

Diversity Issues in Study Abroad

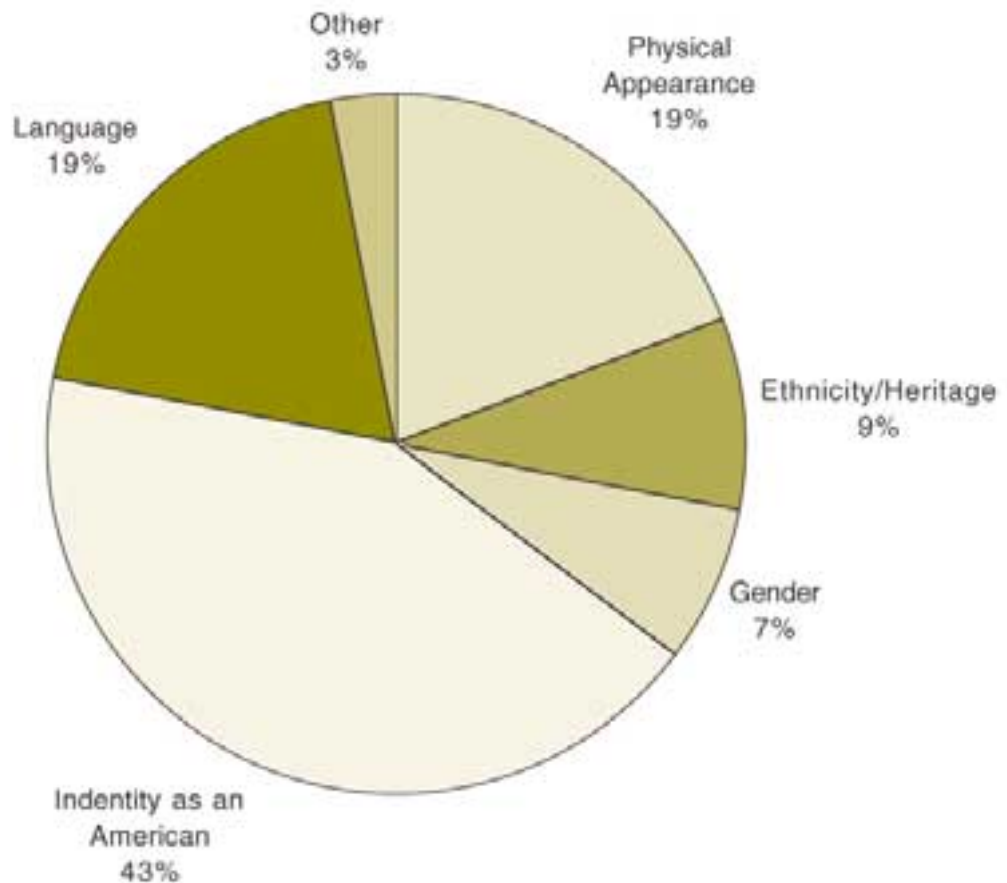
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Regarding this Project...

The *Diversity Issues in Study Abroad* booklet is a collection of quotes by Brown University students about their experiences abroad. The quotes were gathered through a survey of study abroad students returning from either spring semester/full year 1999-2000 or fall semester 2000-2001 abroad. The survey directly addressed issues of diversity in study abroad including ethnicity, heritage, sexual orientation, religion, minority/majority issues, physical appearance, and language. It was designed to elicit thoughtful and honest responses from participating students. Excerpts from the responses have been taken and corrections in spelling have been made, but otherwise the responses have not been changed.

Most Important Factor that Influenced Treatment in Host Culture



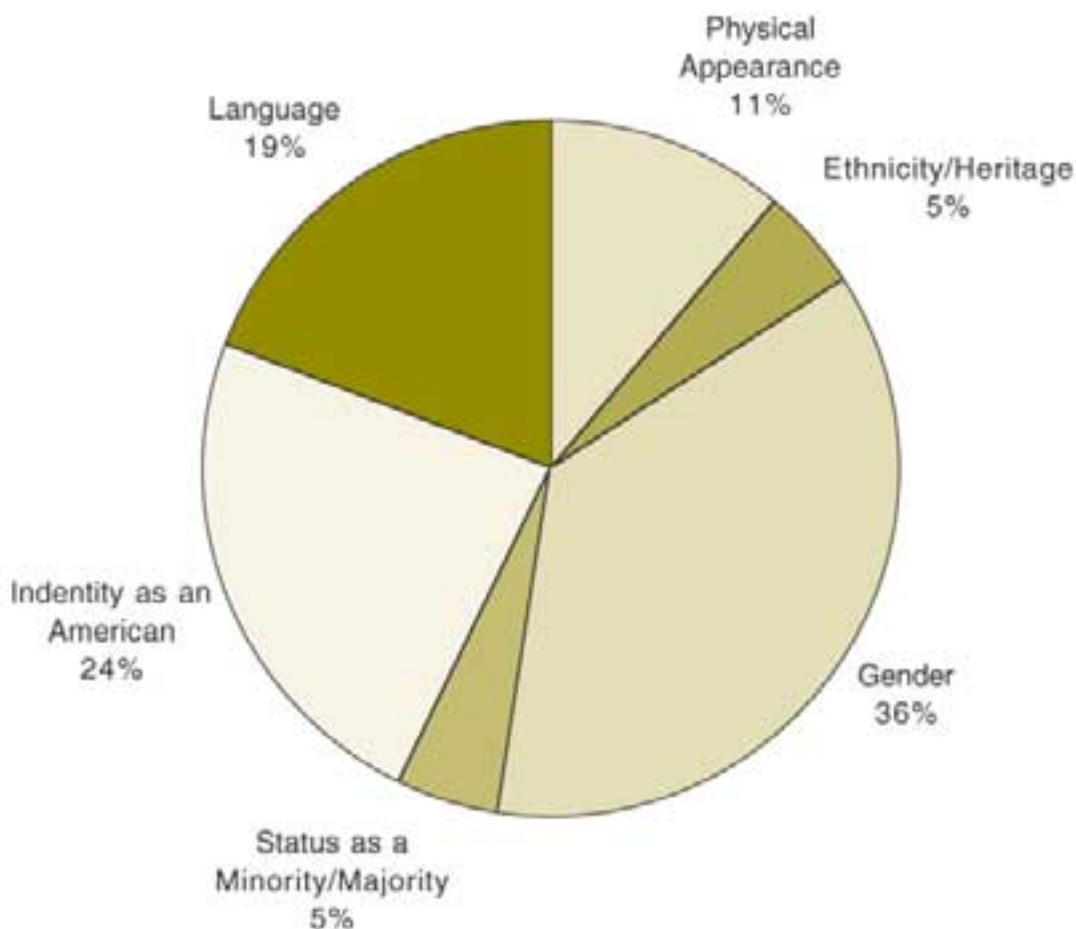
The goal of this project is to provide an opportunity for returning students to contribute the wealth of their experiences to the study abroad process and to make information on diversity issues easily available to students planning on studying abroad. The Office of International Programs wishes to provide examples of as many diverse experiences as possible in this booklet. However, we are limited to input from those students who responded to the survey. We encourage students to explore as many resources as possible when considering study abroad in order to gain a fuller picture of the issues they may face in other cultures. In addition, students should keep in mind that the responses in this booklet represent individual experiences and are not

necessarily representative of the views of other participants or Brown's Office of International Programs.

Brown University sends approximately 500 students abroad a year to 45 or more countries and to programs ranging from direct enrollment in a foreign university to American island programs as long as the programs form an integral part of a student's academic experience at Brown.

The Office of International Programs at Brown University will answer any questions about this survey and provide a copy of the survey to interested parties. We hope that these quotes will help prepare the path for students who want to explore study abroad options.

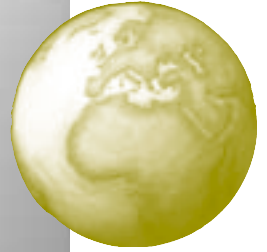
Second Most Important Factor Influencing Treatment in Host Culture







Africa



Botswana

I was in a racial minority for the first time in my life. I was a privileged minority and was not used to the attention.

I was constantly hit on! So many people assumed I was rich because I am white/American. And females are not always considered equal. People would say ‘lekgoatla a kwano’—white person come here.

Homosexuality is illegal. ‘le kgoa’ means white person, but any non-tswana person is not really a person. If you are white, you are constantly reminded of your color/status.

