Published in final edited form as:

J Hosp Leis Sport Tour Educ. 2018 November ; 23: 18–28. doi:10.1016/j.jhlste.2018.04.004.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE NATURE OF THE ADOLESCENT STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

Mat D. Duerden, Ph.D.^{a,1}, Eric Layland, MS^{b,2}, Michael Petriello, MS^{c,3}, Amanda Stronza, Ph.D.^{c,4}, Mary Dunn, BS^{a,5}, and Shelby Flora, BS^{a,5}

^aBrigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, United States of America

^bThe Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA 16801, United States of America

^cTexas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, United States of America

Abstract

Despite rising numbers of adolescents traveling abroad each year, the majority of study abroad research focuses on emerging adults. This study represents an effort to expand our understanding of the study abroad experience from the adolescent perspective. Qualitative data were drawn from interviews and focus groups with, and observations of, participants in the program. Results indicate preparing for and then sharing the experience with like-minded peers, coupled with exposure to a new culture and direct interaction with locals, facilitated a process of reflection and growth with both perceived short-term and potential long-term impacts.

Keywords

adolescence; adolescents; qualitative methods; study abroad; experience design; emerging adults

Introduction

Global interconnectedness is rapidly increasing. Accordingly, many organizations including the United States federal government (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005), institutions of higher learning (Jackson, 2008), and even the

All correspondence for this manuscript can be sent to Mat Duerden, Assistant Professor, Department of Recreation Management, Marriott School of Management, Brigham Young University, w435 TNRB, Provo, UT 84602, 801-422-3834 (office).

¹**Mat Duerden** is an assistant professor in the Department of Recreation Management at Brigham Young University. His research focuses on experience management and youth development.

²**Eric Layland** received his M.S. degree in Youth and Family Recreation from the Department of Recreation Management at Brigham Young University. His research focuses on the leisure of European emerging adults. He is currently pursuing a doctorate degree at The Pennsylvania State University

³**Michael Petriello** is a doctoral student in the Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University. research focuses on how local knowledge is generated from and affected by peoples' interactions with the natural environment.

⁴**Amanda Stronza** is an associate professor in Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University. Her research focuses on community based conservation and eco-tourism.

⁵**Mary Dunn** and **Shelby Flora** were undergraduate research assistants at Brigham Young University who assisted with the data analyses process

Publisher's Disclaimer: This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication. As a service to our customers we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final citable form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.

former First Lady Michelle Obama (CNN, 2014) are emphasizing the importance of internationalizing experiences like study abroad. Study abroad programs present participants with multi-faceted experiences. Contributing elements include program facilitators, fellow travelers, programmatic content and structure, and the environment, culture, and peoples of the travel destination.

While the common assumption is that study abroad provides meaningful learning experiences (e.g., Comp, 2004; Rubin & Sutton, 2001; Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014), this claim relies primarily upon data gathered from emerging adults (i.e., college students). Due to lifespan differences between emerging adults and adolescents (Arnett, 2004), research is needed to better understand the potentially unique ways in which adolescents experience and are impacted by study abroad. Although a variety of age range classifications exist, in this paper the term *emerging adults* refers to individuals aged 18–25 (Arnett, 2000) and the term *adolescent* refers to individuals 10–17 years of age (adapted from World Health Organization, 2017).

The importance of examining the unique perspective of specific groups of individuals, like adolescents, is further supported by experience design literature which highlights the co-creative nature of experiences (e.g., Duerden, Ward, & Freeman, 2015). This paper will use experience design frameworks to support its focus on adolescents and their subjective and lived, as opposed to reflected, experiences while studying abroad. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate the lived experiences of adolescent participants ages 15–17 in a study abroad program to identify key elements, processes, and impacts of their involvement.

Literature Review

Due to the exploratory nature of this case study, the goal of this literature review is to provide a brief introduction to the study abroad literature and issues related to adolescence and study abroad.

Programmatic Variations

Study abroad programs come in many shapes and sizes. Programs vary in types of participants, length of the experience, travel destinations, curriculum foci, degree of immersion, group versus solo travel, and multiple other programmatic elements. At the same time, many study abroad programs share similar, if not overlapping, characteristics and goals (Lyons & Wearing, 2012; Sherraden, Bopp, & Lough, 2013; Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). At their core, most programs share roots in experiential education. The international travel experience and all it entails—cultural immersion, service, education—is experiential in nature. Some programs focus on learning through service (Pechak & Thompson, 2009; Sternberger, Ford, & Hale, 2005) or volunteering (Everingham, 2015; Raymond & Hall, 2008) to assist various in-country causes and organizations. Others integrate international service into university curricula to promote critical thinking, risk management, and intercultural skills for personal and professional development (Foronda & Belknap, 2012b; Hayward & Charrette, 2012; Pechak & Thompson, 2009).

Study Abroad Research

The study abroad literature has expanded greatly over the last few decades (Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012) and has examined both the impacts and facilitating processes of study abroad. Researchers have focused on short-term impacts (e.g., self-confidence, interpersonal skills, intellectual growth, etc.) of study abroad experiences (Beames, 2004; Jones, 2005; Nelson & Klak, 2012; Wingenbach, Chmielewski, Smith, Piña, & Hamilton, 2006). Other studies have examined the long-term impacts (e.g., career path impacts, civic engagement, global citizenship, etc.) of study abroad experiences (Ngee & Luan, 2009, Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josi, & Jon, 2009; Takano, 2010; Tarrant, 2010; Wingenbach et al., 2006). The mediating role of program facilitators has also received attention. For example, Young, Hanley, and Lyons (2017) recently completed a qualitative study of Australian university study abroad participants and examined how conversations and other experiences with program facilitators during the experience influenced participants' sense of global citizenship.

