Canadian Student Mobility and the Experience of National Identity Abroad

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Abstract

Globalization, as a process and a phenomenon, is impacting societies around the world in both subtle and tangible ways. National borders are being transcended, blurred and, some contend, increasingly irrelevant. As key players in nation-building, governments and higher education institutions are responding to globalization using a variety of coping mechanisms. In Canada, foreign policy may be viewed as one of the ways in which the federal government attempts to help define, protect and project the concept of Canadian national identity. Meanwhile, Canadian universities are adapting to the challenges which accompany globalization by implementing internationalization strategies. One traditional, yet still-relevant approach is through the provision of student mobility opportunities which enable Canadians to participate in overseas study. While the motivation on the part of students who take part in such endeavours is often for personal and, ultimately, professional gain, they inevitably assume a role in public diplomacy abroad. Consequently, there is an intersection between foreign policy and the practice of student mobility.

This thesis aims to explore the role that national identity plays in the international mobility of Canadian students, and to compare it with the federal government’s promotion of Canadian values and identity abroad. The research conducted involved the collection of secondary data through a literature review, and primary data obtained through qualitative interviews. The main findings reveal that study participants experienced a heightened awareness of their national identity while they were abroad. The scrutiny and attention students received based on their citizenship, along with exposure to new perspectives and the increased salience of their national identity, required students to discuss, describe and explore what it means to be Canadian. While the International Policy Statement acknowledges the contribution by these students to public diplomacy overseas, the federal government is neglecting to fully capitalize on this opportunity. The dearth of comprehensive, federally-funded scholarships represents a loss of investment in Canadian public diplomacy overseas, and a loss of opportunity for those Canadian students unable to afford to study abroad experiences.
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“The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land,”
~ G.K. Chesterton

1.0 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the key components of the research conducted for this thesis. It introduces the topic of Canadian student mobility and national identity, and lists the research questions used for this study. Background concerning the selection and relevance of issues is highlighted, and an overview of the methodology is presented.

Introduction to the Topic

The frequency of interaction and methods of communication between inhabitants of different nations and cultures have increased as the flow of people, goods and services across borders has surged, and telecommunications services such as the Internet have become more widely available. This phenomenon, referred to as globalization, has been defined in many ways, by scholars from a variety of fields. Considered to be the “leitmotif of our age”, globalization has provoked great debate concerning the magnitude of its perceived advantages and disadvantages (Held and McGrew 2000, 1). Irrefutably, it is affecting the institutions, organizations and economies of nations. Some critics claim that this impact is contributing to the destruction of national identity, while other experts argue that globalization actually compels nations to re-affirm their identity.

Canada is a country where national identity is paramount, yet enigmatic. While it has been perpetually difficult to define, Canadians have sought to build and protect their interpretation of it. Foreign policy may be viewed as providing a framework through which the government articulates and shapes a collective vision of the country. Canada’s most recent (2005) International Policy Statement (IPS), *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, offers some insight into how Canada, as a nation, perceives itself both at home and abroad. As former Prime Minister Paul Martin explains in his introduction to the IPS,
“Foreign policy is how a nation best expresses itself to the world” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, Foreword). As evidenced by its aspirations of projecting “Canada’s values and interests into the world”, one of the messages the IPS attempts to deliver is that Canada is a sovereign nation with a strong sense of global responsibility (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, Foreword).

This focus emerges repeatedly throughout the former Liberal government’s political parlance, and is often cited in contexts where higher education is concerned. At a 2002 University of Toronto symposium, entitled “Creating Knowledge, Strengthening Nations: The Changing Role of Higher Education”, Canada’s former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bill Graham, claimed that: “Education is one of the best means by which we can project Canadian values and our unique experience, and promote the Canadian model of society” (Graham 2002). This, along with the IPS statement: “the future belongs to knowledge-based economies, and steps are being taken now by government and the private and academic sectors to make sure Canada is equipped to benefit” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, Foreword) emphasize the growing importance of higher education (HE) in Canada.

HE institutions (colleges and universities) are actively responding to the effects of globalization by implementing a variety of policies and practices aimed to internationalize their campuses and their programs. Of particular relevance to this thesis are strategies which involve academic mobility. According to UNESCO:

“Academic Mobility implies a period of study, teaching and/or research in a country other than a student's or academic staff member's country of residence (‘the home country’). This period is of limited duration, and it is envisaged that the student or staff member return to his or her home country upon completion of the designated period” (UNESCO 2001).

Mobility strategies are realized in a number of ways, which include bilateral, regional and international programs (Knight 1999, 230), and may be executed through “short term academic tourism to a full year of interacting in another language, culture, and academic and work environment” (Vertesi 1999, 137). In the context of this paper, student mobility
will refer to academic exchanges which have enabled Canadians to study for a period of time at a university abroad.

Student mobility is a catalyst for “brain circulation” which has, mainly for economic reasons, received a great deal of consideration. Often overlooked is the “cultural circulation” that occurs through this process. University campuses are therefore arenas for the exchange not only of academic knowledge, but also of culture and values. As such, the emphasis by the federal government on student mobility as a vehicle through which to export Canadian values and promote Canada overseas through public and cultural diplomacy is pertinent, and worthy of further exploration.

Focus and Rationale for the Study

Scholarly research concerning student mobility has focused largely on internationalization policies at the institutional and governmental levels, with important forays into curricular issues, quality assurance and partnership building in education and research (Van Vught et al. 2002, 104). Less visible throughout these studies are qualitative examinations of, for example, the impact of study abroad on participants. However, the narratives that individuals share about their experiences overseas have the potential to be important sources of empirical information. Essentially, by spending time abroad, students maintain “roots” in one location, but “branch” out by living and interacting with locals in another. This experience is typically thought-provoking and challenges the participants to contemplate different aspects of their lives, including their sense of national identity. Direct contact with the “other”, through communication with host nationals and fellow foreigners, provides a unique forum for re-visiting their perceptions of what it means to be “Canadian”.

Recent studies by Sarah Steegar (2005), Culture(s) of Mobility: New Global Nomadism and the Influence of International Education, and Nadine Dolby (2005), Globalisation, Identity and Nation: Australian and American Undergraduates Abroad, reflect the usefulness of taking into account international academic experience and juxtaposing it
with the concepts of national identity and culture. In consulting with returned exchange students, it is possible to consider the role that national identity played in their overseas experiences. Consequently, strong rationale exists for using a qualitative approach to this study: the impact of an international experience is not something that can be easily quantified. Details concerning the rationales for the use of a qualitative approach will be described in Chapter Two.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

University students, with their diverse backgrounds, interests, abilities and demonstrated academic aptitudes, represent a vibrant cross-section of Canada’s population. As a result, those who take part in study abroad programs have great potential to be enthusiastic and influential participants in public diplomacy overseas.

The purpose of this data-driven study is to explore the role that national identity plays in the international mobility of Canadian students, and to compare it with the federal government’s promotion of Canadian values and identity abroad. This will be achieved by considering the following questions:

1. How is national identity represented in the International Policy Statement (IPS) discourse of the federal government?

2. How does this compare with the practical ways in which Canadian students experienced their national identity while abroad?
2.0 Research Methodology

The abovementioned questions will be explored through a two-fold and qualitative approach. Secondary research in the form of a literature review will be conducted to better appreciate relevant concepts within a Canadian-specific context. Foreign policy, national identity, internationalization processes at universities and student mobility will be discussed. These will inform the primary research process, through which empirical data will be accumulated during interviews. Action theory, including the notions of *Verstehen* and symbolic interactionism, will be introduced as a means of illuminating the data.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

This project has been designed as an exploratory study. According to Martin Terre Blanche and Kevin Durrheim (2002, 40), such an approach necessitates enquiry that is conducted in an open manner, in which the researcher “makes a series of particular observations, and attempts to patch these together to form more general but speculative hypotheses”. Michael Quinn Patton (1990, 12) offers insight about the difference between basic academic research and applied research by explaining that basic research contributes to theory and provides explanations, while applied research works to “inform action, enhance decision making, and apply knowledge to solve human and societal problems”. The latter has been used for this project.

In general, qualitative research is closely associated with the attempt to understand and interpret how people create and respond to the world and its challenges. Many approaches are used in qualitative inquiry, including techniques that are typically non-linear in design (Glesne 2006, 4; Neuman 2000, 122). One term associated with qualitative research is “*bricolage*”, which references a crafting technique involving the coordination and manipulation of various materials and methods with the purpose of obtaining detailed results (Neuman 2000, 147). A similar approach has been applied to the research conducted here.
**Mode of Qualitative Research: Case study**

Essentially, this study straddles Canada’s uncommon educational structure. Whereas many countries have national-level education policies, in Canada, the provinces assume responsibility for education (Knight 1999, 213; CICIC 2004). The inclusion, in this study, of the provincial dimension, would have required a broader examination and may therefore have resulted in a more superficial project. Hence, a single “instrumental case study” (Creswell 1998, 62) was determined as the preferable way through which to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the issues of student mobility and national identity (Glesne 2006, 13). This process allowed a concentrated focus on individual students and provided depth through the inclusion of information sources such as library research, a literature review, and document analysis.

At the outset of this research project, it was necessary to consider the potential drawbacks associated with a single case study approach. One of the main concerns was that it would not be cross-checked with other cases, thereby increasing the opportunity for possible misrepresentation and restricting the prospect of generalizing the findings (Bell 2005, 11). Despite these trepidations, an in-depth method was used to directly access the core issues. It was determined that this particular case does fit into the “big picture”, in the sense that the conclusions it provides may be of use, and interest to those outside of the institution where the study was conducted.

**Interviews**

In order to facilitate an environment conducive to open conversation, and despite the risk of bias due to the subjectivity of the technique (Bell 2005, 157), semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were held. A list of questions was developed to give structure to the interviews (see Appendix A). One benefit of this approach was that it was possible to engage in genuine dialogue with the students, allowing them to elaborate on their ideas and impressions, while also ensuring that specific themes were explored during the interview process. The eleven interviewees were students in their final year of a four year...
Bachelor’s degree program. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The interviewees were selected at random, based on their availability. All were recently returned exchange students, and either Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada. The response to the call for volunteers was great, and several prospective interviewees were turned away, simply because the required number of eleven interviews had been met. This enthusiasm to participate suggests that, aside from a desire to share accounts of their overseas experiences, returned exchange students have a genuine interest in contributing to the generation of new research relating to student mobility. This indicates exciting potential for further research.

**Saturation**

Saturation defines the point when data has been adequately assessed. It is achieved when the researcher concludes that no additional information will obtained from the material (Blanche and Durrheim 2002, 380; Morse, 1995 as cited in Charmaz 2005, 527) and is realized when the research questions have been answered and the data has been fully represented. Saturation “refers to the condition of an interpretive account where the account is richly fed by the material that has been collected, at least to the point where the researcher can intuitively say: ‘I have thoroughly explored the data and have acquired a satisfactory sense of what is going on’” (Blanche and Durrheim 2002, 422). Determining when this point has been reached requires careful consideration on the part of the researcher.