I’ve never been a minority. I have the privilege of being white in the richest country in the world. It’s hard to deal with.

—white female

Ghana

I am of African descent and have always wanted to go to Africa. I chose Ghana because it is an English-speaking country with a history of slavery.

I think that my identity as an American influenced the way I was treated more than anything else. People can always spot Americans which will spark admiration as well as dislike.

Ghana is very interesting for a black American because when you get there you are considered and called “white” because you are so westernized. Many Black Americans have many issues surrounding this. Ghanaians are also very religious (Christianity and Islam).

Being of African descent and going to Ghana made me definitely realize how African-American I am. While my culture has definitely retained many African influences we have also created our own culture out of our own experiences.

—African-American female



South Africa

I was a racial minority, most South Africans being either Black or coloured.

I was also an ethnic minority being queer in a majority heterosexual country with heteronormative culture.

None of the above caused me any problems. Everyone was very accepting/understanding of my situation. I only experienced a little discomfort, in that I had never before been the racial minority.

I was occasionally stared at while walking the streets of Cape Town with my girlfriend, but those were just stares and never went beyond that except once when we were cursed at by a car of drunk young white males.

As an American, I stood out as a result of my accent, which got mixed reviews. Some South Africans were intrigued by nationality, others were a little disturbed—didn't like Americans' very "rich" economic standing/positionality.

Females are not treated with as much respect as men. Women are more at danger of sexual harassment/rape as compared to men.

As a queer, I obviously got many stares, but nothing beyond that.

The racial situation in South Africa is unlike any in any other country due to Apartheid. Non-white people exist in a completely different class than whites. Racial tension among South Africans still exists. Race is a huge factor/discussed factor in all South African lives. The effects/injustices of Apartheid are still visible especially in the low income housing districts.

—1) female, 2) dyke, 3) white (in that order)

Tanzania

I was definitely a minority, being a white girl in a rural African society. I was stared at constantly and people chased me down the street every time I stepped outside screaming the Swahili equivalent of "white person, white person" This was definitely difficult to deal with for the entire time. Students studying abroad in rural Africa should prepare to completely abandon any sense of "racial etiquette" learned in the states. In America we try to eliminate racial differences, in Africa racial roles are sharply defined and extremely difficult if not impossible to break down.

Occasionally, I ran into situations where people acted cruelly or discriminated against myself or my friends. In these cases it was usually a poor African acting out of disgust for white people who obviously had more money and an overall higher standard of living. Even if we tried to blend in, white people "by default" are wealthier in Tanzania and thus many people resent that, even if they choose not to openly display it. We could never blame these people for acting cruelly towards us, but it did open our eyes.

Dressing nicely versus dressing in native clothes alters peoples' reactions.

America is thought of as the 'promised land' where everybody is rich and where Tupac and Michael Jordan live.

Religion (Muslim vs. Christian) is more important on the coast of Tanzania and in Zanzibar. Sexuality is not discussed, everyone is assumed to be straight (although there are plenty of gay Tanzanians).

After a while I just learned to laugh at the people staring at me and the children chasing me.

—white female

It was my first experience of being part of a (white, expat) community. If I had been an African-American (instead of Anglo-American), it might have been more difficult, as Tanzanians could of course distinguish all foreigners, regardless of skin color. Everyone got called "mzungu" (usually translated, "white person")

I would not say that I experienced discrimination, as I believe that the social group with the most privilege cannot, by definition, experience this. However, because I am a (white) American, many people assumed I was extremely wealthy and asked me to give them money. Although, I could not blame them for this perception (as comparatively, I am wealthy), it was a source of frustration at times.

It was simultaneously apparent that I was 1) a Westerner (American), 2) a minority due to my 3) physical appearance. All solicited the same response: attention—stares, often comments ("mzungu!"), sometimes requests (i.e., for money, etc.). Sometimes they worked to my advantage—it was obvious, for example, that my professors gave me more attention than the average Tanzanian student.

Overall, Tanzanians are very welcoming and friendly. Expect attention and be tolerant. Also expect sexism—women do not have the same freedom we do (right to education, jobs, freedom from harassment). And expect people to be curious about your religious affiliation (especially if you have a name that is obviously Muslim/Christian)

—white female

I was in the white, European minority for the first time. It was an amazing experience for me. It gave me a whole new perspective on race—very different from the American concept of race. For future study abroad students—you can never hide, blend into a crowd, people always want to talk to you because you are different, unusual. They want to know why you are there and whether you can help them come to America. White also symbolizes money, intelligence, prosperity, and this can be very confusing, but the interest of people in learning about you is amazing and opens an equally amazing opportunity to learn about them.

I don't recall or am not aware of any negative discrimination that I experienced towards myself, but I saw and heard about discrimination towards black Americans from Tanzanians, and the discrimination between Indians and Arabs and Tanzanians. But overall Tanzania is an accepting place—there are very few acts of violence between tribes, religions, and different races of people.

Gender was also important, because as a female, I had to deal with frequent solicitations and had to pay closer attention to cultural practices as a result so as not to offend or encourage people.

I guess the most important thing to know is that Tanzanians want to talk to people who are different—and an American (no matter what race, gender, heritage) is considered to be different and exciting to talk to.

—white female

Zimbabwe

I was a racial, ethnic, and religious minority as a white, non-Christian woman in a majority black, Christian country. On this program in particular, you are placed in locations and situations where white Zimbabweans would never venture, making you an obvious target both for people genuinely interested in you and for people who think you can give them something (e.g. a green card). Racial tensions in the country were particularly high (while I was there, Pres. Mugabe called all whites “enemies of the state”). I had to be hyper-aware of my surroundings at all times, and to forgo some of the freedom of movement that I am used to, just for reasons of safety. However, I always felt safe, mostly because I was smart about what I did. More than anything, the experience made me extremely conscious of my difference and of how that difference affected how I

was treated. Overall, though, the people were wonderfully friendly and open.

I actually found that my color and status as a foreigner gave me preferential treatment, and access to resources that might otherwise not have been at my disposal. I definitely felt hostility at times, because of my color, but I was never discriminated against. I became very conscious of the difference between my status as a minority in Zimbabwe and the status of minorities in the US.

I was the target for street vendors, for random marriage proposals, for requests for money.

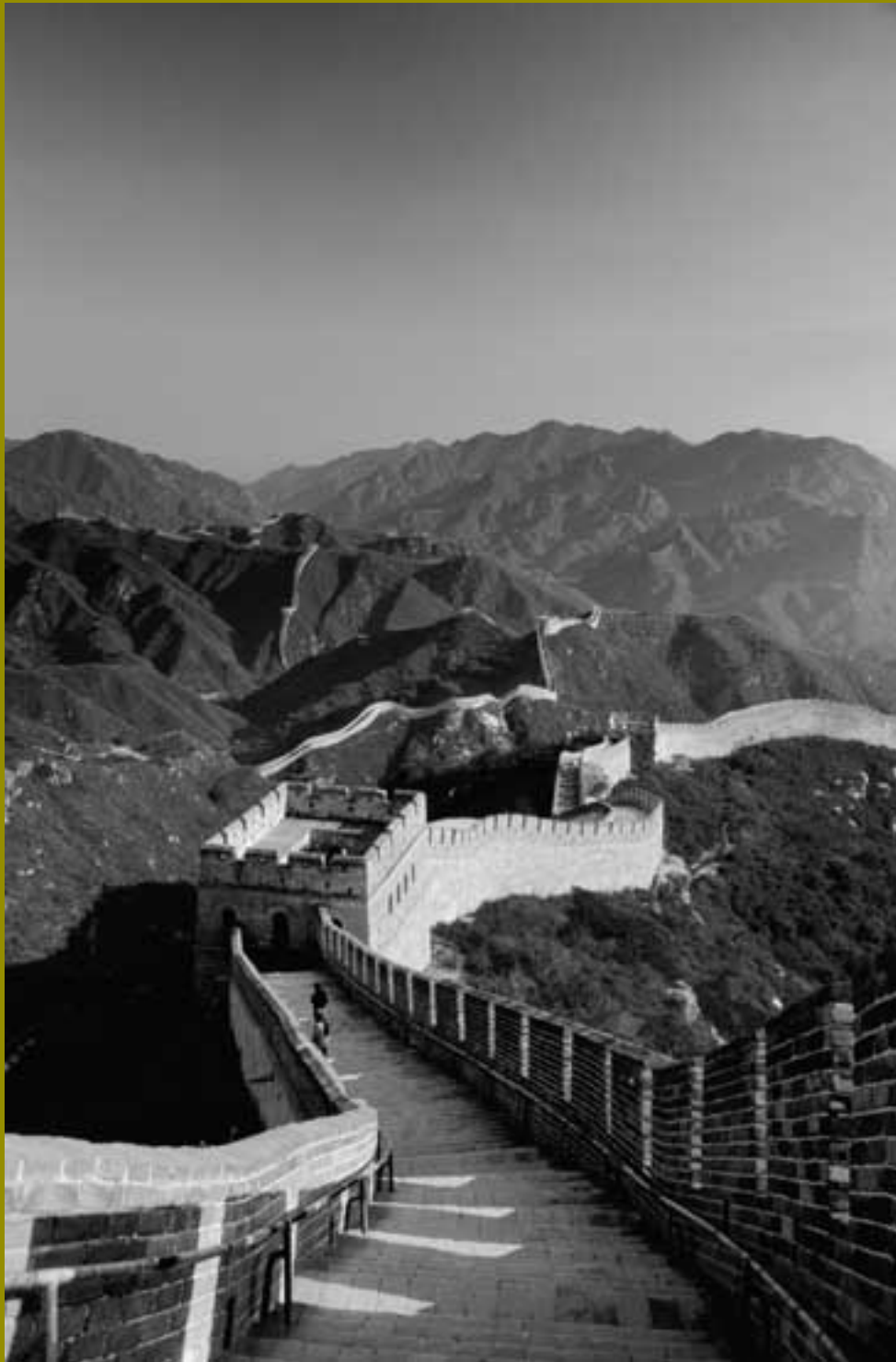
My “job” on the program was to assume the role that I would have, according to my age and gender, in the Shona family. Thus, even at age 21, because I am a female, I was not to go out at night to party, and I was expected to contribute to all of the housework.

