

IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award, Summer 2018

**Gendered Risk during Study Abroad: Germany as a Comparison Case**

Nona Maria Gronert, Sociology

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The support of the Institute for Regional and International Studies' (IRIS) Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award enabled me to conduct 15 interviews over the course of six weeks in Germany. From the end of June through early August 2018, I interviewed students and study abroad professionals in Berlin, Freiburg, Munich, and Vallendar.

This project builds on my prior work on sexual violence in higher education. I aim to use Germany as a comparison case to understand the implications of university structures for the regulation, surveillance, and elimination of sexual assault and harassment. Sexual assault and harassment limit the access of women, trans-, and gender-nonconforming people to public spaces, including university campuses. This makes the use of public space an issue of gender equality.

To begin my comparison, I conducted interviews with study abroad professionals and university students. In statistical terms, researching study abroad students lets me vary the institution but hold the undergraduate sample constant. That is, how study abroad students from American universities and the on-site program staff handle and understand sexual assault and harassment in Germany will illuminate what is unique to the American higher education context. As such, my research questions were: how do study abroad coordinators and their students perceive and address gendered risk in Germany? What forms does gendered risk take in the German and American contexts? Are certain forms specific to Germany or the USA?

I use gender to mean power relations at the levels of person-to-person interaction and institutions. Several dimensions define risk: personal experience of risk, actions taken to avoid risk, and management of risk. Sexual harassment and sexual assault are two forms of gendered risk. Students commit, experience, and seek to avoid sexual harassment and assault. Moreover, organizations, such as universities or study abroad providers, seek to manage the risk of the problems of sexual harassment and assault. The gendered risk framework will help me determine whether sexual assault and harassment are the gendered risks of most concern to coordinators and students. If other forms of gendered risk are of greater concern, I will explore those types of risk as well

Preliminary findings indicate that different study abroad program types have different organizational concerns, which impact staff's perception of gendered risk among students. Study abroad staff who work in international offices at German universities were not aware of gendered risk among their students. These staff had most of their contact with students at the beginning of the term to assist with visas, housing, and class registration. Their jobs were imbued with a German cultural understanding of a university, which differs from the American cultural understanding of a university. The undergraduates I interviewed explained that American universities intervene directly in students' lives, including both academic and non-academic affairs, while German universities required students to seek out information and resources on their own. Staff who worked in hybrid programs, programs sponsored by an American university with an on-site office, and third-party programs, programs sponsored by a study abroad company, had more contact throughout the semester or academic year with students than international offices. As such, these staff knew about more forms of gendered risk students encountered. Hybrid program and third-party program staff told me about particularly violent

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Sociology

cases of sexual assault they had to address in addition to other forms of gendered risk, such as strangers sexually harassing female undergraduates or following women back to their living situation.

One unexpected finding was that study abroad staff at hybrid and third-party programs often confront student mental health issues. These programs were in the process of establishing mental health provider connections in their respective cities so that students suffering mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, could see an English-language counselor while abroad.

In conclusion, the IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award allowed me to conduct interviews with study abroad staff and students in Germany. I continue to analyze the interview data, and I plan to submit a paper for peer-review in Spring 2019.