

# 'Perfect French' and Explaining Where Your Family Is From: Negotiating a New Zealand Identity on Study Abroad

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## Abstract

Study abroad (SA) forms part of the wide range of transnational experiences today. Moving across geographic and discursive space allows unique access to how identities connect to ideologies, and how they are negotiated by young people during times of global mobility, connectedness, and widening inequality. A critical framing of a whole person perspective adds valuable depth, pushing beyond individual portrayals of SA university students as language learners. This perspective recognises that students are socially embedded and continue to experience real-world issues on exchange while remaining connected to several communities through technology. This paper focuses on nationality and ethnicity as salient and connected identity categories for Persephone, a New Zealand participant on exchange in Paris.

Drawing on interactional data, social media, and email data, I demonstrate how Persephone's refusal to speak with a French accent and to move towards the French culture is connected to her relationship to her New Zealand Indian identity, and her engagement with power in the SA context. Findings show that traditional notions of immersion are no longer adequate to capture the complexity of the experiences of today's diverse and critically minded global citizens. Recognising the role of societal ideologies in identity negotiations illuminates hidden components of identity construction and questions the expectations placed on exchange students to uniformly and unproblematically take on aspects of the host culture.

## Keywords

national identity, ethnicity, whole person, ideology, study abroad, critical approach