Religious relations seem generally okay, but the country is almost entirely Christian.

In terms of sexuality: there is no such thing as being gay. Being gay does not exist. Almost no one in the country is “out”, and as a student studying there, if you are gay, it is safest to keep that to yourself—some students on the program really struggled with this.

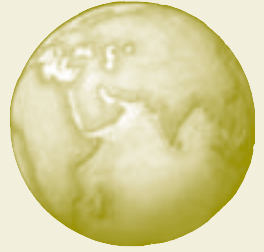
—white female







Asia



China

I was in the “white, foreigner” minority. Actually, people accepted me as almost Chinese when I told them my mother is Chinese. I got a lot of pleasant and some unpleasant attention (i.e. when people thought I was a Russian prostitute).

Chinese constantly overcharge foreigners. I was cheated often. In the end I learned to say a low price and stick to it, walking out if necessary. It was frustrating, but in the US we’re always cheated without bargaining power.

Also, men asked me if I was Russian and felt free to come on to me, believing that I was a prostitute. That made me really mad. As I am as big as many Chinese men, I wanted to whoop their asses—but I didn’t. This experience made me a lot more assertive and unafraid. I know now that women are constantly perceived as sexual objects through no fault of their own. It’s a big societal dysfunction.

Religion is sort of a non-issue. In China, no one talks about it.

Sexuality—I think it might be illegal to be homosexual. Dunno. It’s a very restrictive, traditional society except in modern cities.

Gender—women are “little and quiet” except for my fantastic teachers! They were some of the greatest feminists I’ve ever met. Men are expected to drink and smoke. Few women smoke or drink excessively. Proper men and women don’t have sexual relations outside of marriage. Women only “want” 1 or 2 boyfriends before marriage.

Race—If you look Chinese, they expect you are. Chinese seem to have prejudice against Japanese; like Koreans, like white people from a distance.

They really considered us outsiders who had little knowledge of Chinese culture.

–1/2 white American, 1/2 SE Asian Female

This was definitely the first time I’ve experienced being a minority. It was very weird to me when one of my classmates pointed out that people stared at me because I was tall and white, and made me slightly uncomfortable. Sometimes, I wished I could have remained oblivious to it. It was also the first time I felt a strong sense of nationalism, because I was generally identified as Russian, not American. People were very curious...they noted how white my skin was and wanted to know what a “rich American” thought of China and how much better America is.

There was definitely discrimination because I was a foreigner, especially with pricing. I felt like I had to be constantly on the lookout against being cheated...charging foreigners more, only allowing them to stay at more expensive hotels, these are every day occurrences in China and are government approved. I tried to learn to bargain—I think I failed—but that was about all there was to do...overcharging is just the way it is!

Race seems a minor factor in China, if only because there are so few racial minorities. Outside of price discrimination, being white usually excites a certain curiosity, but usually not hostility or mistrust.

–white female

[I] had the opportunity to experience a completely different style of life, which was very similar to my parents.

Superficially, I look no different [than the Chinese], and for the most part I felt very comfortable in the environment.

[I experienced] minor discrimination; foreign price-hikes, etc...no real option but to deal with the situation and the frustration.

Because of appearance and language, I was like the majority, which affected treatment.

The presence of foreigners in China is small, thus any noticeable differences had to draw the attention of the locals. They are eager to learn, but the minority always tends to draw eyes.

–Chinese-American male



India

Persons of African ancestry are minorities. At first, it feels exciting to be surrounded by people of color, but as you spend more time there you begin to see that people still do draw a distinction between Indian and other people of color so you are still a minority. For the most part though, there aren't negative feelings towards other colors. The negative attitudes I ran into all came from upper class Indians who aspired to be western and had picked up some of the most bigoted aspects of western culture from friends/colleagues in the states.

[I] ran into someone who wanted to study in the states and had heard a report that “you have to watch out for niggers” and then asked me if I was one. Me and my friend explained to him that it's actually a very offensive term in the states. I suspect he didn't really understand that. This is exemplary of how the racism I ran across never felt malicious, but just supremely naïve and ignorant. People's friends fall into the wrong circles in the states, report back home all the horrible prejudices and then people believe them. Even then, however, it felt like a question, “niggers are deceitful right?” Although the language was harsher here than I usually find in the states, I was less offended because it grew out of pure ignorance and the fact that he only had one source of information on the subject. Anyone who's grown up with American diversity, however, should know better. This also made me sadder than it does in the states because I was disturbed to see America's screwed up racial constructs spreading.

It is a patriarchal country and I felt sexism subtly all the time. Sometimes in the form of chivalry, sometimes in the form of not being able to go out alone after dark much, not having men take me seriously or feeling threatened by men when I was in a space where women usually don't go. If you probe deeply, you could find a lot of intolerance for sexuality, but there is a huge don't ask, don't tell culture that makes it ok for gay travelers, but it would not be easy to be openly gay. Patriarchy makes traveling alone as a woman a bit scary at times, but it is possible although you have to be prepared for attention. Indian women are almost always under the care of family, so a woman who is

not stands out. There is a great ethnic diversity that is managed well. I found race to not be too big an issue. There is a somewhat strained religious tolerance. If you are Hindu or Muslim, you may find tensions towards you up north (probably not though) but the south is very tolerant.

—mixed: Af-Am/Caucasian

Being white, I was a racial minority in India. I think being a racial minority for a period of time can be an important learning experience, though I realize that being part of a racial minority can have different implications in different contexts. For example, being white in India not only meant I was foreign and different, it also implied that I was rich, a tourist, foolish with money, and materialistic. In some ways, being white (or having pale skin is also a prized position in India, and can mean enhanced “status” or identification with beauty and social superiority.

I did experience some forms of discrimination, though I think most of the time it was warranted and fair. In many ways I do fit the stereotypes that were assigned to me as a white American woman, so I can't really say I resent the discrimination I felt because of this (although it often made me feel uncomfortable). Perhaps what bothered me most was the following situation (which occurred many times): I was in a group of all Indians, discussing politics. The foreign and economic policies of the US government came under fire (for being deceitful, racist, anti-Third World, etc.) and the people I was talking with automatically assumed that my views on the issue were in full support of my government. This was never true. It was hurtful sometimes that my friends and people I respected would assume that I was an apologist for the US government and corporations just because I myself am American.

When I would identify myself as American, I heard a range of responses, from “why would you leave a place of such opportunity to come—here?” to “your country is dangerous and scary.” Being female—especially white female—has a lot of social meaning. A common perception among Indian men (and I was told this by Indian men and women) is that white women are immoral and sexually easy. As a result, I think, I was approached by Indian men with all kinds of crazy expectations.