A current issue of debate in the study abroad literature centers on the efficacy of long-term (e.g., semester long) versus short-term (e.g., multiple weeks) experiences (e.g., Dwyer, 2004; Fischer, 2009; Kamdar & Lewis, 2015; Kurt, Olitsky, & Geis, 2013). Research findings have shown support for the positive effects of both short and long-term study abroad experiences (e.g., Ingraham & Peterson, 2004) though some research suggests longer programs produce greater impacts among participants (Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004).

Questions also remain regarding how personal, contextual, and programmatic factors influence participants' experiences (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). For example, in a review of recent study abroad studies, Paige and Vande Berg noted the most successful programs incorporate cultural immersion with intentional content delivery, educator interventions, and opportunities for purposive reflection. Exploring processes *during* different types of study abroad experiences, especially from the perspective of participants themselves, could contribute to the literature related to understanding of the role internal elements and processes play within study abroad programs.

Adolescents and Study Abroad

Despite the range of study abroad programs and participants, much of the research data comes from emerging adults (e.g., Bamber, 2008; Foronda & Belknap, 2012a, 2012b; Kiely, 2005; Palacios, 2010; Sin, 2009; Tarrant et al., 2011). While some study abroad research samples have included younger populations, included adolescents make up only part of the studies' broader samples, thus making it difficult to separate the unique experience of adolescents. For example, age ranges in four studies including adolescents spanned from 17 to 25 (Beames, 2004; Pike & Beames, 2007), 16 to 25 (Jones, 2005), and 18 to 30 (Tiessen, 2012) years of age. Other larger studies of adolescent study abroad participants have focused on exchange experiences, as opposed to group travel (Hansel, 2008; Hansel & Chen, 2008). Given basic developmental differences among individuals ranging from 16 to 30 years old, the heterogeneity of these samples makes it difficult to draw conclusions specifically representative of adolescent perspectives.

Differences between adolescents and emerging adults suggest individuals in these stages may have different study abroad experiences. Adolescence, unlike emerging adulthood, is characterized by uniformity in relationship to parents and family (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adults experience freedom from parents and daily obligation to family, while adolescents regularly live within a parent or guardian structure because of financial and legal dependence (Arnett, 2004). As adolescents grow into emerging adulthood, they experience new freedoms and even a change in legal status from minor to adult. Adolescents and emerging adults also experience different physiological states and changes. Little research exists in this area, but scientists have shown noteworthy changes in brain matter and function between adolescence and emerging adulthood (Giedd et al., 1999; Gotgay et. al, 2004) suggesting physiological changes may occur between these developmental periods.

Based upon the reviewed differences between adolescence and emerging adulthood, it seems plausible individuals in these two stages would experience and be impacted by study abroad programs differently. For example, emerging adults would, on average, have more life experiences and knowledge to draw upon than adolescents to interpret their study abroad experience, potentially allowing them to either more fully process the experience or else causing them to be less open to new learning opportunities. For example, research findings suggest an inverse relationship exists between previous travel experience and positive growth on targeted outcomes (Dirkx, Spohr, Tepper, & Tons, 2010; Stone, Hill, Duerden, & Witesman, 2014). In other words, a ceiling effect appears to exist for individuals who have already traveled abroad. Social interactions among participants and leaders may also be different for adolescents versus emerging adults and thus impact their overall study abroad experience. While this review of potential differences is far from exhaustive, it provides some evidence of relevant differences between adolescents and emerging adults that may impact their study abroad experiences.

Experience Design and Study Abroad

Scholars have long been interested in understanding the design and impact of experiences (e.g., Dewey, 1938). Over the last few decades, in part due to the rise of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), experiences as a phenomenon have received increased attention. This has included work to more clearly conceptualize the nature of experiences. Duerden et al. (2015) suggest that experiences include:

objective, interactive encounters between participants and provider manipulated frameworks (i.e., *erlebnis*; e.g., dining at a restaurant, attending a concert, playing in a softball tournament) and the resulting subjective participant outcomes (i.e., *erfahrung*; e.g., feeling unhappy with the quality of food at a restaurant, being emotionally moved by a song at a concert, deciding to return again next year to play in the same softball tournament and win the whole thing) of experiences (p. 603).

The key to this conceptualization is that experiences are interactive affairs that are individually perceived. Therefore, while many individuals may participate in the same objective experience, they will each have their own subjective experience. Accordingly, it could be assumed differences will exist between the subjective study abroad experience of

adolescents and emerging adults. Thus, additional research focused specifically on adolescents is warranted, as the majority of study abroad research has focused on emerging adults and adults.

Daniel Kahneman's (2011) research also suggests significant differences exist between individuals lived and reflected upon experiences (Zajchowski, Schwab, & Dustin, 2017). During an experience, individuals evaluate it in terms of its immediate impact and contributing elements, whereas when reflecting upon an experience post-participation, individuals tend to more narrowly focus on the highs, lows, and end of the experience. Thus, in order to understand the elements and processes of the of a specific participant group's subjective experience, data collection during the experience is essential.

Summary and Research Questions

A need exists for research that focuses on identifying key facilitating elements and processes of study abroad experiences. While advances along this line of inquiry are being made (e.g., Paige & Vande Berg, 2012), more data is needed from under-examined participant groups, like adolescents. Although issues related to perceived study abroad experience data exist (see Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012), qualitative inquiry in this area represents an initial step towards the development of applicable adolescent study abroad program theory. This approach was also informed by the experience design literature and a desire to better understand the subjective experience of adolescents studying abroad. Accordingly, this study's purpose was to investigate a specific study abroad program for adolescents as it occurred, in order to identify key elements, processes, and impacts based upon participants' lived experience.

