and in whose “world” we live. Selwyn and Maher (2003) remind us that, most notably, social studies has historically been presented from a narrow Western perspective. They contend that pronouns raise questions such as: “Are *you* part of *us*? Does *we* include *me*?” They warn us of “the quiet threat and danger in pronouns” that underlies their usage (p. 1). Beyond our daily lives, they argue that the use of *we* extends to notions of national identity. More recently, Larguèche (2016) has argued that the use of *we* has historically served to organize human communities and been a “remarkably effective way” for creating a sense of national identity. Furthermore, he suggests that “creating or asserting a ‘we’ seems to be a necessary step toward ensuring political allegiance and participation in a political unit” (pp. 26-28).

Today, as ethnic diversity continues to increase in the United States, future teachers must be prepared to avoid a “*them vs. us*” perspective (Verdugo & Milne, 2016) and become advocates for an inclusive notion of American national identity. Teachers must have a future orientation, not only for their students but for themselves as well, to be “citizens of the world” (Cushner, 2018, p. 3). Or, in the recent words of Sophie, a 15-year old student from Australia, “It will not matter what nationality any of us have because our world is smaller, people move about, and most workplaces will be internationalized. Our world is likely to be borderless” (Tudball, 2012, p. 98).

Literature Review

Historically, the United States has been “a promised land for immigrants” and embraced a national identity grounded in concepts, among others, such as a New World, Manifest Destiny, and the American Dream (Larguèche, 2016, p. 27). However, the recent movement to “Make America Great Again” has been accompanied by a narrowing of the concept of American national identity as manifested in restrictions on immigration from Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Venezuela, a travel ban upheld by the Supreme Court in June, 2018. This narrowing of national identity is not limited to the United States but is also evident in Western Europe (Amira & Doppen, 2019; Larguèche, 2016, p. 26-28) and is premised on the idea that increased

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diversity constitutes a threat to national identity. Thus, there has been a shift from “thin citizenship” to “thick citizenship” as immigrants are expected to fit “a communitarian notion of citizenship” grounded in “a single, drastically simplified group identity that is “the property of the dominant group” in society (Luong, 2016, p. 64; Milne, 2016, p. 247).

According to Verdugo and Milne (2016), “the research surrounding national identity [has been] clouded in debate and disagreement. [However,] scholars do agree that national identity serves to give citizens a sense of ‘belonging’ to a nation or state” (pp. 1-2). This debate can be made less clouded by clarifying definitions. It is important to understand that *nation* is a construct in which belonging is based on essentialist notions of shared “blood, ethnicity, history, ancestry, common values, kinship and language.” A *state* is a construct in which belonging is based on “shared civic values about citizenship” in which dominant groups define national identity for their own benefit. Thus, a *nation-state* is a construct in which civic identity refers to belonging to a system of political governance in which citizens legitimize their government’s sovereignty (p. 3). As such, it is important to understand that a *nation* and *state* may or may not be the same.

Scholars of national identity can generally be divided into two schools of thought. Whereas essentialist scholars view national identity as “primordial attachment” that is “fixed, based on ancestry, a common language, history, ethnicity, and world views,” constructivist scholars posit that “dominant groups create, manipulate, and dismantle identities for their specific gains” (Verdugo & Milne, 2016, pp. 4-5, 26-28; Van Kerckem, 2016, p. 282). Some, however, identify a third school of thought, labeled “civic identity,” in which “membership in a geopolitical entity is unfettered by ethnicity or culture [and] is based on a set of shared values about rights and the legitimacy of State institutions to govern” (Martin & Verdugo, 2016, p. 215).

Verdugo and Milne (2016, pp. 6-16) offer four lenses through which to analyze national identity at both national and individual levels. Social demography considers factors related to demographic changes and migration patterns, most notably in Western countries. Economics refers to the impact of economic performance. The better an economy performs, the more positive national identity is perceived. National hegemony refers to a framework of governance that provides stability. A drastic change in hegemony leads to changing social roles and statutes, thus calling the current concept of national identity into question. Finally, politics refers to its impact on social demographic factors such as ethnicity, race, social class, and religious composition. National identity is deeply personal and subjective, for it represents an individual feeling of being part of a large community and can also be analyzed based on five dimensions identified by Guibernau (2007) as psychological, cultural, territorial, historical, and political.

