

Study Abroad and Cultural Disengagement

By Eric R. Terzuolo*

The impact of study abroad on how participants view their own cultures, instead of other cultures, is an understudied area. In the research discussed here, change over a semester in Cultural Disengagement (CD) scores on the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) version 3 was the dependent variable. The treatment group were US undergraduates from a large urban private university who studied abroad for a semester; the control group were students at the same institution who remained on the home campus for a semester. Those who studied abroad experienced a statistically significant reduction in disengagement from their culture of origin, as compared to the control group. This runs counter to widespread expectations that study abroad will influence participants to view their culture of origin more critically.

Keywords: study abroad, cultural disengagement, Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), analysis of variance, demographic and program characteristics

Introduction

We expect higher education to help students understand and deal effectively with cultures other than their own. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), for example, provides academic institutions with the *International Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric*. It states forcefully that integrating “intercultural knowledge and competence into the heart of education is an imperative” (AAC&U, n.d.).

Study abroad is widely considered a valuable instrument to promote intercultural knowledge and competence. In fact, increased intercultural sensitivity has long been among the top objectives of study abroad offices on US campuses (Campbell, 2016). The Forum on Education Abroad, recognized by the US Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission as the Standards Development Organization for education abroad, stresses intercultural dimensions in its *Standards of Good Practice*. It requires study abroad program leaders, for example, to “communicate [to students] the importance of understanding the social, historical, political, economic, linguistic, cultural, and environmental context(s) for each program and location” (Forum on Education Abroad, 2023, Section 6.1.4).

The concept of “global citizenship” also has become prominent in defining study abroad objectives, especially since the turn of the century (Tarbutton & Doyle, 2023). In the 2009 *Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher Education and the Quest for Global Citizenship*, for example, the volume’s editor pointed to an ambitious agenda of democratizing study abroad and orienting it toward the goal of “developing critical individuals who are capable of analyzing power structures, building global community, or tangibly helping to improve the lives of people around the world” (Lewin, 2009, p. xv). This is essential in a world

*Adjunct Faculty, School of International Service, American University, USA.

where, according to the author, “boundaries between nations are blurring” (p. xiii). Schattle (2009, p. 18) situates the idea of global citizenship within the long-standing tradition of cosmopolitan thought but admits that global citizenship may be only “hazily defined on campus.” Deardorff (2014) argues, in fact, that both “intercultural competence” and “global citizenship” are used in outcome statements for global mobility programs without having been clearly defined based on scholarship.

It is not just a matter, however, of how students come to view other cultures, but also of how study abroad impacts their view of their own culture of origin. Among study abroad objectives and learning goals, for example, Haverford College includes “enhancing students’ self-awareness and understanding of their own culture”¹. Dolby (2004, p. 150) quotes a statement from Brown University that describes study abroad as a chance to reflect on the “values and way of life of your own country, your own place in that country, and its place in the world.” In advocating a dramatic expansion of study abroad, President Emeritus of Goucher College Ungar (2016) argued it was necessary to help Americans overcome a series of deleterious mental habits, including the holding of “positive . . . zealous views” regarding their own country, “routine invocations of American superiority and invulnerability, complete with divine blessings,” and “preening”².

With expectations for study abroad running so high, assessment of how it *actually* impacts participants’ views of their own cultures certainly merits attention. But this is an understudied area, on which this research report is intended to shed some light.

Expectations of transformative impacts from study abroad are not surprising. It is frequently, if sometimes too casually, described as a life-changing experience (Seifen, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2019). It does have transformative potential. Mezirow’s transformative learning concept, which Deardorff (2016, p. 254) deems an “essential” theory impacting cultural development and learning, emphasizes change in taken-for-granted assumptions constituting individuals’ frames of reference, and the key role of “disorienting dilemmas” in that process. Mezirow has significantly influenced how “those working in the area of intercultural education describe the process of developing intercultural competency” (Brewer & Cunningham 2009, p. 10). Study abroad at least *can* be replete with transformative disorienting dilemmas, as pointed out by Trilokekar and Kukar (2011).