Methods

Case Study Description

This study used an adolescent study abroad program to Cambodia provided by Global Explorers (GEx), a non-profit organization, as a case study. The mission of GEx is to inspire responsible global citizenship through transformational travel experiences for students and educators of all backgrounds and abilities. This program received funding from the United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Youth Programs Division as a recipient of their American Youth Leadership Program (AYLP) with Cambodia award. The award provided funding for 30 adolescent participants between 15 and 17 years of age and 5 adult educators to participate in the Cambodia AYLP. The funded program ran for two years. The grant also provided funds for program evaluation efforts, which made this study's data collection process possible. The program consisted of five 90-minute virtual preparatory sessions, a three-day preparatory retreat in San Francisco, a three-week expedition to Cambodia, and follow-up service leadership and alumni opportunities. The expedition provided hands on opportunities around each content area, including service projects, school and historical site visits, cultural exchanges, homestays with local Cambodians, and an AYLP-specific focus on climate change and the environment. GEx staff members, in conjunction with various local guides, facilitated the in-country expedition.

Participants divided their time between four different regions during their time in Cambodia. About half of their time was spent in two urban areas, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, while the other half of their time was spent in rural communities. While in the cities, students stayed in hotels and engaged in activities ranging from visiting important cultural and historic sites (e.g., Angkor Wat, the Killing Fields) to participating in cultural exchange activities (e.g., visiting with students at an arts school, learning about Cambodian culture through cooking classes) and gaining insight into the support foreign governments provide Cambodia (e.g., visit to the US Embassy). While in rural areas, students stayed with host families and participated primarily in cultural exchange activities through partnerships with two different local schools. Participants in the AYLP program remained a self-contained cohort throughout their time in Cambodia and engaged as a whole group in all activities. GEx staff facilitated reflective debriefing sessions after most components of the experience (e.g., visiting the Killing Fields).

Sample

GEx employed a national recruitment strategy through its website and various affiliated organizations and non-profits. Both adolescent and adult applicants submitted application packets that were reviewed by a panel of GEx staff members to determine merit and fit for the program. Merit requirements were established by the funding agency, which stipulated that each cohort consist of at least 50% students who qualified for free/reduced lunch and 10% with some form of a physical disability. The total sample included 59 adolescent participants from 14 different states who traveled with GEx to Cambodia during 2011 or 2012. The sample consisted of 30 males and 28 females. The average age of adolescent participants was 16.36 in 2011 and 16.70 in 2012. One respondent in the 2012 group did not report their gender. Table 1 contains demographic information for the sample.

Procedures

Two of the authors were directly involved in the data collection process. One traveled with participants in 2011 and the other in 2012. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observational field notes. Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Observational field notes from 2012 were also transcribed and included in the analysis, in order to provide additional contextual clarity to the data. Protocols (Creswell, 2009) were developed to guide the interviews and focus groups. The prompts for early on in the program included questions such as:

- Why did you decide to participate in this program?
- What do you hope to get out of this program?
- What are you most excited and or nervous about?

As well as prompts for later in the trip such as:

- What are you learning about?
- How has this experience affected the ways you feel about the things you have learned?
- What have been some of your favorite memories/highlights?

Prompts were used to get participants talking about the experience and then interviewers posed additional probing questions (e.g., tell me more about that, why do you feel that way) to encourage the adolescents to provide more details.

All AYLP participants from both years were provided information about the study and consent forms for participation. To make data collection as unobtrusive as possible no formal interview schedule was established. This meant field researchers looked for opportune times to conduct interviews and focus groups when participants would not be pulled out of other activities. Accordingly, not all participants were formally interviewed but most engaged in informal interactions with the researchers as part of their joint participation in the program. Additionally, the researchers observed all adolescent participants throughout the course of the program. Across the two programs, a total of 30 one-on-one interviews and four focus groups with two to four participants occurred. Formal interviews were engaged in by 41 of the 59 participants.

Interviews and focus groups ranged from 10 to 30 minutes and took place throughout the duration of the program in a variety of settings, including on buses, in public eating areas, at outdoor gathering places, etc. The decision was made to collect data during the program as opposed to afterwards because the focus of the study was to understand the elements and processes associated with the adolescent study abroad *experience*. Although this approach excluded the gathering of reflective insights after participation, the decision was made to devote data collection resources towards gathering data most aligned with the study's purpose. Both focus groups and interviews were conducted to capitalize on the unique benefits of each format (e.g., the privacy of one-on-one interviews and the generative nature of focus groups) (Babbie, 2004). Pseudonyms were used in place of real names to preserve participants' confidentiality.

Researchers' relationship to the data—Two of the authors, one in 2011 and one in 2012, traveled with and collected data from participants. One of the authors was a doctoral student and the other a professor at a large U.S. university at the time. Both were introduced to their respective groups as researchers interested in learning more about study abroad experiences. Throughout the course of data collection, the researchers spoke openly about their roles. Over time, they integrated with the group and became viewed as simply another member of the party who incidentally took notes and conducted interviews and focus groups. On many occasions, participants sought them out to share experiences, opinions, and overall evaluations of the program.

Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data occurred in two distinct phases. In the first phase, two researchers each coded five different transcripts employing an open coding strategy (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After open coding, the codes from both researchers were grouped into twelve inclusive themes (later reduced to eight). A theme dictionary was developed for all twelve themes, detailing inclusion and exclusion criteria as demonstrated by Ryan (1995). Researchers then followed Bernard and Ryan's (2010) recommendations for content

analysis, including testing the themes, applying the themes, creating a case-by-variable matrix, and analyzing the matrix.

To pretest the themes for reliability, one researcher applied all twelve themes to two interviews not included in the open coding selection. Secondary coders used a portion of the codebook to code the same two interviews for six of the twelve themes in an attempt to reach high levels of inter-rater agreement with the first researcher. The codebook was tested and edited to improve clarity and consistency among researchers until all themes achieved high levels ($\kappa > 0.7$) of inter-rater agreement as measured by Cohen's Kappa (Landis & Koch, 1977). Several themes were combined or redefined to eliminate redundancy, reducing the total number of themes to eight. All eight themes had high levels of inter-rater agreement (see Table 2).

After testing the codebook and establishing acceptable levels of agreement, researchers applied each of the eight themes to all transcripts. Researchers completed the content analysis by creating a case-by-theme matrix to compare each theme's prominence. The methodological and analytical strategies employed in this study contributed to the validity and reliability of the findings. These included qualitative best practices (Creswell, 2013), such as extended data collection in the field, triangulation across multiple data sources and researchers, and establishing intercoder agreement.

Findings

Using the case-by-theme matrix, researchers ranked the identified themes based on prominence (see Table 3). To further illustrate the experience's influence on the participants, samples of interview dialogue are offered throughout. These examples illustrate the lived experience and meaning behind the eight ordered themes. Four themes dealt with elements and processes of the experience and four dealt with perceived outcomes.

Culture: exposure and comparison—The theme of culture appeared most frequently in the data. Related dialogue primarily included sub-themes of exposure and comparison. Participants were immersed in both rural and urban Cambodian culture, both of which were novel contexts for the travelers. Regarding his interaction with local Cambodian students, one participant remarked, "A lot of them said they were sons of farmers, so I kind of thought that was pretty cool because...where I live, we don't have farmers, we don't really farm." While discussing what she was learning from Cambodia, one girl said, "I'm learning that there is a very different world out there from what I'm used to...I've never been to a place like this, and it's a shock to me to see all this and have to stay here." The newness of the experiences and culture often created feelings of shock, surprise, and altered realities.

In addition to exposure to new lifestyles and settings, participants used their own home country and circumstances as a reference for understanding their experience. For example, one participant noticed adolescents in Cambodia had fun differently than Americans: "In America, you have to go to the movies to have fun; you need your iPod; you need money." He then compared that to a different type of fun he experienced while playing with Cambodian students, "Yesterday we had our shoes on our feet, a couple of drums, and each

other. And that's all we needed, and we had the most fun ever." Participants also spotted similarities across cultures while interacting with Cambodian students during leisure activities. As part of a group discussion, one student identified several such comparisons: "I've noticed we've talked a lot about cultural differences, but there's a lot of similarities too...everyone still...laughs and smiles, and that's universal."

Interaction with locals—Participants had opportunities to communicate with Cambodians in a variety of settings. One participant expressed her frustration about the communication barrier: "It's just really frustrating to know that there's somebody who could be such a wealth of information [but you speak a different language]." Other participants exhibited a more proactive approach to bridging communication gaps. For example, participants used hand motions and drawings: "It was fun that you could communicate without using either language; just making signs with your hands or drawing pictures and smiling. That's communication. That's universal." This occurred on multiple occasions as evidenced in this field note: "Hopping off our boat, I saw and heard Sally's group . . . serenading their boat captain with a choral-like song 'Thank You Very Much' in Khmer."

Recognized learning and growth—Participants not only expected future growth to result from their time abroad, but also underwent immediate growth through experience and observation. For some, growth resulted from the new environment. One young man identified a shift in his attitude toward living accommodations and his resulting ability to adjust to different circumstances in Cambodia: "I definitely prefer Western toilets to squat toilets, but I've realized that I can sleep in a bed with mosquito netting. . . . I don't really need all this Western stuff."

Another student explained how seeing the living conditions of urban Cambodians fostered a keener awareness of others' needs. He said, "I'm learning about the culture here, but I think I'm learning more about myself also...and about how I feel about people, and the way they are treated and the way they live." His experiences even moved him to reevaluate his pre-trip purchase of expensive sunglasses: "I could've used that money to help somebody out. I feel bad and regret it. What did I need those sunglasses for when I could've used that money to help somebody out?" Like this young man, many participants learned about different levels of materialism, recognizing a high level of it in their own lives back home.

The growth and learning of many participants resulted directly from social interactions with local Cambodians. One participant spoke of becoming "extremely self-aware" by interacting with a group of Cambodian peers she had never met before. She attributed her self-discovery more to the foreign social group than the foreign environment: "I realized I step outside of my comfort zone when I meet new people and [when] I'm put into a group where I don't know anybody. And by not knowing anybody, there's nobody for me to define myself by." She learned more about herself by participating in the program with people she had never met.

Preparation and expectations—Participants often reflected on their experiences in preparing both physically and mentally for their trip abroad. Despite the mental, academic, and physical preparation, students could not anticipate everything. Many were shocked to

find out things were much different than they expected. Many were surprised to be welcomed by Cambodians: “I didn’t expect all the people to be so friendly and just outgoing and everything. And the homestays, I didn’t expect the family to be so nice and everything.” In contrast, participants did not expect to be confronted with so much human destitution. One young man lamented, “There’s...babies naked on the street. I didn’t really expect it, it really got to me the way that I saw the kids coming up, tapping on your arm, asking for money.”