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In a study of Turks living in Belgium, Van Kerckem (2016) explored three “different ways in which the *established population* draws boundaries” (p. 277) by “homogeniz[ing] and essentializ[ing] the Muslim population” (p. 279). First, body language, expressed in fearful or negative looks, often sends a message of exclusion. Secondly, discourse may range from subtle to overt racism and “othering” immigrants by the use of ethnic jokes and exclusionary words, such as *allochtoon*, to label immigrants, signifying that someone is from somewhere else (pp. 287-290). Finally, discrimination in the labor force, the housing market, and in social establishments constitutes a third way in which immigrants are excluded from national identity (pp. 291-293). As a result, immigrants in Belgium often live in a parallel society while maintaining multiple or hyphenated identities.

Putnam (2007) argues that diversity brings out the turtle in all of us. The greater the ethnic diversity, he argues, the more people tend to withdraw from collective life and distrust their neighbors. He suggests that successful immigrant societies create new forms of social solidarity and that modern, diversifying societies are challenged to create a new, broader sense of *we* (pp. 138-139). Consequently, he argues that civic education can serve to move students from bonding social capital—developing ties with people who are like you—to bridging social capital—developing ties with people who differ from you in some important way.

While research has generally been based on the notion that by immersing themselves in another culture, student teachers may for the first time move beyond a blind “infantile citizenship” to actively identify their national identity and encounter the world and themselves in a transformative way that they would not if they were to stay at home (Dolby, 2004; Doppen, 2010; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), some have begun to call into question the extent of their learning (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012). Some research has found that at the end of their sojourn, study abroad students’ perception of national identity had been disturbed (Savicki, 2012, pp. 229), but other research suggests that study abroad students may in fact more strongly identify with their home culture at the end than at the beginning of their experience. In addition, there is evidence that identifying with the home culture was significantly higher in study abroad students at the end of their experience than among those who stayed at home (Savicki & Cooley, 2011).

Methodology

This study draws on reflective narratives submitted by 78 teacher candidates across all PK-12 grade bands and content areas [Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, Special Education] who completed three months of student teaching in an overseas country through the

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Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST) during their final undergraduate senior year. All teacher candidates were from the same institution and in their early 20s during their overseas student teaching. Established in 1972, COST is a collaboration of 16 colleges and universities in the United States that provides opportunities for its students to have quality student teaching experiences in overseas settings. COST works closely with university and school representatives from the United States and around the world to promote global understanding, intercultural communication, and a meaningful educational experience (COST, 2018).

Participants

The reflections are based on the experiences of 67 female and 11 male student teachers who participated in the COST program from summer 2008-2018. They include 63 white females, 10 white males, one African American male, two African American females, and two Hispanic females. These participants completed their student teaching in Australia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Netherlands, South Africa, and Spain.

Research Question

Based on a framework for thematic analysis suggested by Wilson, Flournoy, Brennan, and Cleary (Cushner & Brennan, 2007, pp. 39-40, 163-164), the reflections document how each teacher candidate experienced his or her overseas student teaching. In their reflections, they addressed their experiences during the honeymoon stage, new learning experiences and personal insights they gained in their overseas school community, and how the COST experience impacted their global awareness. In their final reflection, they were asked to address what “being American” meant to them by answering Crèvecoeur’s question: “What is an American?”

In 1782, the French-American writer Crèvecoeur, naturalized as John Hector St. John, published *Letters from an American Farmer*. In *Letter III*, he addressed the question, “What is an American?” The first to describe life on the frontier in the New World to a European audience, he heralded the American Dream, portraying America as an “asylum” and “land of opportunity animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained.” “We are the most perfect society now existing in the world,” he wrote. “Here man is free as he ought to be.” “He is an American, who leav[es] behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners ... Here individuals are melted into a new race of men ... Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labor ... The American is a new man.” Maintaining that “religious indifference [had become] prevalent,” he believed that “As Christians, religion curbs them not in their opinion” and that

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everyone lived side by side in harmony. He further posited that “[t]here is [living] room for everybody in America,” where the government is grounded in popular sovereignty.