Kathy Charmaz (2005) suggests that there are four elements to data saturation. These include “credibility”, “originality”, “resonance”, and “usefulness”. Credibility requires the researcher to gain thorough knowledge of the subject being studied, and is based on the “the range, number and depth of observations” in the research. In the context of this thesis, the exploration of several interrelated topics was conducted through a literature review. The interviews, which reflect the experiences of students from one (English language) Canadian university, were held in person and allowed for actual conversations to take place, thereby providing depth and greater knowledge of the topic. Originality
necessitates an explanation of how the study challenges or provides further exploration of already-existing notions and procedures. As a topic, there is demonstrated interest in the importance of, and connection between, national identity and student mobility. Again, the literature review and the findings from the interviews support this element. Resonance is demonstrated by interconnectivity between the data, larger collectivities and individuals. Moreover, resonance is manifested in the reality of whether or not the interpretations provided actually offer new insight to readers. Given the demographic (university students) and nationalities (Canadian) of the interviewees, the findings will be of particular interest to stakeholders in higher education and government. Finally, usefulness is successfully achieved if the researcher draws conclusions that will, ideally, inspire additional research. The first two elements listed will, in effect, contribute to the last two elements (ibid, 528).

Validity

Validity was paramount to the entire research process. Max Weber (1864-1920) was an early sociological theorist who championed the notion that sociology should be ‘value free’, implying that personal perspective about what is considered “good” or “right” ought not to influence the research conducted. Weber’s emphasis on objectivity and neutrality was meant to eliminate the bias that occurs when personal values influence research (Henslin 1997, 15). This is a challenge particular to qualitative inquiry, where the researcher himself or herself is “the instrument of data collection and the center of the analytic process” (Patton 1990, 461), meaning that the very credibility of the inquiry depends on the credibility of the researcher. To this end, details about the researcher ought to be included (Patton 1990, 472), and it must be noted that this study has been conducted by a dual citizen (Canadian/American) who has studied overseas a number of times. These experiences were gained through an academic exchange program, an internship, and a full degree program. The consequences of her own national identity(ies) became increasingly relevant as events such as September 11th, 2001, and the war in Iraq occurred. Later, a professional role which involved the support of domestic and
international students prior to their overseas studies, alerted her to the lack of data available on the topic of national identity in conjunction with student mobility.

Effort has been made to approach and examine the material for this thesis from a critical and strictly impartial perspective. Objectivity has a history of being the “sine qua non of the scientific method”, whereas subjectivity suggests that opinion, intuition, and impression ultimately weaken any research (Patton 1990, 479). This thesis has been developed with an aim of pragmatic validation; that it will be relevant and useful to those who read it, thereby engaging their perspective (Patton 1990, 485). It has incorporated methodological triangulation by drawing from different sources including published research, interviews and document analysis (Blanche and Durrheim 2002, 431).

Given the small sample size, external validity was a concern (Patton 1990, 486). However, the population examined in this study was not unusual, in the sense that, like thousands of Canadians, the students were enrolled in the final year of a four year Bachelor’s degree, at a mid-sized, Ontario, English-language university. Students were drawn from two faculties, with almost an equal number of students from each. The interviews were conducted by one researcher which, as Bell (2005, 166) warns, presents the risk that bias will not be detected. It was crucial to remain objective during the interviews, while at the same time ensuring that the interviewees felt enough at ease to share their thoughts in an open manner. The decision made by the interviewer to provide “self-disclosure” by revealing personal experience with study abroad, and a connection to their institution as an alumna, was based on the understanding that it was an appropriate way to help the interviewees feel more comfortable during the interview.

The selection of the interviewees occurred through their response to posted signs around campus and an email that had been forwarded on behalf of the researcher by their respective international offices. Interviews were arranged on a first-come basis, and were dependent on availability. Ultimately, there was adequate representation of gender (six males and five females), and faculties (five students from Arts & Science and six from Commerce). The duration of their time abroad varied. While some had participated in an
exchange for a full academic year, others went for one semester. These issues were taken into account during the analysis of the empirical material. The interviews were conducted on campus, in an empty office (subject to its availability), and in an unused corridor. There were no interruptions and each interview lasted for thirty minutes. The interviews were transcribed, and saved to both hard drive and USB.

Finally, confidentiality was upheld throughout this study. Before each interview took place, interviewees were given an information sheet about the research being conducted. If they consented, they were asked to sign a release form, and to provide a fictitious name to protect their identity. Their permission was sought for follow-up contact in the instance that additional questions were deemed necessary.

Challenges and Limitations

Canada is a vast land, stretching over 7,000 km. It has ten provinces, three territories and two official languages (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006). From a political perspective, it is a highly decentred federation (Madison et al. 2000, 15). In Canada, the federal government is responsible for foreign policy and citizenship, while the provincial governments are in charge of education (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2005).

For practical reasons, such as a lack of time and financial resources, it was not feasible to conduct interviews for a comparative study of returned exchange students from universities across Canada. Instead, and after considerable deliberation, a case study of students from one institution was determined to be a preferable alternative. Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario served as an appropriate choice, not only for convenience and the access to returned exchange students (potential interviewees) that it offered, but also because it is a mid-sized institution. It is, however, an English language university, and it must therefore be emphasized that the students who were interviewed represent the perspective of English (“Anglo”) Canadian national identity. The notion of “Canadian national identity” would likely be different if this study were conducted with participants from Quebec.
Access to higher education is still not universal in Canada. In 2005, according to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), there were more than 806,000 full-time university students in Canada (AUCC 2006). The rate of participation of university students in “short-term for-credit international education opportunities” as of 2003 was extremely low, at less than 1% (AUCC 2005, 4). It may therefore be assumed that the attitudes and views expressed in the interviews reflect those of a privileged demographic of Canada’s population.

Logistical challenges were inevitable, given the realities of undergraduate student life. Many interviewees were preparing for mid-term exams and their upcoming reading break, and were facing rapidly approaching deadlines which required a firm adherence to the half hour interview time allotment. In addition, the interviewees were often effusive in the descriptions they used of their experiences abroad, resulting in a tendency for digression on their part. During those times, it was necessary for the interviewer to redirect their attention to the questions at hand.
3.0 Literature Review

The aim of a literature review is to establish the assumptions behind the research questions, to demonstrate a familiarity with related research, and to identify research gaps (Marshall and Rossman 1989, 24). The following review was based on this objective, as well as with the goal of contextualizing the research topic and key concepts.

Globalization and Internationalization in Higher Education

The impact of globalization offers a spectrum of research possibilities. Hyperglobalists, sceptics and transformationalists respectively embrace the adoption of, reject the reality of, or champion the changes caused by, globalization (Bilton et al. 2002, 52). Jane Knight has suggested that the ways in which nations are affected by globalization differ. Since each country has its unique history, traditions, culture and priorities, it reacts according to these. Knight contends that the internationalization of higher education is one way for a nation to respond to globalization while preserving its individuality (Knight 1997, as cited in Knight 1999, 204). Knight and Hans de Wit offer the following definition of internationalization through the International Association of Universities (IAU) website: “the process of integrating an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the goals, functions (teaching/learning, research, services) and delivery of higher education” (IAU 2006). Marijke van der Wende (2002: 50) also proposes that internationalization be seen as a response to globalization through cooperation, with the ultimate purpose of increasing competitiveness.

Knight has organized the rationales for internationalization into four groups: economic, political, social-cultural and academic (Knight and de Wit, 1995 cited in Knight 1999, 205). The two considered as most essential today are the economic and academic rationales. International competitiveness is driving the agenda for the economic rationale, which is important at both the institutional and national levels. The academic rationale focuses on integrating internationalization into teaching and learning issues (Knight 1999, 236). The political and social-cultural rationales, while still relevant, are generally
perceived as being less important in the modern context. Traditionally, the political rationale was considered as a foreign policy tool, because educational and scientific exchanges were viewed as valuable ways through which to strengthen diplomatic relations (ibid 206). The social-cultural rationale is currently exhibited by some countries as a means to preserve culture, while others see it as an opportunity to promote their culture. This thesis addresses the last two rationales, since they figure prominently in both Canada’s IPS, and in the experiences that students have while abroad.

**Canadian Foreign Policy**

It has been observed that the increasing permeability of national borders has resulted in “iconic representations” being used as “markers of national identity” (Taras 1997, 33). Canadian foreign policy may be viewed as one of these markers. While often employed as a tool for marketing Canada abroad, foreign policy is also worth considering for how it assists a national audience in recognizing itself, since a certain degree of re-configuring and re-distributing of national identity occurs through foreign policy.

Canadian foreign policy has the obvious purpose of projecting abroad a carefully constructed representation of Canada. Maria Teresa Gutiérrez-Haces (2003, 232) contends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) has been heavily involved in the promotion of Canadian Studies programmes and Canadian culture and, in doing so, has contributed significantly to the depiction of Canadian identity. She explains this as “reinforcing from the outside, the image and identity existing in Canada.” Her research considers the association between the development of Canadian foreign policy and the federal government’s attempts to build a pan-Canadian identity based primarily on the international endorsement of universal values (Gutiérrez-Haces 2003, 233). Attributing the timing of this particular emphasis to the “Trudeau era” (in reference to former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau), Gutiérrez-Haces suggests that this was when the promotion of language and human values in Canada’s foreign policy were identified officially as “Canadian values” in foreign policy. These values helped create an identity which, ultimately, received more support within Canada. Quoting
Costas Melakopides, Gutiérrez-Haces suggests that “Canadian foreign policy may, therefore, provide an indirect but compelling answer to the perennial question of Canada’s ‘identity’. If Canada is perceived by non-Canadians as one of the most honourable, enlightened, and civilized international actors, this is due to the record and the motives of Canadian foreign policy” (Melakopides 1998 as cited in Gutiérrez-Haces 2003, 239). As a tangible tool through which specific “Canadian values” are advanced, foreign policy also succeeds in recycling this image domestically (Gutiérrez-Haces 2003, 239).

To build on this premise, it may be argued that Canadian students play a significant role in public diplomacy abroad. As citizens, they represent (either overtly or inadvertently) their country, simply by being abroad. Ironically, as seen in the empirical results of this study, it is often during their time away that students first encounter perceptions held by other nations about Canada. These perceptions may have been formed, or at least influenced, through foreign policy. The manner in which students encounter, absorb and deal with these perceptions could, ultimately, impact their sense of what it means to be Canadian, both abroad and at home, and ultimately, if and how they will apply this knowledge.

While the purpose of this thesis is not to examine the development of foreign policy, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the 2005 International Policy Statement (IPS) was created with input from the Canadian public. This was obtained through a “Dialogue on Foreign Policy”, led by former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bill Graham. The Dialogue Paper reviewed major developments since the foreign policy statement of 1995, by outlining what had previously been termed the three “pillars” of security, prosperity and values, and culture, and using these as the starting point for discussion. Consultations were held through a variety of forums, including roundtable discussions and meetings, both in-person and through online discussion (Graham 2003, 3). One of the observations noted by Graham was “the strong desire among Canadians to make our country better known abroad in all of its diversity, opportunity and expertise: through educational and cultural channels, through trade promotion and diplomatic outreach, and
through the concrete achievements of a reinvigorated foreign agenda” (Graham 2003, 2). He recognizes the public support by Canadians for “The arts and public broadcasting, along with academic, youth, student and other ‘people-to-people’ exchanges as important vehicles for promoting Canada to the world and bringing the world to Canadians” (Graham 2003, 18). In this thesis, the IPS Overview will be examined as a stand-alone document, for the identification of ways in which Canadian identity is represented.