Group dynamics: shared values and experiences—Some participants attributed the bond which developed among the group to the amount of time spent together and the isolated, shared experiences: “It’s kind of like a weird thing where you push a bunch of people together and have them together 24 hours a day...We’ve been forced to make these really strong bonds because it...seems like the whole world right now.” This participant also pointed out these same friendships wouldn’t have formed in a normal school setting. Sharing their hopes and fears as the trip unfolded may have also promoted cohesive shared group experiences. As indicated in field notes, at one point group leaders responded to a downtrodden air among students by asking:

each person [to] share one thing, starting with the sentence stem: “One major challenge has been” Some students highlighted overcoming anxiety, building up self-confidence in group settings, and mood swings as major challenges. The night ended with everyone sharing something they admire or appreciate about another group member using a similar stem sentence.

Through shared curriculum, goals, and challenges, participants formed strong bonds among themselves. They often expressed hope and confidence that the friendships would perpetuate beyond their time abroad: “I feel like we’ll always be friends, and we’ll always be able to keep in contact somehow throughout our whole lives.”

Impact on future: short-term and long-term—Participants also considered the program’s potential impact on their future. These discussions focused on both long- and short-term impacts, ranging from the imminent return home to distant education and career decisions. After experiencing the less materialistic life of some Cambodians, a participant looked forward to making changes immediately following her experience: “I want to go home and simplify my life. It’s a simple thing, but I see how little these people here live with, and I don’t need half the stuff on my desk, so why do I keep it?” This individual recognized an overabundance of material belongings compared to Cambodian students and host families and felt compelled to make lifestyle changes.

Participants often spoke of how their study abroad experience either confirmed or altered plans for their future. Some talked about changing career plans: “I’ve wanted to be an engineer, and now I don’t know if that’s so important. I want to maybe focus on helping people more.” Others expressed their desire to continue traveling in their free time, education, and careers: “It’s gotten me to realize...I want to study abroad in college and make sure that I go on excursions all of my life and just experience everything possible.”

Awareness of social issues—As participants were exposed to poverty, inequality, and other social issues, they developed a new worldview, frequently compared it to their former worldview, and ultimately developed a greater sense of global citizenship. One girl described the experience of seeing human degradation sharply juxtaposed with an ornately decorated palace:

It was so strange. Because, literally, right outside the door to the palace were people who were, like, mutilated from mines and begging and poor. And everything was dirty. Then you walk in, and it's dripping with gold and diamonds. It was so strange. They even had a solid gold spittoon.

These types of stark contrast caused participants to critically analyze difficult social questions related to issues like human trafficking, as documented in the following field note:

The lesson began with 12 minutes to write about several questions, like “What do you think about when you hear the word slavery?” . . . Nearly all the group wrote, but Wanda drew a picture of a muscular, faceless man and woman standing side by side. She said the picture symbolized strength required to endure being a victim of trafficking.

Hence, as participants faced real and sometimes disturbing circumstances, they grew more aware of global social issues, forming the beginnings of global citizenship. For instance, many reacted optimistically, looking for ways to make a difference: “I just kept getting this impression, I have so much opportunity at my fingertips. Obviously I’m responsible for some change in this world, and so now I just have to figure out what that is.” In reevaluating their worldviews, they discovered a responsibility and a desire to contribute to the world through global citizenship.

Conservation—Adolescent participants learned practical conservation approaches applicable both during the experience abroad and after. An example of immediate application was shared by an adolescent who said, “Even now in the hotel, I’ll turn off the lights and the air, and stuff when I know it’s not needed. So, I’m just thinking, like, more [about conservation].” Others commented on the global impact of non-recyclable goods and altering habits at home: “There’s so many things that I can do different with my life to help out the world, like not buying Styrofoam plates and plastic cups and plastic parts that we don’t need.” Some participants even appreciated the everyday conservation methods Cambodians used, such as collecting rainwater for showering. Speaking of his plans to implement a more sustainable lifestyle at home, one young man said, “I’ve definitely become more aware of my surroundings...I’m going to come back so geared up for really converting my family. We’re kind of eco-friendly...but we could do a lot more... A little bit can go a long way.” Participants not only learned what conservation is and why it’s needed, but also formed specific plans to practice conservation upon returning home.

Proposed Conceptual Model

A conceptual model (see Figure 1) was developed, based upon the study’s results, to propose a set of relationships between key themes. In this study, we followed Clarke and Primo’s (2012) description of conceptual (theoretical) models as explanatory tools, such as maps,

used to describe relationships between themes to understand phenomena of interest. Each circle in the figure represents one of the eight primary themes. Theme frequency determined each circle's relative size. Circles on the left of the figure deal with programmatic elements and processes, and circles on the right deal with outcomes. The sequential order and overlapping of the circles indicate proposed inter-theme relationships.

For example, preparation for the program appeared to play a facilitating role in the development of group dynamics during the actual study abroad experience. Specifically, as participants got to know one another before traveling, they identified common, shared values and goals, and this seemed to have produced a sense of unified purpose during the trip. Additionally, their shared experiences abroad further strengthened the group's social bonds. Previous research with other study abroad adolescent samples also found strong group dynamics resulted from pre-trip preparatory interactions followed by additional shared experiences during travel (Duerden & Witt, 2010).