Race is much more important in India than I realized (or, rather, skin color—the lighter your skin is, in general, the more socially superior you are assumed to be). I won't even try to comment on gender and sexuality—it's not something I even begin to understand.

If nothing else, it made me realize that—at least by comparison to most Indians—I am rich, foolish, spoiled, lazy, and sexually easy. It doesn't mean I view myself only in these ways, but I realize better why someone else (especially in India) would view me in these ways.

—white American female

Japan

Actually, the Japanese are very friendly to foreigners, because of the lack of native English speakers in Japan. The Japanese are known to approach foreigners on the street and converse with them.

As an Asian person, the Japanese could not decipher if I was really Japanese or not. Therefore, I was treated like everyone else in society which was great. Once the Japanese learn that you can speak English, they'll try to become your best friend.

—Chinese-Filipino-American female

I went to Kyoto to improve my Japanese, to learn about where my parents lived, and to make some connections between things in my parents and my past and present. I have relatives in Japan, my parents (Caucasian father, Japanese mother) also lived a long time in Kyoto, so I have heard stories and have lots of connections to Japan.

Although relatively subtle, I definitely felt that expectations for women were different than for men. Women to be cute, attractive, attentive, sweet and subservient. As an American, I didn't feel too much pressure to fulfill these expectations.

I was impressed by the generosity of the Japanese and have tried to incorporate that into my life as well.

—Japanese American female

Perhaps racially and ethnically, every non-Japanese visitor to Japan is a minority.

Sexual discrimination, I think, was pretty obvious in Japan. In a regular social situation, it seems as if women are looked down on. Women who are intellectual, open-minded and sensible do not appear to have the encouragement to be as they are, or to further these abilities. To be told to "act more womanly" seemed to mean "be less of an achiever than your male peers". Much of this was not voiced, please note; they are only my observations.

Appearing Asian mislead locals into believing that I was Japanese, too. Confusing on both sides!

Being female, any display of physical strength or education seemed of surprise locals sometimes, e.g. lifting suitcases, running up stairs...

Any mention of English—spoken in English, not pronounced in Japanese—elicited a rash of excitement to converse in English. Difficult!

Kyoto is a pretty homogeneous place—almost everyone is Japanese. Foreign visitors aren't stared at; they're treated very civilly and warmly. Locals are curious and interested in international culture and sharing their own.

Gender: at worst, locals can be sexist and chauvinistic, but on the whole this isn't problematic

Religious: many believers in Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity simultaneously.

—Chinese female

I guess being Chinese, I was part of the racially Asian majority, while also the ethnically Chinese minority. I guess I've always been used to being a minority, being one of only a few Asians from my hometown. But it was also perhaps different for me, because I could generally pass as looking Japanese, and people were often surprised to hear of my real ethnicity. For Asians who more generally do not appear Japanese, I think the experience was much different as it certainly was for those not Asian at all.

I found it interesting, and kind of amusing, when a non-Asian friend and I would be talking to a stranger, and the stranger would inevitably address me even though my friend had initiated the interaction and had a much higher Japanese proficiency level. At the same time, being a fourth or fifth generation American, I can't say I've experienced all that much discrimination here either.

Nowadays, I think Japanese views on foreigners, at least in the general everyday situation, is much more cordial than I heard it used to be. But of course, there are exceptions, and it would not surprise me to hear of unpleasant situations. In general, Japan still does not have the same level of sensitivity about gender and sexuality, so both these can be problematic perhaps to many people.

I think I feel perhaps more American than I did before, and not as worldly.

—Chinese-American male

Vietnam

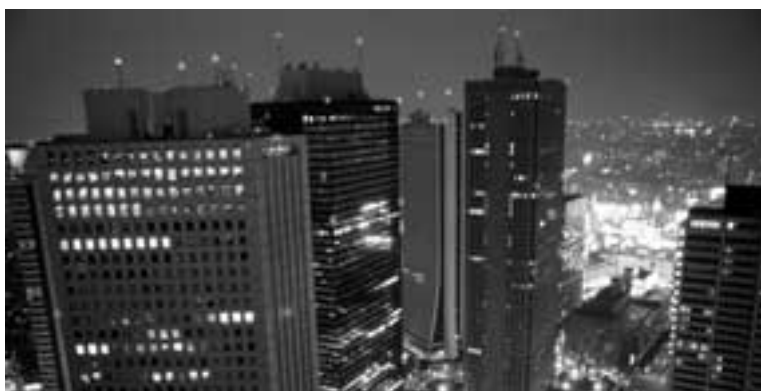
Racially and ethnically, I was a minority in Vietnam.

[No] serious [discrimination], though people would gossip about me right in front of me, assuming that I wouldn't understand Vietnamese.

Much of Vietnam is not what one would consider international. I am pale and have light hair and definitely stood out in Vietnam—people had different reactions to me, but everyone certainly had some sort of reaction. Women and men are treated differently in some situations in Vietnam. That goes for Vietnamese women as well as for me.

It's good for women going to Vietnam to have an understanding of Confucianism. In many small ways, the Confucian ideals for the social previews of men and women are still felt in Vietnam.

—white female





Australia

I was an Indian ethnically and an American nationally, both minority groups in largely English descent Australia. I experienced very little to no racism; but many jabs because I was American...

Sydney is a very diverse, open-minded city. Australia in general is very open.

Now I am a more independent and less 'defined' by my "box" as an American or as an Indian and feel much more like a world citizen.

—Indian-American male

I experienced hearing racist comments perhaps more than in the US. I handled it in a way similar to how I would at home—if I didn't know the person, I'd ignore it; if I did and thought I could influence their behavior, I would mention it. The difference in the racism I heard from Australians is that they seemed much less self-aware about it than some people would in the US.

People are not as consumed by racial questions in Australia—yet they have serious racial issues that need to be addressed and reconciled.

—white female

Australia is very homogenous. This can be extremely frustrating coming from Brown. I found everyone to be extremely friendly, but most of my friends were white and had little/no exposure to pluralism. That said UNSW is almost 50% Asian, a fact that I feel most students—and the school administration—do ignore.

I would feel uncomfortable at first if I were not white (especially in the colleges!), but really, they were completely open to pluralism—it just takes time.

—white female

Gender relations differ from those in the U.S. because Australian males more often follow hegemonic masculinity. They play rugby, think that girls should look pretty, drink a lot, and often get in bar fights.

Cultures differ greatly and it is important not to assume similarities.

—beige female

Same basic diversity as the U.S.—mainly white Australians, Aboriginal Australians, and South East Asian international students. Few South Asian, Middle Eastern or African students (or of those descents).

Not really any discrimination, but some misconceptions that were interesting to hear and sometimes hard to dispell. Aboriginal relations have a long way to go.

—white female

Australia, New Zealand, & the Pacific



Great deal of diversity with Italians, Greeks, Asians, but the white population was dominant. I rarely saw anyone of African descent. However, the one Somalian friend I did speak in length with loved the general attitude and blend of ethnicities. Aborigines are not seen too frequently in Melbourne, however, during my first week there I met one or two Aborigines who were very passionate about their persecuted history and their present treatment by Australians.

The local Australian population has mixed views over Aboriginal issues and it is still heavily debated over in politics. In one instance an Aborigine said to a friend of mine who cut-in on a pool match, “Listen, I’ve been getting [the short end of the stick] my whole life. I’m Aborigine, man. Just let me play the damn game.”

Bi/Homosexuality appeared rather open and generally accepted. Only thing that stuck in my mind was the very small African population in Victoria.

—white male

In Melbourne, the largest percentage of people are of European heritage. But the university, itself, has a huge Asian population that eclipses this norm. Similarly, while in the outback, the number of Aborigines is so great, you feel like the minority, although this may not be the case.

I had many people “brand” me as rich or snobbish because

I attend Brown. Those who didn’t were study abroad students from the states.

The university campus is as diverse as the city environment. Melbourne has a huge Greek district, Italian district, and a Chinatown. Religious affiliations did not seem that pronounced. Political activism seemed stronger than at Brown, though.

—Hispanic-American male

Australia is pretty much like the U.S., there is diversity, but there is also the negatives that accompany it, like racism, sexism, etc.

—white female

Samoa

I was mistaken as part Samoan. At times, it was an advantage. Other times, disadvantage. Americans are seen as super stars, rich, and intelligent.

Men (government workers) would help you to win a date with American women.

Do not say you are an Atheist. Samoans are extremely religious. They gossiped and insulted my classmate who explained she didn’t believe in church.