Data Collection

Spending an extensive period of time immersed in another country’s culture often leads one to question prior assumptions of *we* and *they* and re-conceptualize one’s national identity. The reflections by these student teachers offer an insight into their evolving perceptions of American national identity over a period of 10 years since the summer of 2008. As such, their narratives span the final months of George W. Bush’s presidency, the two presidential terms of Barack Obama, and the first year and half of Donald Trump’s presidency, each of which has had its own global impact.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study seeks to thematically assess how these 78 participants [re]conceptualized their American identity after completing their student teaching in an overseas country. Research has suggested that this method is especially appropriate when studying a contemporary phenomenon to describe the meaning of a lived experience from the perspective of a group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Merriam, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). To protect their identities, all participants have been assigned a pseudonym.

We chose to use Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis for inquiry to analyze our findings. First, we separately read each participant’s narrative to familiarize ourselves with the data. Secondly, we began the sense-making process in which we developed mutually agreed-upon categories that described aspects of national identity. Next, we undertook an interpretation of the categories by developing themes to synthesize the participants’ perspectives on national identity. Throughout the second and third stages of our analysis, we used the constant comparative method to determine common themes within and between the narratives.

Limitations

While the findings in this study are based on self-reports and are therefore limited in the scope of their generalizability, the COST program includes a developmental intention through a required pre-departure semester course and, while overseas, structured supervision by receiving site coordinators and mentor teachers as well as assignments, including the narratives in this study, submitted to the sending site coordinator.

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Findings

Guided by the interpretive research question in this study—“What is an American?”—our findings suggest 12 major themes. After reviewing the themes through an “ongoing reflexive dialogue,” we took a “semantic approach” to categorize the themes into three major categories: *socialization*, *hegemony*, and *individuation* (Figure 1) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Using a thematic analysis approach, “themes are identified within the explicit meanings of the data [and an] analytic process [that] involves a progression from description to show patterns in semantic content, and summarized, to interpretation” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90).

Table 1. Categories and themes

Categories	Themes
Socialization	Lifestyle
	Freedom
	Diversity
	Social justice issues
	Wellness
	Patriotism
Hegemony	Media
	Politics
	Economics
	Geography
Individuation	Global awareness
	Language

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Socialization

According to Cromdal (2006), socialization refers to “an indefinite array of social events taking place in ordinary life surroundings as well as in institutional settings, representing events through which people become skilled in the ways of society” (p. 462). Socialization is an important concept in explaining how individuals develop forms of social identity.

Our findings demonstrate that participants accentuated such concepts as social norms, values, customs, attitudes, and issues with regard to their understanding of national identity. We identified the following themes as elements of this category:

Lifestyle. A predominant theme in our findings is the acknowledgement of different forms of lifestyle and the privileged status Americans enjoy in their daily lives. From “easy access to large grocery stores” to the “availability of advanced technology,” these student teachers came to recognize that they enjoy advantages, opportunities, and privileges their host nations often do not have. For example, while Naomi wrote about her “American passport” as a privilege that enables Americans to travel to many countries without a visa, Mila wrote:

My time abroad taught me a lot about myself as an American. In terms of everyday practices, I realized that I have taken for granted all of the conveniences we have as Americans. Even living in a wealthy home in South Africa, I went without many things that I am accustomed to using or having back home. In America, I can go out to the store and get whatever I need at any time of the day (in most places). In South Africa, I have to go to the store before dark, and then remember to get what I need before the stores close at 1:00 on the weekends. As an American, I take for granted being able to access these things, and use fast and reliable technology any time.