**National Identity**

In order to better appreciate the role of national identity in an overseas experience, it is first necessary to establish the importance of identity itself. At its essence, identity is how people perceive themselves and what is important to them. Some personal attributes are deemed as integral and defining, such as gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, political views, work, etc. Many sociologists argue that there are two connected forms of identity, the social identity and the self-identity. The social identity includes certain “markers” which demonstrate who a person is, and which connect that person to others with the same attributes (Giddens et al. 2006, 73). The self-identity is supported by symbolic interactionists, and is how people demonstrate their individuality. It is the process through which a unique sense of self is developed, by interacting with the “outside world” (Giddens et al. 2006, 76).

Neil Bissoondath (2000, 28) is an author from Canada who writes about themes of migration and dislocation. He also contends that individuals maintain two identities: the private and the public. He likens the “private” identity to a “crystal mosaic of constantly shifting pieces”, and suggests that it is a process of reconfiguration and evolution, through which circumstance, experience, information gained and belief proven (or disproven) form identity. “Public” identity, he explains, is a “wilful construct shaped through collective societal attitudes and structures, and, on a shallower level, through flags, anthems, speeches meant to stir rather than inform”. His argument is that “public” identity is about shared reference, “the common ground of the ‘We’ ”. This public identity is aroused, for example, when a person hears their national anthem after
witnessing an athletic victory, or encounters someone overseas from their homeland and feels that person’s “strangeness” disappear because of their shared, national frame of reference. Bissoondath’s interpretation, although literary and descriptive, is relevant when applied to students who participate in international academic exchanges. Obviously, the challenges and circumstances they experience have an impact on their private identities, while also requiring them to consider their public collective identity, as “Canadians”.

David Taras (1997, 24), however, argues against the contention of a dichotomy between social and individual identities. He suggests that these should instead be viewed as “entangled” since individual identity involves “thinking with social tools and acting in social ways, whether reflexively or unreflexively”. National identity, however “has remained rather immune from these explorations” (ibid 24), prompting researchers to reconsider the role national identity plays in a world that, due to globalization, is becoming increasingly “smaller”.

The world consists of a collection of nations which have divided up its surface through the creation of borders. Referring to these as “lines of inclusion and exclusion”, Karen Cerulo (1995: 73) explains that borders have an impact on “our perceptions of who we are, who we are not, and the appropriate ways in which to express those distinctions.” Taras (1997, 24) also refers to this process as a “drawing of boundaries between the self and ‘other’”, and is applicable when citizens of one country enter another, crossing these boundaries and exposing themselves to perceptions and scrutiny by others based almost entirely on their nationality. It has been argued that the “social and actual mobility, the fragmentation of the classes, the growing importance of consumption and the rise of ‘identity politics’” have resulted in a “decentring” of identity (ibid 27). Dubbed the “declinist” argument, its supporters are convinced that the relevance of national identity is fading. Taras disagrees, noting that “any sense of uncertainty requires that terra firma be sought, and national identity provides an already existing point of anchorage” (ibid 28). The “national” thereby serves as a flexible framework, which supports citizens through geographical, historical, legal, political and institutional means, allowing several
identifications both within and outside the country (ibid 29). In this view, national identity essentially prevails over other types of identity, yet simultaneously allows them to co-exist. Taras stresses this point by citing Calhoun’s assertion that “national identity acts as a ‘trump card in the game of identity’” (ibid 46). This contention serves as a foundation for the exploration of national identity in a Canadian context.

**Canadian National Identity**

Canada presents a complex case where national identity is concerned. For years, Canadians have struggled with what it means to be “Canadian”. Philip Resnick (2005, 11) calls this constant fixation the “identity game”, which he likens to a version of “To be or not to be”. Canadians have maintained certain similarities with the United States and European countries in, for example, their view of the world. Yet, throughout the evolution of their national identity, Canadians have established a distinctive perspective and have developed ways of behaving which are specific to their own history and culture (Schafer 1995, 51).

One hallmark of Canada is the notion of, and respect for, pluralism (Madison et al. 2000, 15). According to the Oxford English dictionary (2002), pluralism is “the existence or toleration in society of a number of groups that belong to different races or have different political or religious beliefs”. Pluralism has an “institutionalised place, in the cultural politics of national identity in Canada” (Mackey 1999, 2). The development of the relationship between the Francophone, Anglophone and First Nations communities has featured prominently in Canada’s history. This, in conjunction with the more recent influx and settlement of immigrants from all over the world, has resulted in Canada’s current and complex demographic, which is often referred to as a “cultural mosaic”.

The need for the accommodation of many differences has been a key principle throughout Canadian history. This accommodation is, in theory, demonstrated through “tolerance, restraint and mutual respect” (Madison et al. 2000, 15). Pluralism is a philosophical position, and “pluralists (...) reject a comprehensive good and recognize
the diversity of goods. Such a belief gives depth to the mosaic; it makes philosophical pluralism an attractive, although still ultimately unsatisfactory, justification of Canadian nationhood” (Laselva 1996, 166). Along with pluralism, “multiculturalism” holds a vital role in Canada. As an official policy, multiculturalism was adopted in 1971, making Canada the first country in the world to take such an initiative (Canadian Heritage 2004). However, the constant consideration and negotiation of difference and distinction required by such initiatives may have contributed to the difficulty of defining Canadian national identity (Laselva 1996, 170).

It should be recognized that, despite this emphasis on pluralism, there is a practice of identifying English Canada as epitomizing the “Canadian” national identity, thereby excluding the French Canadian population (Burgess 2006, 104). These invisible internal borders within Canada also contribute to the challenge of articulating a well-defined vision of the country. Ultimately, its national borders are what have helped Canadians to recognize and often agree about what they are not. These borders help to illustrate that Canada is “different” from its closest neighbour, the United States (Angus 1997, 134). This identification of the “other”, manifested by the United States, serves as a cornerstone in the construction of Canada’s national identity (Lanfant et al. 1995, 7).

Canada’s nation-building process has involved frequent comparisons with the United States, thus designating it the proverbial “other” (Mackey 1999, 145). Clearly, Canadians have been exposed to, and have adopted many American cultural exports. Examples of these early effects of globalization include the numerous broadcasts of American television programs and the arrival of American restaurant franchises and retail stores. Nevertheless, Canada has attempted to “protect” certain aspects of its culture from American influence in particular. The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) was introduced by Parliament in 1968. Its mandate is “to ensure that programming in the Canadian broadcasting system reflects Canadian creativity and talent, our linguistic duality, our multicultural diversity, the special place of aboriginal people within our society and our social values” (CRTC
This initiative demonstrates a dedication to protecting and preserving Canadian culture.

Particular concern about Canadian national identity has been raised over agreements which have resulted from globalization, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA ignited fierce debate within Canada about the risk of becoming increasingly “American”. Some Canadians viewed this agreement, signed by the three North American countries in 1992, as an indication that Canada was sacrificing its identity solely for economic gain. However, it has been recently demonstrated by Michael Adams (2003) that social values, which are a key component of national identity, of the two countries are diverging. Adams (2003, 49) proposes that, while some cultural differences between Canadians and Americans are evident and “external”, such as their differing policies about gun control, health care and language, other differences exist unbeknownst, and operate in a more subtle, yet extremely important way. These include the manner in which the citizens view the globe, how they interact, and the way in which they hope to make an impact. References to values are made in Canada’s IPS, reminding readers that they are integral to Canadian identity.

Universities in Canada

“Nation building” has also been one of the traditional responsibilities of universities. Their very function reveals them to be “multi-purpose or multi-product institutions.” As such, they play a key role in the creation and transmission of ideas, the formation and development of elites and progress of societies, the production of knowledge and the training of the highly skilled labour force (Enders 2004, 363). Yet, there has been an international dimension to universities for almost as long as they have existed. The movement of students to and from Bologna, Paris, and Oxford has been commonly promoted as one of the ways that universities and knowledge transcended borders (ibid 364). The modern forces of globalization have necessitated a continuing evolution on the part of higher education institutions everywhere.
Returning again to Knight’s emphasis on internationalization as a response by universities to globalization, it must be stated that internationalization happens through “the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the university or institution of higher education” (Knight 1994 cited in Knight 1999, 203). Clearly, this process will vary on each campus, and many of its effects have prompted different perspectives to emerge. Building on the declinist argument, Erik Beerkins (2004) proposes a view of globalization as “cosmopolitanisation” by contending that higher education institutions and their stakeholders (institutions, faculty and students) are discarding their national identity and replacing it with an identity based on elements other than nationality, such as a global or regional identity.

The reality that governments are reducing their control over higher education prompts Beerkins (2004, 22) to state that, in a European context, national identity is losing influence. While higher education continues to function as a catalyst for the creation of “cultural, social or economic cohesiveness”, this now also takes place on supranational levels such as the European Union, through the Erasmus and Socrates programmes. This dimension, however, where “Europeanization” is a process in its own right, obviously does not pertain to a Canadian context. Despite Canada’s connections to the Commonwealth countries, and to the United States and Mexico through NAFTA, there does not appear to be any attempt, at least on a similar scale, to create a new, “hybrid” identity based on geographic, economic or historic associations. Therefore, national identity remains a salient issue within Canadian higher education.

Unlike several European countries, Canada does not have a national “system” of higher education. At the federal level, in Ottawa, there exists no single ministry or department of education, but rather a collection of departments: Finance, Human Resources and Skills Development (HRSD), Canadian Heritage, and Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which each deal with federal transfer payments, student loans, official language promotion and the promotion of international academic exchanges, respectively (CICIC 2004). Due to the provincial control over education, there is a complex balance to
maintain by all the stakeholders in the internationalization of higher education. It has been suggested by Gornitzka et al. (2003, 35) that “patterns of internationalisation” may be examined at three levels: the political-executive (macro), organizational level (meso) and individual level (micro). This study considers internationalization at a general macro level through the federal government’s foreign policy document, but focuses primarily on the micro-level, through the lens of student experience. The concept of the university as a loosely coupled organisation impacts the manner in which universities navigate internationalization. Different disciplines may adopt separate approaches, and be motivated by a variety of factors. Consequently, it may be impossible for institutions to define one objective (Lemasson and Bond 1999, 253). Additional challenges to working in such a decentralized system are addressed in the following discussion of student mobility.

**Student Mobility in Canada**

The hurdles associated with the transfer of academic credits, coupled with the prohibitive costs of long-distance travel and living overseas, the lack of financial support, and the significant number of non-traditional students currently attending universities, all contribute to the low participation rate of Canadian students in study abroad. Limitations also emerge when one considers that, like the Europeans, Canadians are not accustomed to extremely high tuition fees and educational costs. As a result, it is not common for students and their families to save extra money to fund the expenses associated with overseas studies. In addition, many Canadians do not have strong foreign language abilities and are, therefore, frequently restricted in the location of their overseas study (Vertesi 1999, 135). This suggests that opportunity and access present major obstacles to Canadian students.