Based on the data, the level of interaction that occurred within the group and with the culture and citizens of Cambodia served as another key catalyst of change. Participants linked these interactions to increased awareness of social issues like global poverty and to personal self-reflection and growth. It should be noted that the distinct cultural differences between the United States and Cambodia may have produced more dramatic impacts than if these same participants had traveled to a country with a more similar culture to the United States like Canada or Great Britain.

Participants' recognition of the learning and growth they experienced seemed to heighten when they began to contemplate how they would reshape their day-to-day lives and their plans for the future after returning home. For some, these reflections led them to identify more immediate impacts, such as being more eco-friendly, while others foresaw more long-term impacts on education and career paths.

Discussion

This study attempted to understand the lived experience of adolescent participants involved in a study abroad program to Cambodia. In order to better understand key elements, processes, and impacts unique to adolescent study abroad participants. The results revealed eight distinct themes related to this question: culture, interaction with locals, recognized learning and growth, preparation and expectations, group dynamics, impact on future, awareness of social issues, and conservation. Four themes dealt specifically with key program elements and processes; the other four focused on resulting program impacts. A conceptual model was introduced to propose relationships between the identified key themes.

As noted in the literature review, distinct social, psychological, and physical differences exist between adolescents and emerging adults (Arnett, 2004). For the adolescents in this study, the familial and parental frameworks of home life extended into the lens with which they interpreted much of their study abroad experience. They reflected on how changes could apply to their homes, parents, families, and schools, rather than focusing on themselves as is

often the case among emerging adults. Even goals set for the future were often discussed in terms of family or school groups. The supervision associated with parent-adolescent relationships was replicated through the educator-student relationship created with this study abroad program. Emerging adults with more freedom to control or influence experiences during a study abroad program may have had entirely different experiences born out of independence associated with their life stage. The structure of this program created both a supervisory relationship and a relatively stable environment with controlled activities and designed experiences. As is often typical, more structure and control is maintained in adolescent programs than those designed for adults.

Some highly influential experiences documented in this study may have derived impact from the shallowly formed identities of the participating students. Where individuals in this group changed entire career and future plans from single experiences, many emerging adults have had more formative experiences both in and out of study abroad and may react less dramatically in altering their future plans or existing career path. Because adolescents are in early stages of identity exploration (Erikson, 1968), usually without firm commitment, they are highly exploratory and influenced by new experiences. Many of the new experiences were shocking and life altering for these participants, who were only beginning to gain an understanding of other cultures and individuals. On the other hand, emerging adults often develop and nurture a global identity and may solidify it with international experience. Therefore, the findings from this study, based upon adolescents' unique experiences, may provide insights into the facilitation of study abroad design and research related to study abroad programs for adolescent populations.

Limitations

This study relied on self-report data from program participants. While this approach allows for participants' perspectives to come to the fore, self-report data, especially from study abroad participants, bears certain limitations. First, self-reports of increases in such areas as intercultural competence may not always correlate with actual increases (Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012). While we acknowledge limitations of self-report data, we believe qualitative data has value as providing a starting point for understanding both the impacts and facilitating processes from the participants' lived experience.

The transferability of the study's findings is also limited due to the unique nature of the provided study abroad experience. All students participated in programs offered by the same provider. The study investigated a unique three-week experience distinct from longer study abroad programs. At the same time, the study included qualitative data drawn from a large sample ($N=59$). Although the observed program bears distinct differences from other study abroad programs, the variety of such programs is so broad as to make attempts to identify a standard program extremely difficult.

Conclusions

During the last 20 years, global interconnectedness and study abroad participation have increased in tandem. This upturn in study abroad activity has also facilitated increased attention from researchers. Even though increasing numbers of adolescents are traveling

abroad each year, the majority of research and theory has focused on older participants. This study represented an effort to expand our understanding of the adolescent study abroad experience. The results indicate that preparing for and then sharing the experience with like-minded peers, coupled with exposure to a new culture and direct interaction with Cambodians, appears to have facilitated a process of reflection and growth with both short-term and potentially long-term impacts, thus potentially fostering the development of global citizenship among participating adolescents.

Acknowledgments

Funding Sources:

This study was partly funded by the evaluation budget of the observed program, which was funded by an award received by the provider from the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Youth Programs Division.

References

- Arnett JJ. Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*. 2000; 55(5):469–480. [PubMed: 10842426]
- Arnett, JJ. *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from late teens through the twenties*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2004.
- Babbie, E. *The practice of social research*. 10. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning; 2004.
- Bamber P. Transforming perspectives through international service-learning. *Pedagogical Research in Maximising Education*. 2008; 3(1):43–56. Retrieved from <https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/liverpoolhope/contentassets/documents/learningandteachingresources/media/12789,en.pdf#page=50>.
- Beames S. Overseas youth expeditions with Raleigh International: A rite of passage. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*. 2004; 8(1):29–36.
- Bernard, HR., Ryan, GW. *Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2010.
- Chi, B., Jastrzab, J., Melchior, A. Circle Working Paper 47. Medford, MA: CIRCLE; 2006. Civic measurement models: Student survey and teacher rating forms. Retrieved from <http://civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP47chi.pdf>
- Clarke, KA., Primo, DM. *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2012.
- CNN. Michelle Obama's reasons to study abroad. CNN Politics. 2014. Mar 25. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/25/politics/michelle-obama-study-abroad-interview/index.html>
- Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. *Global competence and national needs: One million Americans studying abroad*. Washington, DC: Lincoln Commission; 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.aplu.org/document.doc?id=190>
- Comp, D., editor. *Research on U.S. students study abroad: An update, volume III, 2001–2003, with updates to the 1989 and volume II editions 2000–2003*. 2004. Retrieved from http://globaledresearch.com/book_research_comp.asp
- Creswell, JW. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 3. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2009.
- Creswell, JW. *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 3. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2013.
- Dewey, J. *Experience and education*. New York: Touchstone; 1938.
- Dirkx, J., Spohr, R., Tepper, L., Tons, S. Adult learners and short term study abroad: Formation or transformation. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference; Sacramento, CA. 2010.