According to anthropological research, appearance and clothing affect the development of one’s notion of identity (Anderson-Fye, 2012). Wearing casual clothes and paying attention to brands were suggested by Madelyn and Lily as American features. Several student teachers noted that fast-paced living and consumerism are a significant aspect of lifestyle in America. They especially recognized these American features after experiencing slower-paced societies and urged their fellow Americans to slow down as the faster pace of life in America causes more stress. For example, Kayle wrote, “Another thing I have learned is that Americans tend to rush things. We are so determined to do as much as we can in as little of time that we forget to slow down and enjoy our lives.” Likewise, Lily noted, “I’ve noticed the Irish teachers are extremely laid back and

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have the attitude about them that ‘they’ll get to it when they get to it’ while American teachers are constantly running around stressing about everything.”

Being “hardworking,” “independent,” “generous,” and “punctual” were also listed as American traits. Amelia wrote, “In America, time is money. We value punctuality and efficiency of use of time. I think both of those qualities are good ones to have.” Maria added:

Being an American also means being generous. I have become more generous as I have realized just how good I have got it. I am generous both personally and professionally. I am generous in the sense that I am excited to share my knowledge with others and absorb what they have to give.

Dylan further pointed out the idea of the bigger size of everything in the U.S. by stating, “I think being an American means you believe ‘the bigger the better.’ In America everything seems to be bigger. This includes things such as our streets, cars, houses, stores, and brand names.”

Freedom. Freedom provided a basis for these student teachers to define American national identity. Some heralded America as a “land of freedom” or the “American dream” and as such highlighted freedom of speech, expression, and religion as defining characteristics of American identity. To illustrate, Stella wrote, “The freedoms and rights that I’m privileged to because of what the founders of our country fought for, and exercising those rights and participating in the workings of my country is what makes me an American.” Similarly, Scarlett wrote, “Being an American means practicing many different faiths or even no faith at all, without worrying about being judged because you choose to practice something other than what everyone else believes.”

On the other hand, a few student teachers, such as Carter and Daniel, thought of the U.S. as a more restricted country in comparison to their host countries. For example, Carter elaborated:

One instance where I particularly felt uncomfortable and recognized my American view on things was when I accompanied a fellow teacher and his class on a Friday night to the movies. I was shocked and uncomfortable the entire time, because we took a group of 12-year-olds to see a movie that is rated R, and it wasn’t a big deal at all. I asked my teacher if he knew that the movie was going to be so vulgar and he told me that it was no problem at all. Even though I knew this was acceptable to do in Holland with a class, I still felt like it was inappropriate, and I recognized my difference in opinion based on my nationality and the culture that I grew up in. I always felt like an American, but over time

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I became much more comfortable with my surroundings and new experiences, and the people that I formed relationships with.

Daniel also talked about some differences regarding LGBTQ rights in America and Holland:

In Holland, it is not possible to lose one's job for being part of the LGBTQ+ community; in my home state of Ohio, it is. When voting for their representative in government, you have so many parties to choose from that you are actually represented in your government.

Diversity. Diversity was another recurring theme. Several student teachers viewed diversity as a positive aspect of American identity. They used such terms as "salad bowl" and "melting pot" in referring to their society. In their view, diversity distinguishes the U.S. from their host countries. Madelyn wrote:

Even though I have many differences with people in Germany, I learned that because I am an American I share many forms of different cultures. America is a country that has a little bit of every culture and because of that I share cultural ideas with people all over the world. Being an American to me is being a part of many different cultures.

Social justice. After immersing themselves in another country, several student teachers critically assessed their society for social justice issues, mainly racism, poverty, and gender equality. For example, Abigail mentioned, "Being in South Africa has put issues of racism and poverty into perspective back home. While racism seems somewhat apparent when I first got here, it took me three months to realize that rampant racism is deeply rooted and in existence back home."

Wellness. Referring to health and diet, some student teachers blamed American society for food inequity and obesity. They considered the American diet to be a negative feature in comparison to their host countries. Madison pointed out that

Americans are relatively unconcerned for their health in relation to other cultures. The average American eats many more carbohydrates and processed foods than the people in Australia. In the US, the grocery stores would be made up of 80 percent packaged foods and 20 percent fresh foods whereas in Australia it is almost the complete opposite. Americans live a fast-pace life.