—Woman of color



Czech Republic

I am a biracial female. There was almost no one like me in Eastern Europe. Although, I am a minority in the U.S., this was very different.

I can honestly say that I am not aware of any instance in which I was discriminated [against].

I got a very cold reception in most situations because I am an American. The Czech Republic is a very poor country so American students appear wealthy and frivolous to them.

There are little to no minorities in Eastern Europe (Asians as an exception). Women are treated differently, men are much more aggressive there.

—Multiracial female

France

I am white and gay, so my experience was basically what it would be here.

I was never gay-bashed. At least not to my knowledge.

Men have a much easier time. I almost never felt physically unsafe on the street, even late at night.

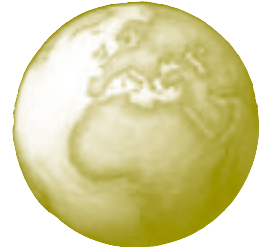
Not so different from the U.S. Most people are not very religious. Probably a bit less racial tension, more between natives and first/second generation immigrant communities.

—white gay male

From both observation and from talking to other Brown/American students, I noticed that minorities in France are viewed as still being “from” the country of their ancestors, no matter how many generations have lived in France. They are not considered truly “French”. The only time I felt funny was a few instances when people found out I was Jewish. The country is so predominantly Catholic that many people seem to expect you to be Christian. As a female, I was harassed more frequently, but maybe also received more friendly treatment. There are different race issues, more Arab discrimination than Black discrimination. I felt that sexuality wasn’t as important. Women have not gained as much ground, in my opinion as they have in many sectors of the U.S.

—white female (Jewish)

Europe



[I was a] racial minority (Indian). This is not the first time I have ever had this type of experience although the Indian population is much smaller in France. Also, Indian immigrants in France are definitely a “model minority” of doctors and engineers as is the stereotype in the U.S. [I experienced] no more discrimination than in the U.S. although I got more interested stares ‘cause I dressed like an American but wasn’t “typical”. I don’t dress like the Indian immigrants do and in general didn’t hang out with many there. Also, most of the Indian immigrants I saw on the street seemed to be Tamil, who have distinct general characteristics. Since I didn’t look like that, no one believed I was of Indian origin. Very aggravating!

France is not as “tolerant” and “diverse” and “accepting” as it is touted to be.

—Indian-American female

My family is actually from France, so it was always one of my dreams to go there. It was an amazing experience on a cultural level to finally understand and live in the same world as my mother. The semester gave me new insights into her life and my own upbringing and strengthened my sentiment towards France.

I was part of the white majority in France much like in the U.S. but it was interesting because at the university where I attended (Paris VIII) there was no visible majority whatsoever. For the first time in my life I was in a truly diverse environment and the ethnic groups were from such different regions and circumstances than those in America. All in all it was an eye-opening experience.

Relations between men and women were a lot more open and making eye contact with men opened you up for all types of harassment. I think it was more acceptable for men to treat women as sexual objects. I think that there is a very heightened tension in the country around ethnicity due to the highly segregated neighborhoods; unequal distribution of monetary resources.

—Caucasian female

I was a racial, ethnic, and religious minority, but as an American of India origin and a Hindu this has always been the case in the U.S. also. In France it was a bit more extreme and very difficult to find people of a similar background but I took it to be just another one of those differences of living abroad—the whole point of going abroad was to experience these differences.

The French are more “discriminatory” than the average American, but they complain about everyone: the English, the Americans, Arabs, Indians. On the other hand, they are also more knowledgeable about other cultures and were always fascinated to hear about India so I would say that it really depends on the individual, as in any country.

The French think theirs is the greatest culture on earth and so expect people to adapt to the “French way”, however they are also often very open to learning about other cultures and religions and are often much better informed than Americans. They don’t really understand multiculturalism: 2 examples; 1) a Maghrebin that is the second generation of his family to be born in France usually still identifies himself as Maghrebin and not French. 2) However as an American, the French see you as only American and have difficulty with terms like Asian-American or Hispanic-American.

—Indian American female (as in the country India)

As a Caucasian, I was in the majority—but I definitely felt in the minority as an American observing another culture. I found that many Europeans already have preset opinions about Americans and about America. Thus, I received a lot of criticism about the social structure of the U.S.—but I wasn’t personally discriminated against.

In Paris there is a large group of minorities, but at the same time the French are obsessed with classifying you as a nationality. Almost every person asks where do you come from—there is rarely interaction between differing racial/ethnic groups—most minorities have their own neighborhoods within the city.

—white female

Sometimes the French showed an open resentment of foreigners, Americans in particular—for example, mocking the American accent in French in bars, restaurants, worse service. I dealt with it simply by focusing on what needed to be done and doing it, ignoring any comments.

Algerians seemed to be discriminated against in the South of France. Blacks, Spaniards (of whom there were few) experienced some, but milder discrimination. Women were sometimes treated exceptionally—but the purpose of that is unclear. In any case, some people may not be used to this.

—white female

Germany

I am a gay male and this was the first time I dealt with my identity as openly, publicly, and continuously as I did in Berlin. Berlin is an incredibly tolerant and progressive city with one of the largest gay populations in Europe. As opposed to my experiences in America, I had no qualms identifying myself as gay and felt I experienced more than tolerance but acceptance on a daily basis. Government debate in Germany currently concerns itself with increasing the rights of homosexuals through marriage and child adoption rights. To underscore that commitment, the city is dotted with ads from the police reminding citizens of the police's intention to ensure gays and lesbians receive fair and equal treatment. The gay pride parade is the second largest street event in the city and lastly the city boasts numerous "established and historic" gay neighborhoods that are very politically active. As stated earlier, this environment was the first time I felt public expressions of homosexuality on my part would be accepted and I enjoyed using the time to grow as a person.

I experienced no notable discrimination other than one incident where a man yelled a comment at me while I was holding hands with someone. This was an isolated incident and nothing different than I could easily have experienced in the U.S.

People I met placed the most importance on my status as an exchange student (irrespective of my being American) and were most concerned with my well being and enjoyment of my experience in Germany. Appearance played little role in how I was treated, aside from if I dressed more in local fashion, it was easier to not become part of the aforementioned discussion. Otherwise people in Berlin really are tolerant of a wide diversity of appearances.

I can only speak for Berlin, and I believe in some regards it holds unique status in relation to the rest of the country. Berlin is a highly diverse city populated with people who (in my American perspective) are highly tolerant in the categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion. Coupled with this is the fact that Berlin is a highly politically active city so it is not uncommon to find debates, rallies, and/or demonstrations on any of these topics as major issues. I feel Berlin's awareness of its central position in the events of WWII only heightens its current commitment to making sure issues of diversity and plurality are encouraged, explored, and acted upon.

From my experience Berlin is not representative of the whole of Germany, nor should my responses be treated as such.

—White male

Hungary

Although it didn't come as a surprise, I was occasionally stereotyped by a general profile of what Americans are like: rich and uninterested in the host culture/language. By local standards I was rich, so it was hard to argue, but this

meant that I had to be careful getting change back and taking a taxi. Speaking a little Hungarian sometimes brought nice results and appreciation; in other cases people were not really interested and ignored the effort. Overall, though, discrimination wasn't a problem.

I was told that my dealings with the police and officials were simplified by the fact that I'm not part of a visible ethnic minority; some Asian students had more trouble. Students who are clearly ethnically non-Hungarian are more likely to be hassled by the police, who can stop anyone for his passport/residence permit at any time. Other than that, however, the atmosphere seemed pretty relaxed, although the population is strikingly homogeneous relative to Brown's.

—white female

Italy

While I have no Italian heritage, my Jewish background made seeing some of the Holocaust monuments and Jewish historical sites around Italy and Europe an emotional and sometimes saddening experience. My program was entirely composed of U.S. students, so within my program, I felt in the majority. But out in Rome and Italy I was definitely in the minority—not Italian, not Catholic. But being an American didn't make me into an "exotic" minority, as there are many American students in Italy and Rome. Usually people were interested in me because I'm American and wanted to talk to me about it.

I felt there was little discrimination in Rome, but this is coming from someone who feels as if he was in the majority and wasn't threatened. Obviously, it's a different experience for women and by the end of the semester the adjective of choice for Italian men was "sketchy".

—white male

I suppose I was a minority in that I am not Italian. However my program was so introverted that I really didn't spend much time dealing with Italians, so it really wasn't a factor. I do happen to have some leanings toward Catholicism (I was raised Catholic), and due to the jubilee, 2000 was the year to be a Catholic in Rome. I feel like I have a bit of renewed faith—so I found that a very rewarding experience.