Many of the international opportunities for study abroad are structured on the assumption that students and their families are financially able to incur the additional costs of overseas education (Caron and Tousignant 1999, 179). While there are some funds to assist students with international projects, particularly where developing countries are
concerned, Canada does not have a significant, nationally funded program to support students who participate in international exchange programs. While the European Union (EU) has developed a strategic framework which uses international education as a strategy to adapt its human capital to the demands of globalization, Canada has not managed a similar endeavour (Conference Board of Canada 1999, 12).
4.0 Theoretical Context

The sociological notion that “we come to know ourselves largely by seeing how others react to us” (Calhoun et al. 1997, 23) is applicable to this study. Central to the overseas experiences of the interviewees was the fact that they often found themselves “reflected in other people’s attitudes and behaviours” (Cooley 1905/1956/1964 cited in Calhoun et al. 1997, 121). Action theory was therefore determined as the most appropriate framework through which to interpret the material obtained during the interviews. As this study concentrates on the experience of national identity abroad, it was necessary to use a theoretical dimension which would inform the empirical data, and action theory served as a logical match. The following chapter provides an overview of action theory and accounts for how it applies to the thesis topic.

Action Theory

When people aim their actions at others, and recognize “shared beliefs, values and interests”, action becomes a social experience. Researchers may conduct studies of actions, but these are only possible on a surface level, from the “outside”. In order to better understand the actions, a researcher needs to empathize with the actor, thereby improving his or her grasp of the meaning of the action (Seale 2004, 27). Action theory evolved as an alternative to quantitative and positivist empiricism, providing a variety of qualitative research approaches. It moved from the research of social “facts” to the more “socially meaningful world of intersubjective action and interaction”, and required that the values of the researcher be acknowledged (Filmer et al. 2001, 28). It emphasises the choices made by individuals regarding the roles they play, and highlights the importance of interpretation and negotiation in the management of identity (Bilton et al. 2002, 256).

The idea is stressed, in both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, that people manage and negotiate their lives and relationships based on their “beliefs and circumstances” (Bilton et al 2002, 256). Both approaches dismiss the notion of “a determined picture with predetermined roles”, and suggest that researchers should
concentrate on the capacity of actors to give meaning to their surroundings and to make decisions about how to live based on these meanings. Essentially, this involves the recognition that “each social situation has its own dynamics and is collaboratively authored by the actors concerned” (Bilton et al. 2002, 256). As actors evolve throughout life, adopt new roles and interact with others, they develop a new understanding of meanings. Ultimately, these lead to new forms of action (Seale 2004, 29).

Examples of action theory with highlights of their uses are summed up in the following chart.

**Table 18.1 Actors, meanings and society** (Bilton et al. 2002, 508)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Action Theory</th>
<th>Nature of meanings</th>
<th>Form of action studied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weber on religion and action, Parsons’ theory of action</td>
<td>Meanings derived from established culture/values/belief systems in the society or social group</td>
<td>Goals and rational motives for intended actions deriving from belief systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic interactionism</td>
<td>Meanings and identity are constructed through social interaction, or imposed through powerful shared symbols and labels</td>
<td>Face-to-face interaction, the process of labelling and the negotiation of social identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weber’s Verstehen</td>
<td>Intentions held by an actor in relation to a separate act; goals for rational action</td>
<td>Individual acts; understanding the motive of the actor and the beliefs available to the actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>Meanings are a common stock, used in a common-sense way to construct actions. They are taken-for-granted definitions of reality: ‘common sense’</td>
<td>Meanings must be interpreted on their own terms, and seen as real to the actors and true in their setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnomethodology</td>
<td>Meanings are accounts of everyday life, by means of which actors make sense of their setting and achieve order within it</td>
<td>Context-specific speech and behaviour; routine social practices that sustain order and meaning in social settings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Weber and *Verstehen*

Max Weber believed that non-traditional deduction was necessary for social-research. He proposed that human action could best be understood by sociologists through gaining insight into what a person means. This comprehension, described by Weber as “*Verstehen*”, is therefore rational rather than emotional and, as such, can be verified empirically. This fosters an objective approach to sociological science (Filmer et al. 2001, 28). *Verstehen* is a process through which to interpret the “meaning of an act” (and therefore the motive) of the person being studied (Bilton et al. 2002, 500). Directly translated from the German language, it means “understanding” and “refers to the unique human capacity to makes sense of the world” (Patton 1990, 56).

Weber believed there were four types of motives behind human actions, which included the “traditional conformity to habit”, “emotional behaviour”, “rational behaviour oriented towards an ultimate value” (salvation, for example), and “rational behaviour oriented towards a mundane goal” (earning a living, for example) (Bilton et al. 2002, 500). While numbers and statistics may adequately represent the things people do, they needed to be ‘interpreted’ through ‘*Verstehen*’ (Henslin 1997, 16). Drawing on Weber’s ideas, this study takes into account the motivations and rationales behind certain choices made by the interviewees during their study abroad experiences.

Weber also emphasized the importance of “empathetic introspection and reflection” which is based on observation and interaction with others (Patton 1990, 57). One primary weakness of this approach is that it neglects to situate “thought and action” in communal context (Bilton et al. 2002, 500). Whereas Weber’s approach suggests that actors need to be more rational in attaining their goals, the following section will describe how symbolic interactionism identifies the self as both creative and reflexive, offering a “humanistic, subject-centered perspective” (Bilton et al. 2002, 508).
Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and Symbols

Associated with the notion of *Verstehen* is “a modern theoretical approach” called “symbolic interactionism” (SI) (Giddens et al. 2006, 14; Patton 1990, 75). Those subscribing to this approach consider symbols as “the basis of social life” (Henslin 1997, 21) which provide meaning to human interaction (Patton 1990, 75). Symbolic interactionists are also of the opinion that human behaviour is determined by the manner in which people define themselves and others. By using micro-analysis (Henslin 1997, 28) to examine roles and how they change, symbolic interactionists study human relationships and interaction, and how people determine their place in the world around them (Henslin 1997, 22).

Symbols, which include language, enable people to communicate and to form relationships and, as a result, create society. George Herbert Mead argued that symbols are what allow people to see others like themselves, creating “intersubjective understanding” (Filmer 2001, 29). Those who use symbolic interactionism to study the social world examine the symbols that people use as a depiction of how they see the world. This helps scientists to observe how it affects their behaviour (Henslin 1997, 105).

Symbolic interactionism involves the study of symbols that have been developed and which give purpose to the interactions between actors. SI is known for its attention to social identity and the way in which actors depict themselves to others and how social rules and identities are constructed. As such, SI is associated with an emphasis on observing variety in social life (Bilton et al. 2002, 501). According to Herbert Blumer (1969), who was a student of Mead’s, there are three main beliefs behind symbolic interactionism: 1) that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; 2) that the meaning of things arises out of the social interaction one has with one’s fellows; and 3) that the meanings of things are handled in and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Patton 1990, 76). An additional focus by symbolic interactionists concerns stereotypes and the question of whether or not these are actually self-fulfilling. A study
by Mark Snyder revealed that “stereotypes tend to bring out the very kinds of behavior that fit the stereotype” (Henslin 1997, 105).

The figure below illustrates the process suggested by Snyder:

Figure 4.2 Self-Fulfilling Stereotypes (Henslin, 1997, 106)

1. We see features of the person, or hear about the person.
2. We fit what we see or hear into pre-existing stereotypes, and then expect the person to act in certain ways.
3. We act toward the person according to our expectations.
4. From the ways we act, the person gets ideas of how we perceive him or her.
5. The behaviors of the person change to match our expectations, thus confirming the stereotype.

It is useful to apply this model to the interviewees in this thesis study. For instance, students identified that it was frequently assumed by host nationals and other
international students that Canadians would be “nice”. This assumption may have impacted, in a positive way, the manner in which the Canadian students were greeted or welcomed into various social groups or functions while overseas. Additionally, it was noted by the interviewees that such reactions did, in fact, affect the way in which they perceived their own national identity. They recalled instances where they tried to live up to this stereotype, thereby confirming it to those abroad. This notion of the self-fulfilling prophesy will be discussed in Chapter Seven, but is also connected to the idea that, from birth on, humans assume (or “play”) a variety of roles throughout their sociological development. Based on this idea, sociologist Erving Goffman developed “dramaturgical analysis”, which suggests that “we tend to become the roles we play” (Henslin 1997, 109) and raises the question of whether people consider themselves “in the way we do because this self-image is confirmed or altered by those who comprise our audience” (Bilton et al. 2002, 502). SI is useful for practical qualitative research, as it helps sociologists determine what is important to people, making it possible to provide suggestions on how to alter or improve programs and organizations (Patton 1990, 76).

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology focuses on the structures and essences of experiences with phenomena that people have. It has been perceived as a paradigm, a philosophy, a perspective and as being “synonymous with qualitative methods or naturalistic inquiry” (Patton 1990, 68). The phenomenon being experienced may be an emotion, a relationship, a marriage, a program, an organization, or a culture (Patton 1990, 69). These help people to process phenomena and to comprehend the world around them. Researchers using phenomenology are interested in determining what actors experience, and better understanding their interpretation of it. In this case study, the purpose has been to explore the experience of study abroad and national identity through the perspective of Canadian students. Those who subscribe to phenomenology believe that it is not possible to understand an experience unless a researcher experiences it for him or herself. While this study has been conducted by someone who has experienced academic mobility, she did
not participate in the same study abroad programs as each of the students who were interviewed.

One of the main contributors to phenomenology was Alfred Schutz who, while influenced by Weber, disagreed with the idea that single acts had specific motives. Schutz argued that people could act only by drawing from a shared set of social concepts, symbols and meanings (which he called “recipe knowledge”). He contended that Weber’s account of the relation between actions and reasons or motives was too mechanical. Symbolic interactionists examine the manner in which people create and share definitions and roles, and consider symbolic communication as essential. Schutz, however, believed that social life was a collection of assumptions, and that the order in society endured for only the period of time that a society believed in those assumptions. In other words, that “social reality has a meaning for human beings and therefore human action is meaningful – that is, it has a meaning for them and they act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and to the acts of others” (Bryman 2004, 14). While Weber’s *Verstehen* is used passively to predict the acts of others, phenomenology means that people use common sense and can be considered as “amateur sociologists” if they are successful social actors (Bilton et al 2002, 505).

Schutz also proposed a principle called “reciprocity of perspectives” which suggested that actors have two assumptions about each other, which are necessary conditions of their interaction. The first assumption is that they would each see the situation in the same manner as the other, were they to switch places. The next assumption is that both of them take for granted that their different perspectives are irrelevant in the face of their current interaction, and that both will define their interaction in the same way. Rather than being true, these assumptions are “idealizations” which occur, despite actors attempts to avoid them (Seale 2004, 31).
Ethnomethodology (EM)

Ethnomethodology developed out of the work that Schutz did. However, it is more committed to “practical, grounded research”, and may be considered a “fusion of action research and phenomenology” (Bilton et al. 2002, 505). It is concerned with research about the ways in which actors make sense of their actions (Seale 2004, 32). A central concern for ethnographers is culture, and the attempt to understand the culture of a particular group of people. One of their assumptions is that individuals who spend time together within certain programs and societies, will form a culture. Improvements to these organizations may therefore be made based on ethnographic evaluations (Patton 1990, 68).