Patriotism. Patriotism was regarded as an important element of U.S. society by several student teachers. Some highlighted their viewpoint as part of "a proud nation." On the other hand, some

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complained about over-patriotism by referring to such practices as the Pledge of Allegiance as unnecessary in education and at sporting events. Hazel wrote:

Americans are all together a very proud nation. At an early age you are taught what each star and stripe on Old Glory stands for, your grade-school teacher will praise Francis Scott Key as an idol for his rhyming abilities, and soon after you master the ABC's, you're on to the Pledge of Allegiance. Patriotism is something you are born with as an American.

Hegemony

National hegemony as a "framework of dominance" plays a major role in how citizens perceive their national identity (Verdugo & Milne, 2016, pp. 6-7). Three major themes fall under this group: media, politics, and economics.

Media. Realizing the pervasive power of cultural imperialism, numerous student teachers became aware of the global impact of American media on people's perspectives in their host countries. For instance, Millie wrote, "I was astonished by how much U.S. news was aired in New Zealand on the popular news programs every evening. I can't remember the last time I watched the news in the States and saw news stories from countries other than the one I was living in." Similarly, Sienna wrote, "I was amazed when I got here to realize that the people here kept up with the Kardashians more than America does."

Some student teachers also argued that the hegemony of American media has contributed to a number of "false stereotypes." In their interactions with others, they stressed that "Americans are different from what the media portrays." For example, Maya wrote:

The most meaningful learning experience has been in the classroom, where students have often brought up questions about life in America that show a view of Americans saturated by the media. This has been the most challenging for me to overcome, specifically when attempting to bridge the gap between cultures to engage in meaningful conversations with my students. There seems to be a disconnect between the understanding of what it means to be an American as informed by popular culture and the reality of American life.

As another example, Madison wrote:

So much of Australia's economy and lifestyle is directly connected with the American economy, that they are very concerned with the happenings in America. They get a lot of our television shows and radio programs; therefore, they actually are very up-to-speed

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with the pop culture in America. Pop culture is just as important in Australia, and there is more of it. Not only do Aussies follow American pop culture, but also their own as well as Europe's pop culture.

Lily and Melody emphasized that "regional and cultural differences must be acknowledged."

These students also described the influence of American media, and hence its pop culture, on the host culture. Some even provided examples about the detailed knowledge their hosts had regarding American news, politics, and culture, details they themselves were often unaware of. Their description of the global impact of American culture implies cultural imperialism. Jade wrote:

My ignorance became painfully obvious in Ecuador, where I had a student—a political buff—who staunchly supported Republican values. He attempted to talk politics with me and made references to American political television programs, but I was hesitant to express my beliefs because I feared that he knew more about my own country than I did, and I'm pretty sure I was right in that assumption.

Politics. Reference to politics was nearly universal across all student teachers' reflections. "Acquisition and maintenance of power" is a key factor in citizens' perception of national identity (Verdugo & Milne, 2016. p. 7). American political hegemony was evident in their commentary on incidents in their host countries that highlighted the role of America as superpower.

For example, governments and American presidents were frequent themes. Nearly all students referred to these themes at some point in their reflections. Being asked about presidents, several student teachers posited that Americans are reluctant to talk about politics. However, by listening to comments by their hosts about Presidents Obama and Trump, they concluded that presidential elections are a key aspect of American identity. Mia wrote:

Our new president was all the rage! In Cape Town I saw a sign outside of a barber shop for an Obama haircut. I saw people wearing Obama shirts all the time. It was kind of bizarre. I am excited about all the prospects that come with a new person in office, especially someone for whom I voted, but the man was like a celebrity there! The whole experience was a lot of fun.

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Kimberly also wrote:

President Trump was brought up almost every time I was revealed as an American. The Kiwis here honestly watch much more news about Trump than I ever have. It was important to me to be honest with how I felt about Trump, and that a lot of Americans would also feel the same way. If I was questioned, "How could people vote for him?" I was clear to explain the two sides to political parties, and the Electoral College. I think hearing some of this explanation from an American helped people to understand how an "insider" actually felt about their president.