Italian men are notorious for being...well, Italian men. So I experienced the usual pinching, etc.

I have a feeling that sexuality may be kind of a big deal in Italy. We regularly saw homophobic slurs spray painted on walls. Such an attitude really would not surprise me in view of the Italian notion of romance and the emphasis the culture places upon men romancing women. The Catholic church probably has something to do with this attitude as well.

—white female sort-of-Catholic



I had difficulties with the language but beyond that, I was right at home (racially, religiously especially) I got a first hand look at Catholicism—my religion, which was eye opening for me. I would imagine that Italy is not the easiest place to be if you are not Caucasian or heterosexual.

People definitely treated you differently if they assumed you were American which for me was always the case. Shop owners, restaurants would give you a harder time but they warmed up quickly if you attempted the language. Overall, I can't believe how welcoming Italians were to outsiders.

As stated earlier, I was in the majority as a heterosexual, white Catholic so I didn't experience any negative attitudes. However, I could see that being a different race, ethnicity or sexuality could be difficult in Italy.

—White American Catholic female

Italy was a weird experience for me because although I had fun, by the end of the experience I was definitely homesick for people who looked like me and wouldn't stare at me and be fascinated by my look.

Italian men are very assertive in their admiration and approach towards women. Especially foreign women. It was interesting.

—African-American female

The attitude towards women as exhibited by southern Italian men is atrocious. Women are possessions to be handled owned and traded freely.

The attitude towards Americans is a mixture of interest and disdain—depends largely upon the age of the person you're interacting with.

Sexism is not nearly as bad up north.

Black women do indeed seem automatically viewed as prostitutes or touchable, fuckable objects.

—White female

In Italy, I was definitely in the minority racially. Although I guess that Irish people and Italian people are both considered "white", I felt I stuck out a lot. With just one look at my blonde hair, blue eyes, and pale skin, every single Italian could peg me for a foreigner—not necessarily American, but definitely a foreigner, no matter how well I spoke Italian. This made me uncomfortable at times. On the converse, I am Catholic, and most all Italians are Catholic. I really enjoyed this solidarity, attended mass every weekend—religiously I was in the majority.

I was not denied anything based on my race. I was, however, the target of harassment (by Italian men), because as I said, I could be easily identified as an American woman. The harassment occurred once in a while—not ev-



ery day, but definitely at least once a week. The worst situation was on a train when a group of Italian young men would not leave my friends (American) and I alone, even touching our hair. This was different for me because anyone can be an American. It is not based on how you look. In Italy, Italians know you are not Italian.

So far all of my comments have been fairly negative. I want to say that Italians are generally a very warm, friendly, open people. But it is just the situation there that there is a certain Italian "look", and it is hard to blend in if you are not Italian (even if you wear all black and buy a cell phone). So many Americans will be identified. I was disappointed when I realized that Italy is in many ways a racist society. This comes from a number of things—ignorance, anger about immigrants taking their jobs. This especially affects African-Americans. I think it would be especially hard to be an African-American woman since it would be assumed that you are a prostitute.

—White American female

I was part of the majority in the sense that most Italians are fairly light skinned and I am Caucasian. However, being American and blond is often a noticeable difference to the locals that people pick up on immediately from appearance, accent, etc.

When I first arrived I noticed a fair amount of anti-US and anti-NATO graffiti... Many Italians resent the impact that US/NATO action in the Balkans—Serbia and Bosnia (as well as the Albanian war a couple of years ago). Also, there were different other heated discussions I took part in or witnessed regarding other US policies like the death penalty. So some resentment, but not personally based or directed.

Immigrants from Africa, Albania, Morocco..., are not really accepted as "normal" residents and are referred to by most as extra-communitari—literally outside the country/community even if they hold jobs. In that sense, Italy has a long way to go—in racial acceptance.

—White female

The Netherlands

Being Jewish was semi-rare in Europe, finding services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur was difficult. Some people reacted strangely to me being Jewish. That was new. I didn't feel discriminated against, however.

Everything is supposedly fine in tolerant Amsterdam. However, women and blacks should beware, as well as Asians with accents. Women always get harassed and the Netherlands has horrible women's rights. As far as the other two groups, insensitive attitudes pervade the country.

—White male, Jewish



I was surprised at how little sexual discrimination/harassment there is in Amsterdam. Much less than in the US. I felt much safer there.

Amsterdam is a very international city and is known for its tolerance. People don't look twice if a drag queen is walking down the street.

—White female

My dad, grandfathers, and many aunts and uncles studied there. They were curious to see my reaction and to see if I chose well in going to Brown.

[I'm] white, non-hispanic, Dutch. I found it very annoying after 2 1/2 years at Brown. I missed diversity a lot. They [the Dutch] are open to anything, travel a lot themselves, do not generally discriminate and speak English. I learned how much more important (to me) my American half is than my Dutch half.

—White female

Russia

I am white and look like I could be Russian—although Russia is a strange place because to them “Russian” is an ethnic groups as opposed to “Jewish” or “Azerbaijani”—so a Jewish person who has lived all their life in Russia isn't considered “Russian”. But I was Russian looking so I would say I wasn't faced with any racial discrimination issues. The only discrimination I dealt with had to do with my being American.

Russia (even a big city like Moscow) is full of violent racism and ethnic battles—I would say it is literally dangerous to be black in Russia or have a physical appearance like a Chechen (black people get beat up routinely or without any provocation). Also—being Jewish can be dangerous though it's less obvious. Being Asian would also involve being treated differently.

—White female

Spain

Religion—it was unusual to be Jewish

There are numerous swastikas and “live Nazis” signs. Feelings about Judaism ranged from curious to confused or dismissive. There is not a huge immigrant culture—pretty much everyone is Spanish, so people that look differently get some attention.

—White female

Spain is part of Europe. Europe is full of white people. Europe is pretty “comfortable” for white Americans in general.

One guy didn't want to speak Spanish with me—only Catalan. I'd hardly call this traumatic.

Barcelona is a modern, European city. You can pretty much do what you want. Girls do get harassed more on the street, though. Especially by crusty, snaggletoothed old men who don't know any better.

—White, ethnically Jewish male

I was a racial minority—which I am used to having attended all (mostly) white schools since elementary school. This was with a significant difference though because there are very few blacks in Spain to begin with (less than 5%). The few that there are are only in the large cities and are immigrants. As a result, I was even more conscious of “looks” that I got from Spaniards than from white Americans

[I encountered] many leers, stares, touches from Spanish men and harassment at the airport in London (immigration officer).

I felt especially by Spanish males exotified. Racially, as I said before, the country is not diverse. The few people of color there are immigrants. Immigration is currently a major/serious concern in Spain and all of Europe. Spain particularly has a large unemployment rate which adds some heat and hostility to the immigration issue. To me Spaniards seemed generally, though unadmittedly, xenophobic and racists (some professors themselves Spanish agreed).

Without a doubt, I never was so aware until now of the subtleties or nuances of racism. It doesn't have to be blatant. It can be very subtle and simply stem from an unfamiliarity with actual members from a racial group (beyond images on TV—mainly the news—images of immigrants sneaking into the country illegally, poverty and disease throughout Africa). This put a cast on my study in the country, but I still enjoyed actually travelling and studying.

All of what I've recounted about the treatment I received was true more of older (40 yrs. and up) people and not nearly as true among people my age (late teens—early twenties).

—African-American female

I was only part of a minority in the sense that people could tell I was not Spanish.

Although it's officially mostly Catholic, the majority of the Spanish are not practicing. I found people in Barcelona to be very open-minded and accepting of others. I did find that the men there are much more...um forward. Nice, friendly, but forward. A woman should know how to assert herself there.

—White female

As a male, I was given certain freedoms that weren't given to females.

Sexuality accepted in Barcelona in general, though not necessarily within specific families.

No real races besides white, so some racism—for ignorance, ditto with religion.

—White male

In Sevilla, I stuck out as a white American girl. There was nothing I could do about this—aside from maybe dyeing my blond hair! Living in the United States all my life, I have never experienced being a minority—and I thought it was actually an invaluable part of the experience. I was never treated badly—but sometimes differently. However, I would say it was worse for my Asian and African-American friends on the program, because they are even more of a rarity in Sevilla.

The discrimination I faced stemmed more from the machista sense that is still alive and well in Spain. There were a few situations in which comments were made that I would not expect or find acceptable in the US. These were harmless—but sometimes could border on annoying and upsetting.