Ethnomethodology is associated with Harold Garfinkel, who suggested that practical research helps to demonstrate how the social world is produced and reproduced by the actions of people (Bilton et al. 2002, 506). Like phenomenology, ethnomethodology emphasizes the skills and knowledge that people utilize without thinking, such as what occurs in their regular, every day activities and routines. Ethnomethodological research relies on interviews and observation. Many ethnomethodologists are interested in examining how people make sense of what happens when they are placed into new or unexpected situations (Patton 1990, 74). While this study did not involve direct observation in the field, the interviews conducted reveal a number of the experiences students had, and how they dealt with them, while they were living in foreign countries. As will be shown, it was evident that the interviewees observed a heightened sense of national identity while living in a new country and culture.
5.0 The Representation of National Identity in Canada’s IPS

In all forms of communication, there is the “message”, with the “sender” and the “audience” to consider. The International Policy Statement (IPS) conveys several messages relating to Canadian national identity. Although it was developed with input from the Canadian public, ultimately, it was packaged and promoted by the federal government, or the “sender”. The IPS has four separate, detailed sections including “Diplomacy”, “Defence”, “Development” and “Commerce”. This chapter will look at conceptual clusters which emphasize topics relating to Canadian national identity in the Overview of the IPS (Berg, 1989: 108). The Overview features the key points of the IPS in sections entitled, “International Policy at a Crossroads”, “The Canadian Approach”, “Making a Difference Globally” and “Changing How We Work”. The purpose in examining the Overview is to answer the first research question: how is national identity represented in the International Policy Statement (IPS) discourse of the Canadian federal government? Pursuant to this, it will be possible to compare its representation with the ways in which students experienced their national identity while abroad.

Foreword from the Prime Minister

The title of Canada’s International Policy Statement (IPS) is “A Role of Pride and Influence in the World”. The Oxford English dictionary (2002) defines pride as “deep pleasure or satisfaction gained from achievements, qualities, or possessions”. Yet, pride may also be used in the context of “an excessively high opinion of oneself.” In the instance of the IPS, a reader’s interpretation of the title may influence his or her initial impression about Canada. Nevertheless, four of the title’s words; role, pride, influence and world, are drawn directly from specific concepts discussed in the IPS and do foreshadow the tone and messaging which follow.

The Foreword (2005), by then Prime Minister Paul Martin, identifies the IPS as a tool through which Canadians can see themselves reflected. He states: “Our policies as a government, reflecting our beliefs as Canadians, are articulated through the words we
speak, the decisions we make and the actions we implement in the name of Canada”.
Martin suggests that global changes in the political and economic spheres have
necessitated a review of Canadian foreign policy. These require the country to reconsider
“how best to project Canadian values and interests into the world and make a real
difference in the lives of its embattled peoples” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005,
Foreword). This assumes, first that Canadian values and interests are worth projecting,
and secondly, that these values and interests will have a positive impact on the lives of
the less fortunate.

Throughout the Foreword there is an emphasis placed on the notion of Canada being a
‘good neighbour’. Martin explains that “we want to make a real difference in halting and
preventing conflict and improving human welfare around the world. This may sound
naively altruistic, but it’s not. Rather it’s a doctrine of activism that over decades has
forged our country’s international character” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, Foreword).
By referring to Canada’s character and associating it with activism, Martin depicts a
nation concerned about “others” which suggests that being helpful and considerate are
attributes of the Canadian identity.

An effort to differentiate Canada’s interests from those of the United States is made early
in the Foreword. A description of the Canadian-American relationship is made
diplomatically, acknowledging that “We share many goals, both within our continent and
within the world, but our societies are different. Our perspectives and our values
sometimes diverge” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, Foreword). This statement draws on
the contentions held by Cerulo (1995) and Taras (1997) about lines of inclusion and
exclusion, and on Mackey’s (1999) suggestion that comparisons with the United States
are part of the identity building process for Canada. The Foreword of the IPS suggests
that values play an important role in Canadian national identity.

The IPS indicates that Canadians show “remarkable generosity toward the world’s poor
and suffering”, and illustrates this by stating that, “as members of religious
congregations, as supporters of non-governmental organizations, or as private individuals
working and contributing on their own, Canadians have done a great deal to share their good fortune with others” (Foreign Affairs, Foreword). In applying the adjective “generous” to Canadians, Martin bolsters the notion of Canadian altruism. He champions further efforts with a call to action: “as Canadians we must be active beyond our borders to promote our values and our interests” and “We have the means to help, and so we will. We must”. It is clear that Canadian values are held in high esteem by Martin, the federal government and the Canadian public. As such, they form a cornerstone of Canadian national identity. Martin uses these values as rationale for underlining the responsibilities and expectations which accompany the benefits of holding Canadian citizenship.

**International Policy at a Crossroads**

Martin’s call to action is repeated in the following section of the IPS, where Canadian values are used as grounds for global involvement and intervention. In response to the growing imbalance of power and the unfortunate consequences for many people around the world, the IPS states: “Canadian values dictate that we cannot allow their suffering to continue” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 2). Canadian values are represented as a sort of moral compass, directing Canadian citizens to react in a way that is helpful to others. There is an assumption that, regardless of personal values, those of the nation take precedence. This notion surfaced in the interviews conducted for this research, and will be discussed during the empirical research chapter.

Globalization figures prominently in the IPS, and its influence on national identity is noted in the IPS with the goal to “…foster international cooperation as well as defend our sovereignty” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 1). There is also the suggestion that globalization has been “bringing people closer together at an international level” and has been a “feature of Canadian life for decades” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 4). Canadian “multiculturalism” is apparent in the youth of the country, who are, “the most ethnically diverse in Canadian history – are already capitalizing on the opportunities presented by globalization” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 2). Diversity and pluralism are clearly perceived as assets to the country, and an integral part of Canadian identity. Again, the
IPS links benefits with responsibilities, as underlined by the statement that “Canada’s advantages come with the expectation that we fulfill our responsibilities as a global citizen” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 3). The theme of “responsibility” surfaces throughout the IPS and must, therefore, be acknowledged as a consideration in how the IPS was developed.

**The Canadian Approach**

Canadian national identity has been formed largely on the 1867 founding principles of Canadian Federation, “peace, order and good government” (Department of Justice 2006). These may influence and contribute to Canada’s “vibrant and prosperous political community”. References to Canadian pluralism are seen in the IPS description of Canada as a “diverse multicultural society capable of transcending the narrow politics of ethnic and cultural difference” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 4). “Society”, “community” and “people” figure prominently in this passage. Alluding to the pursuit of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the IPS acknowledges that while other countries “share these values, we have moulded them into a particular constellation that reflects our historical experience and our current aspirations” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 4). This reveals how the government identifies values as being distinctly “Canadian”, and it demonstrates the way in which they contribute to Canadian sovereignty.

**Revitalizing our North American Partnership**

Canada holds an abundance of joint achievements in partnership with the United States, including the world’s largest bilateral trading relationship and longest unmilitarized border. By highlighting these accomplishments in the IPS, Canada is represented as a “good neighbour”, and a positive perspective is demonstrated with regard to Canadian-American relations. However, as previously indicated by Martin, this close relationship to the Americans takes place “without the abandonment of Canadian national identity, social policies or sovereign decision-making power” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 6). The IPS suggests that “the public expects the Government of Canada to remain vigilant in
protecting both Canadian citizens and Canadian sovereignty” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 8) which builds on the idea of Canadian identity as needing to be protected.

Making a Difference Globally

Canada’s positive international reputation is highlighted in this section, through the emphasis that is placed on its historic international accomplishments. In addition to labelling Canada as a “leader on refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) issues”, the IPS notes Canada’s successful negotiation of “linguistic, ethnic and cultural differences” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005: 16). These assets have created in Canada a system of governance that the IPS likens to a “laboratory full of intriguing experiments that can assist others engaged in the complex task of institution building” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005: 22).

In an attempt to discourage potential criticism about its approach to foreign policy, a caveat is made in the IPS with regard to providing assistance abroad. It states, “As we assist in this process, the importance of national autonomy cannot be overstated. Canadians hold their values dear, but are not keen to see them imposed on others. This is not the Canadian way.” Further to this, “Our efforts must also remain sensitive to the current lack of capacity in developing countries. Our initiatives cannot in turn become burdens themselves” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 20). Given that, in the Foreword, Paul Martin spoke of “projecting Canadian values”, this caveat may be perceived as contradictory (Foreign Affairs Canada 205, Foreword). Yet, it is clear that the government is providing a distinction between “projecting” and “imposing” the IPS on others. The acknowledgement of this difference suggests that consideration of other cultures goes beyond Canadian borders; if not in practice, then at least in policy.

Changing How We Work

In the concluding section of the IPS Overview, several references are made to the role of Canadians abroad and the use of public diplomacy as a means of spreading “Canada’s
influence” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 28). The IPS notes that “Younger Canadians travel, work and study abroad more than ever before, and think in terms of networks rather than geographical units. Our multiculturalism also means that many Canadians are part of broader diasporas that link nations directly and transmit impressions of our country to the world” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 29). The message is delivered that Canadians are already global citizens, and that the government is supportive, in theory, of the notion of young Canadians spending time overseas. The role of the government is depicted as “fostering academic and professional partnerships between Canadians and foreign counterparts” (Foreign Affairs Canada 2005, 29), but the IPS neglects to indicate how the federal government has contributed to these partnerships in the past, or if it will continue to do so in the future.

Summary

The Overview of the IPS reveals important insight into Canadian character. The notion of Canada as a country heavily involved on the global stage, along with an emphasis on the responsibilities that Canadians have toward the less fortunate, are repeatedly highlighted. References are also made about the importance of strengthening international ties through public diplomacy and exchange opportunities, but there is no suggestion of how such programs might be strengthened. There is also an assumption that, when Canadians travel abroad, they will be good representatives of the country and, by example, Canada’s ideals as a nation will be spread.
6.0 Preliminary Observations

The previous chapters have outlined the concepts related to student mobility and national identity, and are intended to serve as a foundation for the empirical portion of this study. The following chapter will provide an overview of these findings. As has already been explained, it was determined that direct interaction with returned exchange students through interviews would be the most effective method of obtaining rich, detailed perspectives and information. Again, it must be noted that the interviewees represent only a small sample of English Canadian students. Nevertheless, it is fair to suggest that the findings reveal valid observations which may be of use to stakeholders in international higher education.

The interview questions were developed based on the original research premise of exploring the role of national identity in the international mobility of Canadian students. The first series of questions was designed to gather information about the interviewee demographic. These general questions were seen as a rational way through which to initiate the interview process and to engage the interviewees in conversation. In addition to identifying their age and home province, they were asked to name their subject of study, exchange destination and the duration of their overseas program. Questions were also asked to determine whether or not the interviewees had previous experience with international travel, living abroad, or if they had been exposed to other cultures through parents who had immigrated to Canada. The next group of questions related to interviewee motivation for participating in an exchange program, including inquiry about when they made the decision to participate in a study abroad experience, and concerning reaction and support (or lack thereof) they had received from family and friends. This information was sought with the aim of contextualizing their decision to go overseas.