Determining the actual scope and nature of study abroad’s impacts became an increasingly important topic of research as numbers of students studying abroad steadily increased, reaching a pre-pandemic peak of almost 350,000 annually³. The Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) 1996 report *A Research Agenda for the Internationalization of Higher Education in the United States* already was an important stimulus to improved research on issues including intercultural sensitivity (Ogden & Streitwieser, 2016). The assessment movement in higher education also has promoted more rigorous research (Vande Berg, 2007).

¹Available at: <https://www.haverford.edu/study-abroad/apply/learning-goals#:~:text=We%20expect%20study%20abroad%20to,world%3B%20behavioral%20in%20that%20we.>

²For a debate on Ungar’s proposal, see Terzuolo and Ungar (2016).

³See <https://opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/u-s-study-abroad/>.

A recent review, for example, of the literature on the intercultural competence outcomes of short-term study abroad programs identified 68 relevant articles (Goldstein, 2022).

The growing body of literature on the intercultural development/competency/skill impacts of study abroad employs a wide variety of techniques, both qualitative and quantitative. Ogden and Streitwieser (2016), for example, listed 12 instruments relevant to research on culture learning and intercultural development. Of those, the quantitative, longitudinal, quasi-experimental research discussed below employed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), specifically version 3. This version included a measure termed Cultural Disengagement (CD), which can be described as indicating “the degree to which an individual or group experiences a sense of disconnection from a primary cultural community” (Hammer, 2012, p. 119)⁴. Note that the IDI, widely used in the private sector as well as academia, is a rigorously validated instrument with strong content and construct validity, tested *inter alia* for cultural bias and susceptibility to social desirability effects (Hammer, 2012).

The IDI Cultural Disengagement measure was used here to test the following research hypotheses regarding impacts of study abroad:

Research Hypothesis (RH) 1: Study abroad, as compared to an equivalent period of study at one’s home institution, will be significantly associated with decreased disengagement⁵ from one’s primary cultural identity.

RH 2: Demographic characteristics or life experience of students⁶ will be significantly associated with differences in cultural disengagement change between study abroad and control groups.

RH 3: Study abroad program characteristics⁷ will be significantly associated with change in Cultural Disengagement scores for students who participate in such programs.

The next section of this paper, the Literature Review, focuses on studies that have employed the IDI to examine the relationship between study abroad and

⁴Note that the IDI, which undergoes continual revision and updating, has reached version 5 as of this writing. In summer 2019, IDI, LLC, which owns all rights to the IDI, advised IDI Qualified Administrators that version 5 no longer would include Cultural Disengagement in the reports generated by the instrument. The intention was to improve the learning and experience of IDI respondents and assist IDI Qualified Administrators in providing debriefs. The instrument did not collect the requisite contextual information to facilitate fully satisfactory discussion of the Cultural Disengagement score. (T. Tachiera, Director of Programs, IDI, LLC, personal communication, January 10, 2022.)

⁵Note that this would entail a pre- to post-test *increase* in CD score. The inverse relationship between the CD score and the degree of cultural disengagement it indicates can be a source of confusion at first. Simply stated, the higher the CD score, the less a participant’s disengagement from their primary cultural identity.

⁶The variables employed in this study were: gender, academic major; membership in an ethnic minority; self-assessed ability to interact effectively in a language other than English; one-year of college-level foreign language study; self-identification as member of more than one national culture; having a grandparent born and raised outside the US; amount of time spent abroad before participating in the research. These were operationalized in the form of dichotomous variables, in other words as answers to yes/no or either/or questions.

⁷In this study, students were asked whether: they had studied in an Anglophone country; their program employed intentional pedagogy to promote intercultural skills; they took courses at host-country universities that were primarily intended for host-country nationals; their studies included courses conducted in a language other than English or intended to teach a language other than English; they resided primarily with host-country nationals.

change in how participants perceive their culture of origin, while also providing additional theoretical context. The subsequent Methodology and Research Design section provides further details of the IDI in its description of the research methods. Subsequent sections describe the research results, discuss those results, underlining similarities to and contrasts with other research findings, and offer some conclusions regarding the implications of these results for future research.