I stuck out as an American, especially because of my blond hair and blue eyes. I was never treated badly, just differently.

Sevilla is a wonderful place—but what it lacks most and I missed most is diversity in all forms. The people there are just not exposed to the type of diversity I am used to. Racially/ethnically—everyone is Hispanic—with “their” minority being Gypsies, who are treated horribly. Gender—women are still subordinated—not as badly as other cultures—but the macho sense is still very strong. Sexuality—I did not meet one student who was homosexual or bisexual. Religion—my Jewish friend found a tiny synagogue for the Holy Days, but the Jewish population is very small. Catholicism still dominates—and there are very few other options.

Students considering studying in Sevilla should be aware of the lack of diversity. The Sevillans are open and friendly—but no one should go expecting to fit in 100%.

—White female

United Kingdom

I am Jewish, but have always lived in very Jewish areas, though still in the minority. It was somewhat more noticeable (minority status) in London but I encountered no problems. I am white, however one of my most interesting experiences was the number of times Europeans argued with me that I am not American and insisted I was from somewhere along the Mediterranean (Italy, Greece, Spain, Morocco).

In many ways similar to home. Perhaps less race issues, but similar immigrant problems. Church and state are one, but England is not actually a religious (very practicing) country.

—American, female, white, Jewish

For the first time, I was labeled from the first time I opened my mouth as a minority. Obviously, I was an American. While my school had many abroad students, I found that I hung out with only American students. This is the only thing I regret from my time abroad.

There was a definite split between American abroad students and British students. This might also have been influenced by the fact that I was there 2nd and 3rd semester.

—White female

There is not much ethnic diversity in Oxford, but being American in England is almost like being a minority.

It’s a pretty accepting place and I don’t think anyone would feel uncomfortable studying in Oxford.

—White male

[I am] East Asian [and am] also a minority in the States. [It was] much like being at Brown.

Yes, [I encountered discrimination] much in the same way as in the States. During some travel it was painfully obvious I was a foreigner.

There are some visible signs of discord between the native English and immigrant Indian community in East Oxford. Other students have told me they have experienced racism. I was often taken for a Japanese tourist.

—Korean-American male

[I was a] racial and ethnic [minority]. As a person of mixed ethnicity, this is not a first-time experience. I experienced it here, coming to Brown. Just be prepared to answer some questions about your culture/heritage, as well as some odd looks from natives.

Yes, [I encountered discrimination]. A homeless man on the subway tried to sneak through the gates with my ticket. When I saw him behind me he yelled slurs at me “stupid, heartless, foreigner”. And a man on the street made imitations of an Asian language to me.

I haven’t had this experience a lot in the US. I am from Hawaii, where I am a majority. This was new to me.

Great Britain is just as prejudiced as the US. They just want to seem “beyond it”, though, to distance themselves from the US. Women are totally kept out from sports. I played soccer which “obviously made me a lesbian” according to my Great Britain guy friends. They are expected to be feminine and fashionable and non-threatening to the male realm.

—Japanese/Chinese/Filipino/Spanish (just multi-ethnic)

I was judged more as an American by the way I spoke and how I looked rather than any other factor. London is a very international city with lots of minority groups. In some ways society there is more mixed and integrated than most parts of the US.

—“other” or “mixed”

I was part of the multicultural minority that studied at Glasgow University. The Scottish are a homogeneous people, but they are very accepting and even outwardly friendly towards foreigners. I never once felt like an outsider.

On my program, there were people from a range of backgrounds and to my knowledge, no one had any trouble.

—Greek-American



Argentina

Ethnically, being South Asian I stuck out, but it wasn't in a bad way. People didn't know where I was from and when they found out, they were curious. I was called "moracha" and "morena" which are used to refer to women of darker skin color. This was frustrating at times, but I understood that they are more descriptive terms than racial slurs. Men make quite a few comments to women, also. However, both these situations aren't reserved for foreigners.

Porteños (people from Buenos Aires) claim that race is not an issue, but there are very few people of African descent. Most African-American students had many confrontations with race, especially women because of associations with race and prostitution. There is a fairly high proportion of east Asians and indigenous peoples in this city of European descent. Overall, the city is experiencing a diversification that is making things more tolerant on the one hand and contributing to discrimination on the other hand.

—Indian-American

Brazil

I am a strong believer in "latinoamericanismo". I went to Brazil to find what similarities it shared with other Latin American countries (racially, politically, culturally). It was a great experience. I learned and it increased my pride in my heritage.

As a mulata/morena I was able to fit in easily in Brazil. Many did not believe that I was "American". So different from Brown where I have always been a racial minority. It is empowering! Because of the class differences, most people are judged by their dress style. As a tourist you'll likely pass for being upper class/rich. Everyone (racially) can pass for being Brazilian. Those who spoke Portuguese well had an easier time.

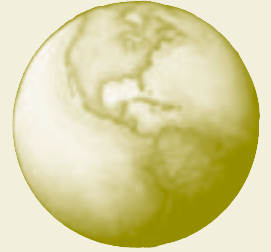
Brazil prides itself in being a diverse country. Racial tensions exist, but they are not as strong as in the US. I felt completely comfortable while I was there. Dark-skinned students might have a harder time. The only thing I can suggest is to keep your cool and communicate your frustrations.

I have a lot more pride about my ancestry. I learned the history of my people and of the world from a Third World perspective. My identity with Latin America is now stronger than ever.

—Dominican-American female



Latin America



Chile

Most Chileans are Catholic—I'm Jewish. This was not my first experience with being part of a religious minority. It was actually great—people were very interested in my religion. I even went to temple several times—in fact, some of my best Chilean friends are Jewish.

Any discrimination was based on being an American girl. Chilean men would whistle or make sexually charged comments fairly often.

Chileans are fairly racist against indigenous groups, but deny being racist. They don't seem to have problems with black people, but that's probably because there really aren't any in Chile. I did see a lot of ignorance. Examples: 1) A Korean-American girl in our group of ten was called "chinita" (little Chinese girl), 2) An African-American girl was sometimes perceived to be from Africa—people didn't believe she was from the USA.

—Caucasian, female, Jewish

I was born in Colombia and feel comfortable in most of Latin America but not Chile.

I felt very much like a minority in terms of being a woman and not being Chilean. I would say that having Latin American blood made me like other people but I didn't really feel that way.

Yes, [I felt discrimination] as a woman, as a person from the U.S., as a woman who likes to wear skirts, as a lighter skinned, lighter eyed, English speaker. If I spoke English, I would be charged more, given dirty looks, but other times I would get privileges. Jeers, shouts in the street from rude men, not just lower, working class, ALL CLASS OF MEN. Very Conservative, "Christian Democracy"—no abortion, no divorce, and almost no diversity. Women [are] inferior—make less money, treated not with respect, very Catholic.

—Hispanic and/or Latina



Costa Rica

I am not hispanic but there are many Caucasian (especially Americans) living there, and I was always surrounded by 20 other American students.

As a female athlete, it was not as accepted to participate in games with guys, etc. However, because I had 2 or 3 other female athletes, together we just jumped in and it wasn't so much of an issue. Ticos are generally very accepting and open minded.

Right now, there is a lot of hostility towards Nicaraguans, who Ticos perceive as coming in and taking jobs, being a violent people, etc. There is certainly a history of discrimination towards Blacks (Caribbean and African workers were brought in as slaves to build railroads) were not considered citizens until the 50's (allowed to vote, travel to capitol).

—white female

I studied in a country with a predominately Hispanic origin and I am a black female. Although there are blacks in Costa Rica, they are not as highly visible as I expected. The experience was a bit different at first, but I got used to it. Costa Rican society is very comfortable with identifying others by appearance, including race. Therefore, I often heard others refer to me as “negrita”. At first, I was shocked but then I realized that it is a part of their culture.

Overall, I think that people were more surprised that I was black and from the U.S., because they probably assumed that I was from Costa Rica.

Also, Costa Rican society is full of “machismo”. American women are subject to a lot of cat calls and comments by men.

I noticed that many of the host mothers were “stay at home” moms and that the men in the family are waited on hand and foot. Costa Rica is a very Catholic society—religion is in the forefront. Also, they have a very unhealthy prejudice against Nicaraguans.

—African-American female

Cuba

I was part of a minority of North Americans, a tiny minority of South Asian-looking women and a tinier minority of Hindus.