The third series of questions featured an open-ended approach. These were used to better understand the international study experience through the perspective of the interviewees (Patton 1990, 24). Interviewees were probed about whether or not they had attempted to learn more about Canada before going abroad, if they felt “proud” to be Canadian, and if
they believed that studying overseas had an impact on their sense of national identity? Interviewees were also asked whether or not they identified themselves as Canadian through the use of a national flag displayed on their luggage or backpacks, or if their professors actively sought their “Canadian” perspective in the classroom? Finally, interviewees had the opportunity to comment about future plans they had, if their time abroad had influenced their professional aspirations and, ultimately, who they considered to be the beneficiaries of the accumulation of knowledge and experience they gained while overseas? In other words, did they see Canada as benefiting, ultimately, from their exchange program?

Labelling has been used as tool to identify categories (Blanche and Durrheim 2002, 141). Each of these categories has been examined for patterns and unusual phenomena (Bryman and Burgess 1994, 7), along with any tensions or contradictions (Blanche and Durrheim 2002:141). Before providing a summary of the findings, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of “perspective” at this point in the study, and to note why it is considered vital. Perspective is used by an individual, but it does not cause a particular type of behaviour (Charon 1989, 23). In life, a person assumes many roles and, therefore, has many perspectives. In addition, people identify with different “social worlds”, groups or societies, and through symbolic interaction they learn the perspectives of these particular worlds. They are then able to use these perspectives to define and interpret situations in their lives (Charon 1989, 25).

Each person also juggles different identities. Depending on their “identity salience”, some identities are more important at specific times to an individual than others. People maintain a hierarchy of salience, with certain identities ranking at the top (Charon 1989, 80). It may be argued that when students are abroad, and removed from their regular roles, it is their national identity which becomes more salient. Another important aspect to symbolic interactionism is the suggestion that “taking the role of the other” allows an individual to view situations from a different perspective. This can have either a positive impact, in that the experience helps an individual to become more empathetic to the “other” or, it may have a negative impact, in that it may be used to advance their
individual interests (Charon 1989, 106). The interaction with people from a variety of cultures, nations, religions and backgrounds offers an even greater opportunity to consider situations from other perspectives.

The following observations were noted and provide a brief summary of the interviewees and their demographic.

| Gender              | 6 males  
|                    | 5 females |
| Age                | Between 20 and 23 |
| Faculty            | 5 Arts & Science students  
|                    | 6 Commerce students |
| Exchange destination | Denmark (2)  
|                    | England (1)  
|                    | France (2)  
|                    | Italy (1)  
|                    | Mexico (1)  
|                    | Northern Ireland (1)  
|                    | Scotland (2)  
|                    | Sweden (1)  |
| Home province      | British Columbia (1)  
|                    | Ontario (9)  
|                    | Quebec (1)  |
| Nationality of parents | Australian, British, Canadian, Finnish, Irish, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese |
• All of the interviewees had travelled outside of Canada prior to their international study experience. For some, this travelling was confined to North America, while others had travelled further abroad.

• Four of the eleven students received financial assistance (through either scholarships or bursaries) for use during their exchange program. Two of these scholarships were specific to the exchange partner institution, one was a bursary based on financial need and was granted by the home (sending) institution, and one interviewee was the recipient of a federal scholarship granted at the beginning of his university studies and which he was permitted to apply to his academic year away. None of the students received funding from the federal government specifically for going abroad.

• More than half of the interviewees had parents who had immigrated to Canada. Parental reactions were observed by the interviewees and ranged from reluctant to enthusiastic support, as seen in the following: “they kind of questioned why I would want to step backwards into the life that they left behind” and “They really liked the idea of the international experience…because of our international background…so they really supported it.”

• The Commerce students spent less time abroad, generally only four months, while the Arts and Science students tended to go on exchange for a full academic year, generally eight months.

• All of the interviewees indicated that they hoped to find work with an international dimension upon graduation from university.
Ch. 7 Main Findings and Discussion

Transcripts were made of the recorded student interviews, and were used as an “artefact of social communication” (Berg 1989, 106), through which discussion, analysis and interpretation will be made in this chapter. The discussion component will allow the student voices to be heard and will focus on answering the query of “what is going on here?”, while the analysis portion will identify key factors and relationships. Interpretation will take place through suggestions on how to use the data and analysis.

The Flag as a Label

The role of national symbols and their use by Canadians when abroad featured prominently in the interviews. When considered exclusively on a “surface” level, national flags and symbols may be seen as the “calling cards by which nations identify themselves”. They are used to “objectify each nation’s identity, making tangible that which might otherwise be impossible to meaningfully apprehend, and bringing a sense of concreteness to the highly abstract” (Cerulo 1995, 3). Some symbols have been used to “crystallize” national identity (through flags, anthems, mascots) and are used by citizens with an interest in displaying their national identity. Many Canadians stitch the distinctive red and white maple leaf flag onto their backpacks and luggage. This intentional “labelling of the self” (Charon 1989, 146) may influence a person’s own acts, and sometimes those of others, and also constitutes a way of announcing one’s national identity, or presenting oneself according to the identity he or she is claiming (Charon 1989, 147).

The Overview of the IPS proposes that Canadians have many reasons to feel “proud” of their country, their values and their identity. The document, however, assumes that Canadians who are abroad are actively making their national identity known to those around them. With this in mind, the interviewees were asked if they displayed a maple leaf flag on their backpack or luggage, and whether they had stitched it on because they were going abroad. The intention was to explore how students felt about, or managed
their national identity while abroad, and to determine if they chose to display this identity in an overt manner. Six interviewees responded that they did not travel abroad with a maple leaf flag displayed on their backpack, while five did.

Those who did not, cited reasons such as:

- *I didn’t think I needed one.*
- *It never crossed my mind.*
- *I thought about it, for sure, because I’d heard that it helped, but I…I hadn’t come across anything that was, or anybody or anything (…) that would have made me feel like I needed to have it, so I didn’t.*

The interviewees considered the “usefulness” of the maple leaf and contrasted it with the “need” of having one. This was echoed by the students who did display the maple leaf flag. Two of the interviewees added further explanation for their choices about wearing the flag. One observed that, ironically, “*All the Americans did it and none of the Canadians did.*” This appropriation of nationality raises intriguing possibilities for future research concerning what may be considered “identity theft”. This point was further reinforced with “...*a lot of Americans who were travelling over there would tell people that they were Canadian just so they wouldn’t get into trouble*”. The interviewee attributed the adoption of a Canadian symbol by Americans for personal benefit, such as safety or positive reception. Only one interviewee suggested that he disagreed with the entire concept of broadcasting nationality, and chose not to display the maple leaf flag, arguing that “*I think it’s kind of tacky*”.

Those who did display their Canadian flags presented reasons which ranged from security to following the advice of another Canadian, or for a desire to be recognized by the flag in the hope that it would elicit a more positive reception from locals.
Rationales were as follows:

- I always wore a Canadian flag on my bag because I felt like… it seemed I got treated a little bit nicer… I don’t know if it was actually happening… but that’s how I felt.

- … one thing is, you are proud of your country, so you want to show where you’re from. And another thing is, you do not want to be assumed that you are an American.

- I bought it before I went to England the first time because people told me it was a good idea.

- … you wanted to be identified for who you were… and you are proud. And I think that Canadians do have a good reputation abroad, and I heard that a lot of people are friendly towards Canadians and I, I don’t know how true that is, but, I thought it was fairly nice. And it was nice too, because when you’re travelling along and you’re asking people for help, some actually noticed you were Canadian and if they’d been there and had a positive experience they would help you. And it did come in handy a few times, so it was definitely a benefit.

- you have your Canadian flag on your backpack, you want people to know that you’re a Canuck.

Regardless of whether or not it is has been proven, statistically, that Canadians receive “better” treatment as a result of being Canadian, or if they recognize each other abroad and choose to interact with fellow Canadians based merely on this similarity, it is important to note that one interviewee admitted, despite displaying his maple leaf flag, that, “no one ever sort of marched me down and said, ‘oh hey, I’m from Canada too’ or anything like that… those classic stories.”
The objective behind asking the students about their use, or lack thereof, of this symbol was twofold. It was necessary to determine whether students were putting much thought or consideration into their decision to display their national identity before going abroad. Wearing a country’s flag makes an important statement to those around him or her about that individual’s identity: first, that they are Canadian and secondly, that they feel confident the flag will not work to their disadvantage. The response from others can be positive or negative. The fact that five of the eleven interviewees did choose to display their national identity suggests that national pride was a factor in their decision. It also demonstrates that Canadians are unafraid to use their Canadian identity in the hope of procuring advantage or profiting in some capacity.

**The Nice Canuck: A Self-Fulfilling Prophesy?**

Labelling occurs in another way, through “others”. Inevitably, the interviewees learned how Canada is perceived abroad through their interactions with fellow students, professors, locals, etc. The interviewees repeatedly expressed surprise at the positive reactions they received when they announced their citizenship.

This learning experience is articulated by the interviewees in the following statements:

- *I didn’t really know that a lot of people had that much interest in Canada*

- *…a lot of people were very interested and ... and I was surprised that many people said that they really wanted to go and visit, because I’d just never thought of Canada as a place people - tourists go to.*

- *I was known as “The Canadian” through the department…people didn’t know my name but they knew my nationality.*

- *I learned that people overseas, they seem to like Canadians a lot.*
One interviewee provided a more detailed description of an experience he had while travelling during his exchange, which was pivotal in his experience as a Canadian:

“in the Netherlands, Canadians are really well viewed and I didn’t really know this - and I was in a shop and this guy said ‘Are you American?’ and I was like, ‘no – I’m Canadian’, and he said ‘Oh, you’re Canadian? Oh man!’ And he brought me a cup of coffee and it was just - it was amazing and I felt so proud to be Canadian because everybody…everybody loves us over there…so it was a really nice feeling.”

This notion of being “liked” or well received by the others impacted the way the interviewees later behaved.

Insights on the subject were expressed by the interviewees:

- …people have this perception that Canadians are really nice. I don’t think we’re particularly nicer than a lot of the other nations, but I think that’s our image. I think there are a lot of nations that are actually much nicer than Canadians but I - I didn’t mind playing on that brand.

- …well, after being there for so long and everybody saying ‘oh Canadians are so nice, Canadians are so nice’, it…you would feel weird if you started acting mean, so, it’s sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy I guess.

- I feel that Canadians - this is based on my experiences from seeing how other people view Canadians - that we’re really, really friendly and we’re not discriminating and…we have a lot more opportunities than a lot of other places do, and it’s really interesting that we have two languages in our country as well. That is not exclusive to Canada, obviously, but I think that we’re a lot more open than a lot of other countries are…that we’re viewed at
least, like on a personal/international basis as being, – I don’t know – I can’t think of the word… but… friendly! Friendly.

Rather than provide her own interpretation, this description was based entirely on how “other people” had perceived Canadian “values”. This connects to the idea of how foreign policy is projected abroad and circulated, ultimately influencing the very people it represents. When asked to give three examples of Canadian values, most of the interviewees struggled. All had difficulty articulating their responses or providing examples. In the end, the answers they provided do align with the values implied in the IPS.