Snyder mentioned a racial slur she heard about President Obama and wrote:

Depending on whom you ask in Ireland, you will get some very interesting answers of what an American is. If you ask one of my third class students about what an American is they will go on about Barack Obama (or as one of my students called him Black Obama) and Donald Trump.

Likewise, Adalynn wrote:

We would constantly be asked about Trump's policies. While some people just asked whether or not we liked Trump, others actually got deep into some of his political issues with me. I was surprised at how much they knew. I know a lot of it is in the media, but some of the smaller issues and societal problems were also brought up. This made me realize that I was a lot more globally unaware than I thought I was.

Economics. Economic hegemony is another aspect of American national identity. According to Verdugo and Milne (2016), "the better the economic situation, the more positive national identity is perceived" (p. 6). The student teachers demonstrated ambivalent feelings about a number of economic issues. For example, some student teachers who were placed in New Zealand and Ireland argued that America is behind their host countries with regard to sustainable economic policies. They provided examples of policies and practices resulting in conservation and preservation of planet earth and natural resources. Jasmine wrote:

Upon arriving in New Zealand, I realized that they are much more aware of the impact that we, as humans, have on the environment. In the education system, they teach students about pollution and the amount of trash we create and how to minimize it. They give out awards for having waste-free lunches and give out rewards for picking up litter.

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The students study topics such as nature and learn about how to help save endangered species and make our world a better place to live.

On the other hand, a few student teachers identified the dependence of others on the U.S. economy and highlighted the influence and power of the American economy by describing their strong purchasing power due the high value of the U.S. dollar. Mia, for example, wrote that, "Our economy is in a downward spiral and the rest of the world is following. So often I would hear South Africans commenting that they hoped our new president would start to turn things around." Mason also pointed out the high value of the U.S dollar:

I noticed how easy it was for me to spend money in South Africa and that my dollar went much further than the local currency, the Rand. Some teachers here are earning the equivalent of \$15,000 USD a year, and while the cost of living is certainly lower, it also means that it is much easier for me to travel to South Africa and spend money than it would be for a South African to travel to America and spend money.

Geography. Geopolitical entity affects national identity (Verdugo & Milne, 2016). Several student teachers lauded America for its size and location. They perceived its unique geographic location as a contributing factor to American hegemony as it is sheltered and isolated and hence has a lesser risk of war and is in better position to assert dominance. For example, Bella wrote, "After coming to Greece I realize how geographically isolated the Unites States of America is to other countries. The United States of America is not geographically close to other countries and does not feel threatened by neighboring countries." Millie, Mason, and Avery questioned the use of "American" to refer to someone from the United States; in their perspective, such demonym ambiguity "overlooks those who live in other parts of the American continent."

Individuation

Some student teachers centered their reflections on their personal development. They defined themselves in terms of attributes not commonly ascribed to national identity. Self-discovery requires understanding others' perspectives. Therefore, in describing their individual identity, they often outlined and attributed certain features to Americans. This category includes two major themes:

Global awareness. Many student teachers suggested that they had developed a global perspective. They highlighted the importance of global awareness for Americans and distanced themselves from American society when it comes to understanding the world and its current

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affairs. They urged their fellow Americans to develop global awareness and criticized American society for lacking a global perspective. Some argued that Americans need to travel more and step out of their comfort zone in order to gain hands-on experiences in the world beyond. For example, Hannah wrote, "I believe that in order to live in a melting pot like America, you cannot confine yourself so much to a social structure that you begin to ignore the world of cultures all around you."