No overt racial discrimination. Just comments, sometimes ignorant or racist comments about my ethnic background, were made, but nothing that truly affected my lifestyle there or caused me severe inconvenience, hurt, or discomfort.

My ethnicity was often a topic for either positive comments (appreciation), curiosity, or racial slurs, I was called everything from Brazilian to Arabic to Cuban (I'm Indian). Being a female is worse than in any where else I have been to, since you're constantly sexually harassed and objectified and propositioned or assumed to be a prostitute. Though not always negative, being a female there requires resilience, confidence and strength. Being an American understandably creates a power hierarchy based on money between you and your Cuban friends. You have to be careful that you are being valued for you, not your money or citizenship. Cuban people while progressive in many ways, are very machista. Women are totally ojectified and harassed and it is accepted and excused even by women. But most of the foreign women I've met can't get used to this even after years immersed in the culture. This won't destroy your experience, but you have to adapt yourself to ignore or deal with it. Most people are not racist, while they have little exposure to foreign people especially East and South Asians, Arabs.

At times I felt that I totally blended in there, a feeling I never get in North American culture. At others, I felt like I was a walking freak show down the street that was cat called every 5 seconds. I think I just sort of realized how much my appearance intrigues, confuses, or calls people's attention even though I never think much about it at home.

—South Asian American female



As an ASIAN-American wanting to study in Latin-America I was very concerned about how I would be received. I had never learned in any of my Latin-American Studies classes about how Asians fit into any social structure.

Being one of two Asian women in the whole country of Cuba was HARD. HUGE culture shock issues. Immediately expect calls of “China!” ranging from affectionate to blatantly derisive (karate chops, nasal sounds, bows). Basically: Any racism of similar varieties you have experienced in the U.S., amplified by about 200. It is important to recognize the cultural difference (oftentimes it is motivated by ignorance/inexposure to the world—also, it is more accepted to describe people as “gorda” or “china” whereas in the US it is “un-pc”). However, I found it difficult to find support among both my Cuban friends (who had no concept of what I was experiencing) or my U.S. friends who just didn’t understand how alienating it was to have NO ONE look like me, and having that fact constantly pointed out. It was not the first time I have been treated this way—after all, I live in the US!!—but it is definitely hard to come to terms with some of the cultural differences such as the instant references to my race.

Women: expect cat calls, shouts, constant come-ons. ESPECIALLY in a poor country like Cuba. Looking foreign and being female = chance for Cuban men to have a “sugar-daddy”(or a “yuma”). Seems difficult for men and women to just be friends.

We must understand the power privilege that comes with being from the US. Especially in Cuba with such a delicate US-Cuba relationship, this was huge. Some will be curious, some will speak to you differently with the need to “represent” their country.

Religion: Constantly amazed me to hear people freely saying they didn’t believe in God!! There are church-goers, but I did not once meet a religious person who felt ashamed of their religion.

Sexuality: In Havana, there is a fairly good size population of queers. Many prominent “gay” places will have a lot of prostitutes because again, in a poor country with tourists, this happens.

Race: All the black students I met told me they felt so comfortable in Cuba, as they could “pass” and people treated them as Cubans, etc. I think to hang in Cuba and not look Cuban, it is VERY important to keep an open-mind and be prepared to deal with culture shock.

To any students interested in visiting a country where they will be a racial minority: Ask those OF YOUR OWN RACE who have been to that country how their experiences were!! I naively took to heart the words of a white woman—white man with whom I discussed race/Cuba before going: “There didn’t seem to be much racism there” and “the Asians blend in with the rest of the population”. These

statements were so wrong. I guess I can’t blame them; obviously they were only speaking from their own experiences—but it is so important to get perspectives from those closer to your own.

—Korean-American female

Cuba and Nicaragua

I was a minority in terms of race and ethnicity. As a white North American, I definitely stuck out, more so in Nicaragua. I sometimes received preferential treatment as a result of being a rich foreigner.

Never in my life have I felt so ‘gendered’ as I did in Latin America. Men always making comments on the streets and in interpersonal interactions.

Managua: race—very predominately mestizo...both black and white students in my group stuck out. Women need to be prepared for lots of street harassment. I was out as a queer to very few Nicaraguans and did not feel comfortable being honest about that with my host family or in general. You better be comfortable with Catholicism!

Cuba: As a foreigner/North American one sticks out and is a target for Cubans who want to make some money. Gender dynamics are still very polarized, but I felt more comfortable reacting to harassment. There is a thriving queer scene in Havana, but I still didn’t feel comfortable being out to people outside of that scene.

I realized some ethno-centric assumptions I have about gender as well—having been taught that when a man comments to you on the street he is sexually objectifying you and exerting his power over you, etc., etc., didn’t fit into this context where it is often considered to be a compliment...

Basically, I had to realize that I tend to impose my understanding of things on different contexts and that I can’t do that always.

—White woman

Mexico

It was definitely interesting to be stared [at] and always “stick out” but maybe that made me appreciate more that my Mexican friends treated me for who I was, not my color. Some men would think I was dumb or slutty because I was American. I dealt with it by having a strong sense of who I truly was and trying to demonstrate my real self—my intelligence and morality to all my friends.

Almost everyone is Catholic—but no one really had a problem with the fact that I wasn’t. Women are definitely treated with less respect in an academic and job sense which was

hard for me, but they are also idolized as mothers and girlfriends. It's very different. Race relations—the whiter you are the more beautiful you are.

—White female

My decision to study in Mexico was definitely based in part on my heritage. I'm third generation chicana, but since my family immigrated to the U.S., my relatives, including my parents have consistently returned to Mexico to study. It's a way to polish our Spanish, visit relatives, and keep in contact with the Mexican culture. Though I do not identify as Mexican, it is a crucial part of my family history and traditions that we still maintain.

Though in the U.S. I'm a sexual minority, in Mexico it felt all the more extreme due to the invisibility of queer life. I think having studied in a very conservative private university, located in the most religious state in Mexico, exacerbated the situation. Still, I did manage to enjoy my stay. It's good to leave the Brown queer-friendly bubble, because it helps keep an LGBT person from being complacent.

On the flip side, it was an incredible experience to be surrounded by people who were the same color as me (for the most part). I felt like I had power.

Like I said, the university was very conservative and wealthy. I heard people put down indigenous Mexicans and homosexuals a lot. Most of the time I didn't speak up, because I was trying to hide myself. Also, I felt it was important to use my time in Mexico to really observe and listen, rather than impose. I had a Mexican professor who told our class of exchange students that Mexicans who immigrated to the U.S. were the garbage of society.

I feel that [it] is very important to differentiate between what I experienced in and out of the university. There were two different countries within Mexico: UDLA the wealthy university and the rest of Mexico. The university was extremely sheltered, almost high school life. The outside seemed more varied. My experience obliterated any inclination I might have to view a Mexican as a singular

stereotypical type character. There is a tremendous amount of diversity in Mexico.

I spent a lot of my time in Mexico hiding my sexuality. That made making friends more easy, but my relationships could only grow so much because I was forever hiding an elemental part of myself. Towards the end of my stay I started coming out to a very select group of friends (like 3 students). It turned out that they were very supportive and even took me to a gay bar behind the university. I was disappointed that I let myself be so scared for so long, but that's all retrospective. There were a lot of very homophobic people, including my own suitemates. That said being out is a gamble. You're likely to encounter hostility, but your friendships will be genuine.

—Chicana queer woman

I am Puerto Rican, but I wanted to take the opportunity to explore another Spanish-speaking country to compare and contrast cultures.

I am used to being part of a minority. The jist of being a minority is having that extra pressure that your actions represent your group so you tend to be more conservative in a sense. My dark skin and really curly hair made Mexicans think I am black. They figured I would fulfill the stereotypes of being black.

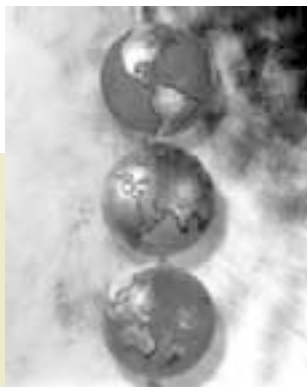
—Puerto Rican female

Nicaragua

[I was a minority] racially, Ethnically, Linguistically, Sexually. Not the first time for me, but always difficult and healthy in the long run. You just want to be anonymous after a while.

Male aggression is explicit, aggressive and broadly accepted. Good luck if you are queer, female, and white. Or any of the above categories. I stood out and often stood alone.

—White female and queer



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