Their responses have been organized into clusters according to related concepts:

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<td>Multiculturalism/Multicultural</td>
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<td>Strong sense of Identity</td>
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<th>Peace, Peacekeeping</th>
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<td>Value the Outdoors</td>
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| Education                          |


Their difficulty in answering the question was palpable. When contrasted with their responses to questions about being mistaken for Americans, it became evident that it was easier for the students to articulate what they were not, as opposed to what they were.

“Not American”: Reclaiming Canadian Identity

Noted repeatedly throughout this thesis is the idea that Americans play a key role as the “other” for Canadians. The people of Canada, in general, have been known to disagree over who they “are” as a nation, yet they are certain of whom they are not - Americans. Symbolic interactionists place an emphasis on the consequences arising from “taking the role of the other”. It may be contended that when Canadians go abroad, they frequently find themselves placed in the role of the “other”, because foreigners tend to assume that they come from the United States. The interviewees were asked about this experience. With respect to this, all of the respondents confirmed they had been mistaken for Americans. Most acknowledged that they felt this was an honest mistake.

One student, who was not a Canadian citizen but rather a permanent resident of Canada, stated that, “I didn’t really mind. I think it only bothered me because they would ask if I’m from ‘America’ which in my mind isn’t an actual country”. Here, the issue seems to be with technical jargon rather than the implications of being mistaken for an American citizen. As for the rest of the group (Canadian citizens), all admitted their effort to not be “offended” by the error. This sentiment soured depending on how frequently the erroneous identification occurred and, if it continued even after they had already claimed Canadian nationality. Most frustrating for the interviewees was if they identified themselves as Canadian and were then told by non-Canadians that this was “the same” as being American.

- …at first I felt fine, I didn’t care because I figured it was an honest mistake. But if I’d already told them that I was Canadian, that’s when I started to get angry.
• I tried not to be offended ‘cause that’s kind of nationalist…but after a while, just because it happened so often and when it did it was in a very negative context - very ‘oh you’re American?’ - or I’d say something and I actually heard people say, like ‘Damn Yankees’ once, you know what I mean? And so I was - I did get somewhat offended by it near the end.

• I specified the fact that I was Canadian, not American, even though I (also) have American citizenship… that’s just because I lived there for a few years, it has nothing to do with how I feel.

One interviewee reported “I was really surprised that I was more defensive, and like ‘no, I’m Canadian’”. Similar sentiment was articulated by another interviewee, who said, “everyone assumes…right? So, I didn’t really take offence. But when, when people would say, ‘well, it’s basically the same thing’ then I would get defensive.” In both cases, the use of the term “defensive” may be associated with the notion that Canadian national identity is something that needs to be protected.

Further to this, one student noted, “you assume they assume you’re an American until you say you’re a Canadian”. Another explained, “It wasn’t an anger or frustration…but it’s just…it’s pretty immediate”. One interviewee indicated that he interpreted being mistaken for an American to be an insult. When asked to elaborate, he explained, “cause it’s like, well, I, I’m Canadian. I don’t think I sound that American. I’m not, ignorant, you know…” He did not want to be affiliated with the negative connotations sometimes associated with the United States.

The aspect that bothered one of the interviewees, specifically, in being mistaken as American, was articulated in her explanation:

“I wasn’t offended, but I know people who were. And when I would be called American, I would just kind of quietly correct them, and be like, ‘you know,
I’m Canadian’ and… it bothered me because I’m familiar with what I think American values are and I don’t see myself aligning with that.”

The importance of “values” resurfaces here, in conjunction with national identity. In this instance, the interviewee specifically rejects American values. Additionally, the notion of “otherness” emerges, allowing students to actively reconsider and define their nationality by contrasting it with another. Of most significance was the way the Canadian students were surprised at their own reaction to having to continually identify their nationality.

The constant need to clarify which country they represented involved a need to articulate what differentiates Canada, and Canadians, as “different” from Americans and the United States.

**Learning about Canada**

Although they continually identified themselves as Canadians, the interviewees admitted that they occasionally struggled with the reality of how little they actually knew about their homeland. With the aim of determining whether they had anticipated their role in public diplomacy abroad, interviewees were asked if they made an effort to learn more about Canada before leaving home. Ten of the students responded that they did not, while one admitted that she had. This, she explained, was because she “wanted to be able to speak intelligently at least about our politics, and I researched a little bit about First Nations, history, just so I could speak about it more intelligently.”

Not surprisingly, most of the interviewees indicated they learned the limits of their knowledge about Canada throughout their exchange programs. One respondent explained that, “once you get there you realize how little you know.” Students used words like “embarrassed” and “dumb” to express how they felt upon realizing the dearth of awareness they had about Canada and “disappointment” to describe the reaction of foreigners who were hoping to learn more about Canada from them. Interviewees admitted to relying on the use of Canada’s size to rationalize this lack of knowledge, stating:
Well, I also felt embarrassed that I hadn’t seen much of Canada…but I mean, it’s big!

…they were asking me questions like ‘What’s Vancouver like?’ – I don’t know. ‘What’s Niagara Falls like?’ - I don’t know. ‘What’s Winnipeg like?’…and it’s like…‘well, Winnipeg, I’ve never been there, but I have a feeling it’s pretty boring. That’s what everybody says’…and I guess they were pretty disappointed about my limited knowledge about Canada…but then I’m like, ‘well, Canada’s like a billion times bigger than France.

I guess, when I was there I actually found that I was trying to learn more about it because people were asking me all these questions…and sometimes I wouldn’t have an answer so I would feel dumb thinking…‘oh, I how do I not know about my country?’ So, I learned more about Canada while I was there.

I’d have to sometimes call my parents and say “OK, so what exactly is Canada’s stance on this?

I wouldn’t say that I learned much about Canada as opposed to more of an appreciation of what I was missing.

Based on these comments, two observations may be made. First, the interviewees were stimulated to re-consider Canada during their overseas studies. In some cases, this meant that they needed to actually seek out information they did not know about Canada, or that they were inspired to discover places in Canada they had never been. Secondly, interviewees developed an appreciation for Canada that had not existed before. It is evident that their sense of national identity was influenced in part by the way they experienced being Canadian abroad, and by what they came to learn or appreciate about their country while living overseas.
Canadian Students and Public Diplomacy Abroad

One of the ways in which students reconsidered their national identity was through the promotion of their homeland. When asked if they felt obligated to behave in a certain way because of their citizenship, the issue of “making a good impression” emerged. Interviewees identified their reasons for this effort, stating:

- Maybe because I’m going back there and I want them to be thinking about me…maybe it was for entirely selfish reasons and I wanted to establish a connection and I want them to do business with Canada… I don’t know whether I can answer that, it’s actually a really good question. Um…pride? Maybe it’s just simple psychology that you want to justify where you’re from, and that you want to feel good about yourself. It could boil down to that…

- …everyone you talk to – they end up forming a lot of their perceptions of Canada, and I think that every time you’re talking to someone about Canada, you want to make the most favourable impression as possible and be welcoming and inviting them to see your country.

- I was in Paris where an Italian guy came and sat next to me and he was like, ‘where are you from?’ And I’m like, ‘I’m from Canada’ and he was like ‘You’re the first Canadian I’ve ever met’ so he wanted to talk to me for twenty minutes…and just asked me questions about Canada and stuff…and that was…I felt kind of neat about that.

- I suppose if I had any effect on anyone I met and they think of me as a ‘typical’ Canadian, maybe that’ll have some bearing on other things.

One respondent expressed that, “the French people, they didn’t really know that much about Canada. So I felt while we were there it was kind of our duty to tell them about
Canada and make them love Canada.” When probed about why she wanted to make them “love” Canada, she replied:

“Well, I mean we have such a great country and I didn’t want everyone to assume that we were Americans, and I wanted to make sure that people knew that, we had our own identity…and, that we were sort of a mix between the US and European culture, and I mean…I guess I just wanted them to really learn about it because people don’t know that much about Canada outside of what’s in their own countries.”

The exposure the students provided to non-Canadians about their homeland is evident, and bolsters the argument in support of study abroad as being an important tool in public diplomacy.

Reflections on the Impact of Study Abroad

The interviewees were questioned about their attachment to Canada after their experiences abroad, and to identify what they anticipated would be the lasting effects of their overseas studies. Their responses varied. Some noted the positive impact that spending time away from their homeland had made:

- *I value it (Canada) a lot more, because I know how distinct we really are.*

- *I have a new found respect for Canada after going there and coming back…especially the way people view Canadians over there.*

Another group of interviewees felt the opposite and admitted that the exposure they had to other countries and cultures actually made them feel less attached to Canada. They explained:

- *I just knew Canada would always be there.*
• Maybe it changed me more, how I realized that Canada is not the only place I
  want to be...my entire life.

• ...it's made me think of Canada as more of my second choice...this is like,
  'I'm settling'.

One more explanation was provided by an interviewee, who had experienced a national
holiday in the country where her exchange had taken place. Her reaction reveals what
may be perceived as a rejection of Canadian plurality. Referring to the national holiday
she had experienced, she justifies what she appreciated about it:

• it's neat that everybody can...everybody has the same sort of mindset and
everybody can feel like they are attached to something that they can call their
own...and that's definitely something that I would give up Canada for, to be
able to be a part of...

Others were more philosophical:

• I would like to live in another country more than ever...but I still feel more
  “Canadian” than when I left.

• ...it gives an opportunity for people to really...formulate their ideas about not
  only their own country but about what they want to be doing in their own
  country.

• You appreciate what Canada has to offer and a lot of the good things about it,
  and the things that they do better...you also learn about some things that we
  could improve, but I think that you gain to appreciate a lot of things,
  especially the things you miss.
8.0 Conclusions and Suggestions to Stakeholders

The purpose of this study has been to explore the role that national identity plays in the international mobility of Canadian students, and to compare it with the federal government’s promotion of Canadian values and identity abroad.

The following research questions were used to consider this topic:

1. How is national identity represented in the International Policy Statement (IPS) discourse of the Canadian federal government?
2. How does this compare with the practical ways in which Canadian students experienced their national identity while abroad?

The research conducted was qualitative and designed with an aim of better understanding how one particular group of university students responded to their overseas experiences as Canadian citizens. Semi-structured interviews were held in order to facilitate dialogue and allow the opportunity for detailed information to emerge through student reflection. The conclusions presented here should be viewed as a means of better understanding the importance of national identity in the context of student mobility.

An attempt has been made to ensure that the research process was as objective as possible. However, it is necessary to note its limitations. Despite attempts to critically examine the experiences of a group of individuals, the risk of misinterpretation or bias on the part of a single researcher must be acknowledged. The subject itself is challenging, since people maintain multiple identities and these are constantly evolving. In addition, the topic was multidisciplinary, requiring that information be drawn from a variety of theoretical sources. As a result, it was not possible to delve too thoroughly into any one area.

While the findings presented here will be of interest and of use to stakeholders in the higher education and government sectors, they are based on a study made of a small group of interviewees. In addition, a critical absence of French Canadian perspective is noted. This was articulated at the beginning of the project, since it may be viewed as
misrepresentative to discuss “Canadian national identity” without incorporating a French Canadian view. Finally, this study has not taken into account the role of regionalism (Atlantic, Prairies, the West, Northern Canada, etc.) within the context of Canadian national identity.