- Duerden MD, Witt PA. The impact of socialization on youth program outcomes: A social development model perspective. *Leisure Sciences*. 2010; 32(4):299–317. DOI: 10.1080/01490400.2010.488189
- Dwyer MM. More Is better: The impact of study abroad program duration. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 2004; 10:151–163.
- Erikson, EH. *Identity youth and crisis*. New York: Norton & Company; 1968.
- Everingham P. Intercultural exchange and mutuality in volunteer tourism: The case of intercambio in Ecuador. *Tourist Studies*. 2015; 15(2):175–190.
- Fischer, K. Short study-abroad trips can have lasting effect, research suggests. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 2009. Feb 20. <http://chronicle.com/daily/2009/02/12191n.htm>
- Foronda C, Belknap RA. Short of transformation: American ADN students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences of studying abroad in a low-income country. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship*. 2012a; 9(1):1–16. DOI: 10.1515/1548-923X.2411
- Foronda C, Belknap RA. Transformative learning through study abroad in low-income countries. *Nurse Educator*. 2012b; 37(4):157–161. DOI: 10.1097/NNE.0b013e31825a879d [PubMed: 22688874]
- Giedd JN, Blumenthal J, Jeffries NO, Castellanos FX, Liu H, Zijdenbos A, Paus T, Evans AC, Rapoport JL. Brain development during childhood and adolescence: A longitudinal MRI study. *Nature Neuroscience*. 1999; 2(10):861–863. DOI: 10.1038/13158 [PubMed: 10491603]
- Gotgay N, Giedd JN, Lusk L, Hayashi KM, Greestein D, Vaituzis AC, Thompson PM. Dynamic mapping of human cortical development during childhood through early adulthood. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 2004; 101(21):8174–8179. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.0402680101
- Hansel, B. Report 2: Looking at intercultural sensitivity, anxiety, and experience with other cultures. New York: AFS International; 2008. AFS long term impact study.
- Hansel, B., Chen, Z. Report 1, 20 to 25 years after the experience, AFS alumni are compared with their peers. New York: AFS International; 2008. AFS Long term impact study.
- Hayward LM, Charrette AL. Integrating Cultural Competence and Core Values: An International Service-Learning Model. *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*. 2012; 26(1):78–89.
- Ingraham EC, Peterson DL. Assessing the impact of study abroad on student learning at Michigan State University. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 2004; 10:83–100.
- Jackson J. Globalization, internationalization, and short-term stays abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 2008; 32(4):349–358. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.04.004>.
- Jones AM. Assessing international youth service programmes in two low income countries. *Voluntary Action: The Journal of the Institute for Volunteering Research*. 2005; 7(2):87–100.
- Kahneman, D. *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2011.
- Kamdar N, Lewis T. Deriving Long-Term Benefits from Short-Term Study-abroad Programs. *Journal of Management & Engineering Integration*. 2015; 7(2):1–10.
- Kiely R. A transformative learning model for service-learning: A longitudinal case study. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. 2005; 12(1):5–22.
- Kim, YY., Ruben, BD. Intercultural transformation: A systems theory. In: Kim, YY., Gudykunst, WB., editors. *Theories in intercultural communication*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage; 1988. p. 299–321.
- Landis JR, Koch GG. The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics*. 1977; 33:159–174. DOI: 10.2307/2529310 [PubMed: 843571]
- Lyons KD, Wearing S. Reflections on the ambiguous intersections between volunteering and tourism. *Leisure Sciences*. 2012; 34(1):88–93. DOI: 10.1080/01490400.2012.633858
- Nelson ED, Klak T. Equity in international experiential learning: Assessing benefits to students and host communities. *PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement*. 2012; 1(2):106–129. Retrieved from <http://encompass.eku.edu/prism/vol1/iss2/3>.
- Ngee, LM., Luan, TS. Connecting overseas community service-learning expedition and development of personal capabilities in youths. Paper presented at the Outdoor Education Research Conference; Beechworth, Victoria, Australia: La Trobe University; 2009.
- Paige RM, Fry GW, Stallman EM, Josi J, Jon J. Study abroad for global engagement: The long-term impact of mobility experiences. *Intercultural Education*. 2009; 20(sup1):S29–S44. DOI: 10.1080/14675980903370847