Language. Language is perhaps the best tool in understanding identity and ideology (Shahri, 2012). Several student teachers realized the importance of learning other languages. They argued that American education has failed to address the need to offer foreign language courses. For example, Sophia wrote:

As a culture, Americans can also be arrogant in the sense that we often do not realize the importance of learning another language as much as other nations realize the importance of English. In the city of Quito alone, there are at least six English immersion schools, and there are several other schools that teach English as a required subject from Kindergarten on. However, in the U.S., immersion schools are few and far between, foreign language instruction typically doesn't start until at least 7th grade, and even then, it is treated as an elective. We expect people from non-English-speaking cultures to learn how to communicate with us but we don't meet them halfway.

The American accent was another notable relevant topic. Some student teachers came to realize that their accent is generally seen as an identifying factor. Although they were placed in English-speaking countries, they offered examples of the semantic and pragmatic variations of American English. For example, Ava wrote:

My accent most definitely set me apart from the rest; I could get by as a local until I opened my mouth. In the beginning I was quite an intrigue to my students, everything I said they wanted to hear twice and much time was spent saying words for them, just so that they could hear it in my accent and marvel or laugh at it, whichever suited them at the time. As time went on, the novelty of my accent withered and seldom would I hear comments about it. It was not until they did not want to do something that they would inform me that suddenly they could not understand what I was saying.

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Discussion and Conclusion

According to Smith (1993), national identity as a modern concept is rooted in “pre-modern ethnic identities.” It may not be possible to analyze the emergence and development of national identity “without exploring its social and cultural matrix.” Nationalism affects national identity and vice versa. Both depend on “earlier motifs, visions and ideals” of any given society (p. 71). Understanding American national identity is important due to its global impact.

Future educators will play a key role in shaping the collective ideals of a society. This study set out with the aim of understanding the perspective of teacher candidates on American national identity. Its findings contribute to the ongoing discussion of national identity in education.

Our findings suggest that by living and working in another country, even for a short period, teacher candidates begin to develop their global awareness through a comparative analysis with their host communities. This is a positive development because “teachers must themselves be citizens of the world if they are to guide their students in this direction” (Cushner, 2018, p. 3). A prevalent theme in our findings is that teacher candidates who have taught overseas believe that their fellow Americans need to travel more and seek hands-on experiences in the wider world.

To the question *What is an American?* nearly all participants referred to their individual lives in one way or another. From their preferred lifestyles to how they perceive the ideals and values of American society, it is evident that socialization and individuation contribute greatly to one’s perspective on national identity. Based on our findings, American national identity is constructed based on collective values such as lifestyle privileges, freedom, diversity, social justice issues, wellness, and patriotism.

On the other hand, some aspects of national identity are based on fixed criteria such as language and history, which has contributed to the formation of national symbols (Smith, 1993). For example, our findings indicate that American English is associated with national identity. This finding confirms the notion of “linguistic nationalism,” in which “one variety of language is selected as an indicator of differences between insiders and outsiders” (Kramsch, 1998, p. 75). This binary distinction is reinforced through the education system.

National identity is also a form of civic identity based on “the legitimacy of State to govern.” The legitimacy of any state is defined within “a framework of governance or dominance” (Verdugo & Milne, 2016, p. 5). Our results strongly suggest that American national identity is associated with U.S. hegemony in different forms and on different platforms such as media, politics, economics,

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and geography. Our data provide a significant cluster of statements with reference to the U.S. influence and power in participants' host countries. A possible explanation for this might be constant questions about American elections and presidents that often came as surprise to most of these teacher candidates.

Many unanswered questions remain about how and why such associations take form. Further research should be undertaken to investigate the formation of national identity among teachers and teacher educators alike. For example, future research may ask student teachers to specifically comment on the areas identified by this study. The findings of such research might also help teacher educators in helping future student teachers begin to understand and address national identity during their overseas experience. Furthermore, social studies educators in other countries may conduct similar studies.

In closing, our findings lead us to conclude that an American is a person who enjoys a privileged lifestyle in a free and diverse society and feels proud of his or her country. However, there is room for addressing issues related to social justice such as racism, public health, and food insecurity. Despite U.S. worldwide hegemony, our findings suggest that Americans should develop their global awareness and learn other languages. Whether these conclusions ring true for Crèvecoeur's question shall be left to history.

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