Findings

Although Canadian values were not explicitly defined in the IPS, there was an emphasis on their role and importance to Canadian identity. They were identified as being a key factor in what differentiates Canada from the United States, for example. Canadian values are used throughout the IPS as a moral compass, providing direction about what role Canada should adopt on the world stage. In addition to associating helpfulness, consideration, and the notion of being good global neighbours, the roles of pluralism and multiculturalism are depicted as quintessentially Canadian, with a strong emphasis placed on the notion of the responsibilities of Canadian citizens to the less fortunate around the world. Canadian students are acknowledged in the IPS as influential players in public diplomacy abroad, capable of carrying Canadian values, and transmitting them to others.

It was clear from the interviews that the students, prior to embarking on their overseas studies, had already been exposed to a variety of cultures through travel, immigrant parents, or extended families abroad. The diversity of their heritage indicates that they represent the plurality and multiculturalism so inherent to Canadian national identity. In this sense, they were ideal representatives abroad and well suited for this study. While the students themselves found it challenging to articulate exactly what they considered to be “Canadian values”, they ultimately identified attributes and qualities that aligned well with those implied in the government IPS.

None of the interviewees received assistance from the federal government specifically to help offset the additional costs associated with their international studies. Limited institutional support was available based on financial need, which required that students
seek help from other sources to cover the expense of going abroad. Thus, a critical flaw is revealed. The federal government, and Canada as a nation, are able to enjoy the benefits accrued through the public diplomacy which takes place through the largely self-funded, overseas studies of Canadians.

By deciding to display their national flag, five of the eleven interviewees publicly labelled themselves as Canadian, and announced their nationality to all. Those who displayed the flag revealed an interesting perspective. Rather than doing so out of Canadian pride, many used it as a sort of “insurance policy”, a popular accessory to guard against negative responses from foreigners. While wearing the national flag while abroad has become something of a Canadian tradition, it was viewed by the interviewees as a useful mechanism in securing a better welcome within foreign societies. Regardless of their efforts, all of the interviewees revealed that, at some point during their overseas studies, they had been mistaken as Americans. Though initially forgiving about this error, interviewees admitted frustration if this continued, or if others perceived them as having the same culture as Americans. Therefore, it may be argued that part of the experience of the interviewees regarding national identity occurred through the constant articulation and expression of being “Canadian”. Prior to going abroad, only one of the interviewees had attempted to learn more about Canada. Consequently, while living overseas many of the students realized how little they actually knew about their country. An important aspect of living abroad is having the opportunity to develop a new appreciation and understanding of one’s own culture and, where necessary, to critically reconsider their homeland. Students admitted feeling a responsibility to behave in a certain “friendly” way, but this often manifested itself after the students realized how Canadians were perceived by “others”.

The interviewees expressed different perspectives about how they were affected by their study abroad experiences. Those who had excelled academically found that they had gained direction with regard to their future academic plans. Others suggested that they now viewed Canada as their “back up” plan. The exposure to opportunities outside of their homeland had inspired them to seek out future international involvement. Finally,
some interviewees acknowledged that they returned to Canada with a stronger appreciation of their home country. The interviewees all saw the experience of studying abroad as greatly benefiting them personally, rather than being of particular benefit to Canada.

Although students who go abroad tend to be drawn, initially, by the opportunity to learn about other cultures, they return home with a more solid sense of their own national identity. They feel better informed as citizens, more engaged in the global context, and express greater enthusiasm about being “Canadian”. This study confirms that national identity plays a pivotal role in the overseas experiences of students. It appears likely, regardless of whether or not they are able to secure financial assistance, that a small proportion of Canadian students will continue to travel abroad. However, a greater impact could be made by Canada in terms of cultural and public diplomacy if the federal government reduced the barrier of cost through scholarship and bursary assistance. Equally important is the need to better engage the returned “study abroad” students. Their enthusiasm to become involved with further studies, careers, and communities with an international dimension ought to be channelled through better programming and future opportunities orchestrated by the federal government.

**Insights for Stakeholders**

The conclusions outlined have obvious implications for stakeholders in international education. The following suggestions are made with the understanding that current budgets are tight and funding for new initiatives is limited.

**Federal Government:**

- Study abroad continues to be an “elite” activity, given that is accessible to a limited group of Canadian students. The federal government ought to follow the lead of other national governments and invest substantial funding into the
creation of generous scholarship and bursary programs to assist Canadians in pursuing study abroad experiences.

- Secondary school students should be viewed as prospective university “study abroad” participants. Awareness programs could increase both the interest and feasibility of incorporating an overseas study program into their post-secondary experience. A new initiative could be created and coordinated at the national level, funded by the federal government and orchestrated through an organisation such as the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE). This could involve partnerships between international offices of universities and guidance departments of local high schools. Returned university exchange students could be engaged in meaningful volunteer work by providing information sessions to secondary school students which highlight the benefits of undertaking an overseas study experience. By anticipating the extra costs associated with study abroad, secondary school students could start to plan and budget well in advance. Schools with high populations of students not currently represented in “study abroad” programs could be targeted in a pilot project. Without long range planning, beginning in secondary school, it is unlikely Canada will increase its number of students studying overseas.

- The federal government, through their overseas missions, could provide better support to Canadian students who are abroad by involving them through invitations to embassy events, lectures, presentations, etc, and encouraging the Canadian students to bring their new international friends. By doing so, the Department of Foreign Affairs would demonstrate that it makes efforts at cultural diplomacy and that it values the presence of Canadian students overseas. It could potentially enhance Canada’s reputation abroad at a local, or grassroots level.

- The federal government has an abundance of material featuring information about Canada. This could be distributed to outgoing Canadian students by
their university study abroad offices prior to their departure. Minimally, web addresses should be provided to students with details about where to find information about Canada and on topics frequently of interest to non-Canadians.

**Canadian Universities:**

- While Canadian universities are working to internationalize their campuses, collaborative efforts should be undertaken to allow a greater number of students to go abroad. If, for example, one institution has not filled all of their exchange places, an appropriately qualified student from another university might be selected through careful negotiation between the involved institutions. Exchange spaces should not be going unfilled.

- Encouraging students who are abroad to stay involved with their home campus is a way for prospective exchange students to learn more about overseas opportunities available to them. Writing articles for their campus newspaper, or providing links to their online Blogs, would be both cost-effective and informative.

- Many students spend time abroad in their third year of university study and only have one year left in their degree involved on campus. Upon returning from their overseas studies, universities could create opportunities for returned students to take part in panel discussions on campus, or participate in visits to first year classes to speak about the highlights of their experiences.

- The intensity of overseas experiences often makes re-entry to their home country, and return to their university, a challenging experience for students. Providing meaningful volunteer opportunities for returned exchange students to meet new, incoming international students, or linking them with the broader community, would help returning students to hone their new-found skills.
**Future Research:**

This research has uncovered areas for further study. Given Canada’s multicultural population, research about students who pursue study abroad opportunities in the country of their parents’ origin (i.e.: “heritage exchanges”) might reveal trends that would be of use in determining future exchange agreements. Further to this, a study concerning the number of students who participate in independent, self-funded study abroad experiences from across Canada would be useful. A study about student mobility *within* Canada (i.e.: the Can-Ex Program) might yield findings which could be used in a comparative way with the motives of students who go abroad. Given the size and diversity of the country itself, some students participate in mobility programs within their own country, between Canadian universities. Finally, large “follow-up” studies which explore the more mature reflections of former exchange students five, ten, or fifteen years later could offer fresh insights into the issues discussed here.

**Conclusion**

As this study has explored, the opportunity to pursue studies in another land brings with it many benefits. This, as Philip Resnick (2005, 7) suggests, is because “…sometimes, it is when you are thousands of kilometres away from home that you begin to see things in a new light.” Canadians are proud of their international reputation. Canadian foreign policy contributes to, strengthens and forges a positive depiction of the country. Yet this image is projected best by through the cultural circulation which takes place when Canadians spend time overseas.

The negotiation of multiple identities, and the heightened awareness and salience of one’s national identity while abroad, allow young citizens to take a fresh look at the connotations associated with being Canadian. Returned exchange students are a valuable resource to Canada. In a sense, they have served as unofficial, “mini-ambassadors” of Canada while abroad, and when they re-enter their home country, it is with a renewed sense of self and often, a strong sense of purpose. As such, the federal government and
Canadians, in general, would benefit from placing a greater emphasis on ensuring this type of experience is better available to more students. There are many ways to promote a country; through expensive marketing campaigns, famous artists, top-notch business executives, fancy business cards and glossy brochures. However, supporting young Canadians during their overseas studies means sharing Canada’s best resource. Students bring with them their youth, energy, optimism and ideals as they embark on an authentic journey of discovery. What they leave behind is a powerful impression of Canada.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Section One:
Age
Gender
Canadian citizen?
Home province
Faculty/Department
Exchange country
Duration of study abroad
Date of return to Canada

Section Two:
Parents’ Nationality
Previous travel abroad?
Lived in another country?
Speak foreign language?
  If yes, was this language used while abroad?
  Was another language learned while abroad?
  What impact do you feel that had on your international experience?
What made you want to study abroad?
Did you know already, when you started at Queen’s, that you wanted to study abroad?
Were there obstacles you had to overcome in order to study abroad?
  If yes, what were they?
How did your family respond when you decided to study abroad?
How did your friends respond when you decided to study abroad?
Did you receive any scholarship or bursary that helped you to have this experience?
  If yes, who funded it?

Section Three:
Would you say that you felt “proud” to be Canadian before you left?
Do you think of yourself as a citizen of North America?
How attached do you feel to North America?
While you were abroad, with whom was most of your contact?
Would you say that your exchange experience impacted your sense of being “Canadian”?
  If yes, how?
What did you learn about Canada while you were abroad?

Were you ever in contact with the Canadian Embassy in your host country?

Did you ever feel obligated to behave in a certain way because of your citizenship?

Did you find that you compared Canada with the USA in order to explain something to non-Canadians about Canada?

Did people ever assume you were American?
  If yes, how did you feel when this happened?

Did you travel with a Canadian maple leaf symbol on your backpack, or luggage?
  If yes, did you have this on your backpack before leaving, or did you put it on because you were going away?

Did your professors give you the opportunity to speak from a “Canadian” perspective?

Were you involved in any activities in the local community (volunteer work, special events, employment, etc)?

Were you involved in extra-curricular activities on campus?

Did you keep in regular contact with your family? Friends?
  If yes, what methods did you use for this (email, telephone, blogging, MSN)?

Did you deal with challenges abroad (academic/personal) in the same way that you did while still in Canada?

In your opinion, did your experience abroad change you?
  If yes, how?

Have friends or family members noticed differences in you since you returned to Canada?

Who do you think will benefit most from your experience abroad?

Do you feel more attached to Canada now, after your experiences abroad?
  If yes, why do you think that is?

Have you maintained contact with the Canadian friends you met overseas?

Have you maintained contact with the non-Canadian friends you met overseas?

What has been the most lasting effect on you, from your time abroad?
  Do you think this will continue?

Did the experience you had overseas make you want to work overseas, or have a job that has an international dimension?

What has been the most challenging part of coming home?

Is there anything you wish to add about your experience?