- Paige, RM., Vande Berg, M. Why students are and are not learning abroad: A review of recent research. In: Vande Berg, M., Paige, M., Hemming Lou, K., editors. *Student learning Abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it*. Sterling, VA: Stylus; 2012. p. 29-58.
- Palacios CM. Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: Conceiving global connections beyond aid. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. 2010; 18(7):861–878. DOI: 10.1080/09669581003782739
- Parker B, Altman Dautoff D. Service-learning and study abroad: Synergistic learning opportunities. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. 2007; 13(2):40–53.
- Pechak CM, Thompson M. A conceptual model of optimal international service-learning and its application to global health initiatives in rehabilitation. *Physical Therapy*. 2009; 89(11):1192–1204. DOI: 10.2522/ptj.20080378 [PubMed: 19745025]
- Pike ECJ, Beames SK. A critical interactionist analysis of “youth development” expeditions. *Leisure Studies*. 2007; 26(2):147–159. DOI: 10.1080/02614360600898102
- Raymond EM, Hall CM. The development of cross-cultural (mis)understanding through volunteer tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. 2008; 16(5):530–543. DOI: 10.1080/09669580802159610
- Rubin DL, Sutton RC. Assessing student learning outcomes from study abroad. *International Educator*. 2001; 10(2):30–31.
- Ryan, GW. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Florida; FL, United States: 1995. Medical decision making among the Kom of Cameroon: Modeling how characteristics of illness, patients, caretakers, and compounds affects treatment choice in a rural community.
- Sherraden MS, Bopp A, Lough BJ. Students serving abroad: A framework for inquiry. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. 2013; 17(2):7–42.
- Sherraden MS, Lough B, McBride AM. Effects of international volunteering and service: Individual and institutional predictors. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. 2008; 19(4):395–421. DOI: 10.1007/s11266-008-9072x
- Sin HL. Volunteer tourism—“involve me and I will learn”? *Annals of Tourism Research*. 2009; 36(3): 480–501. DOI: 10.1016/j.annals.2009.03.001
- Sternberger LG, Ford KA, Hale DC. International service-learning: Integrating academics and active learning in the world. *Journal of Public Affairs*. 2005; 8:75–96.
- Stone, GA., Hill, BJ., Duerden, MD., Witesman, E. Study abroad as a transformative experience: Measuring transformative learning phases and outcomes. 2014. Manuscript submitted for publication
- Strauss, A., Corbin, J. *Basics of qualitative research*. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 1998.
- Takano T. A 20-year retrospective study of the impact of expeditions on Japanese participants. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*. 2010; 10(2):77–94. DOI: 10.1080/14729679.2010.505707
- Tarrant MA. A conceptual framework for exploring the role of studies abroad in nurturing global citizenship. *Journal of Studies in International Education*. 2010; 14(5):433–451. DOI: 10.1177/1028315309348737
- Tarrant MA, Rubin DL, Stoner L. The added value of study abroad: Fostering a global citizenry. *Journal of Studies in International Education*. 2014; 18(2):141–161.
- Tarrant MA, Stoner L, Borrie WT, Kyle G, Moore RL, Moore A. Educational travel and global citizenship. *Journal of Leisure Research*. 2011; 43(3):403–426.
- Tiessen R. Motivations for learn/volunteer abroad programs: Research with Canadian youth. *Journal of Global Citizenship & Equity Education*. 2012; 2(1):1–21. Retrieved from <http://journals.sfu.ca/jgcee/index.php/jgcee/article/view/57/42>.
- Vande Berg, M., Paige, RM., Hemming Lou, K. Student learning abroad: Paradigms and assumptions. In: Vande Berg, M., Paige, M., Hemming Lou, K., editors. *Student learning Abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it*. Sterling, VA: Stylus; 2012. p. 3-28.

- Wingenbach GJ, Chmielewski N, Smith J, Piña M, Hamilton WT. Barriers to international experiential participation. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*. 2006; 13(3):79–89. DOI: 10.5191/jiaee.2006.13306
- World Health Organization. Recognizing adolescence. 2017. Retrieved from <http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/section2/page1/recognizing-adolescence.html>
- Young T, Hanley J, Lyons KD. Mediating global citizenry: a study of facilitator-educators at an Australian university. *Tourism Recreation Research*. 2017; 42(2):223–234.
- Zajchowski CA, Schwab KA, Dustin DL. The experiencing self and the remembering self: Implications for leisure science. *Leisure Sciences*. 2017; 39(6):561–568.

Figure 1.
Conceptual Model

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Table 1

Qualitative Demographics

Cohort	Mean Age	Gender		Ethnicity					Nat. Am.	Other
		Male	Female	Hispanic	Black	White	Asian			
2011	16.36	13	15	1	4	16	4		1	2
2012	16.70	17	13	3	2	10	3		1	12

Table 2

Inter-rater Reliability

Theme	Description	Rating (R) *
Culture	Two primary areas within this theme are exposure/awareness and comparison. Culture can be understood by recognizing the unique aspects of another group and by comparing one's own culture to that of another; includes recognition of cultural barriers.	.73
Interaction with Locals	Description of experiences participants shared with locals and their attitude toward the experiences; includes both direct and indirect interaction.	.77
Recognized Learning & Growth	Experiences when participants gain something meaningful out of the process and feel they have learned something more than program curriculum. This theme specifically required that participants expressed awareness of their learning.	.71
Preparation & Expectations	Reflection on how prepared individuals were for the program experiences and whether or not the trip met, exceeded, or did not meet their expectations.	.83
Group Dynamics	References to the program group's cohesion, compatibility, and other social aspects.	.79
Impact on Future	References to change immediately or in the future attributed to experiences during the program, also includes expected challenges to adjusting when returning home.	.76
Awareness of Social Issues	Awareness of issues representing global or universal challenges faced by humanity; often includes expression of a desire to change.	.71
Conservation	Discussion of issues including wildlife preservation, pollution, climate change, recycling, energy sources, or any other sustainability and natural preservation topics	.73

* R>0.70 is considered to be high or excellent reliability

Table 3

Theme Frequencies

Theme	Transcripts	References
Culture	39	738
Interaction with Locals	33	649
Recognized Learning & Growth	37	627
Preparation & Expectations	39	608
Group Dynamics	35	547
Impact on Future	37	464
Awareness of Social Issues	32	426
Conservation	24	242