Literature Review

Though IDI measures have been used as outcome variables in research on study abroad's impact on participants' relationships with their cultures of origin, this research is very limited compared to that on intercultural competence impacts of study abroad. Hao (2012) considered the Cultural Disengagement impact of a year of study abroad on high school students from the People's Republic of China. The study abroad students showed a small mean increase (from 4.09 to 4.12) in CD score, suggesting increased engagement with their own culture. The mean CD score for the control group, who did not study abroad, dropped. But the between-groups difference was not statistically significant.

Other studies have employed a different IDI measure, Encapsulated Marginality (EM), which was something of a forerunner to, but also quite distinct from, Cultural Disengagement. The IDI places individuals on the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC), a theoretical developmental framework, *currently* with five progressively more multicultural orientations toward cultural difference: Denial, Polarization, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation. The Intercultural Development Continuum has its roots in M. J. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) but with significant research-based revisions. As employed in IDI version 2, in fact, the Continuum included the Integration orientation from Bennett's model, an ethnorelative/multicultural orientation (Chan, 2011), a stage beyond Adaptation, the now most multicultural orientation (Hammer, 2012). To capture the Integration orientation, the IDI then included an Encapsulated Marginality (EM) scale, drawing on the work of J. M. Bennett (1993), who had identified two types of marginality: "constructive marginality," a positive way of experiencing the sense of being between cultures, and "encapsulated marginality," in which "separation from culture is experienced as alienation" (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p. 425)⁸.

Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2018) examined the intercultural sensitivity impact of an international mobility program on Spanish university students, employing a Spanish version of the IDI version 2 that included Encapsulated Marginality, using pre- to post-test measures for a group that studied abroad and for a control group that did

⁸Validation research leading to version 3 of the IDI, however, indicated that the DMIS Integration stage was "not theoretically related to the development of intercultural competence – the focus of the IDI." Rather, the DMIS Integration stage was "concerned with the construction of an intercultural identity" (Hammer, 2012, p. 119). Cultural Disengagement was a successor, in a sense, to the Encapsulated Marginality measure, but also explicitly distinct from the IDI's measure of intercultural development/competence.

not. Both groups demonstrated increased interculturalism over the course of an academic year, but the increase was statistically significantly greater for those who studied abroad, including on the Encapsulated Marginality scale. Turning to the intercultural sensitivity impact of service-learning experiences among people from other cultures, Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2021) also found that Encapsulated Marginality score change aligned with increased pre- to post-test ethnorelativism among those who participated in service learning, as opposed to the control group.

Jones, Hof, and Tillman (2016), on the other hand, found inconsistent Encapsulated Marginality impacts for an intercultural service-learning experience at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, with two of the six participants showing decreased EM scores following the experience, implying increased alienation from their cultures of origin. Westrick (2004) using IDI version 2 had found a statistically significant increase in Encapsulated Marginality score, indicating progress in resolving EM issues, for students at an international secondary school in Hong Kong who participated in a year-long humanities course with an intercultural service experience at an orphanage in China. But students at the school participating in other intercultural programs with similar objectives did not experience comparable impacts on Encapsulated Marginality⁹.

Pedersen (2010) found a statistically significant pre- to post-test increase in EM scores for US study abroad participants in the UK who were enrolled in a Psychology of Group Dynamics course and received intercultural effectiveness training. Students studying abroad, but not engaged in said education and training, and a control group that did not study abroad at all, actually saw decreases in mean EM scores. The EM scores for participants in a short-term program in The Netherlands with intentional intercultural pedagogy also increased (Pedersen, n.d.)

Those interested in intercultural competence development have good reason to be interested in cultural disengagement and encapsulated marginality. Byram, Nichols, and Stevens (2001), for example, made a strong link between intercultural competence and a critical, analytical stance toward one's own culture. In defining the characteristics of what they termed the "intercultural speaker and mediator," they included: "willingness to relativise one's own values, beliefs, and behaviours" (p. 5); knowledge of "social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country" (p. 6); "critical cultural awareness . . . an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 8). Byram also linked what he termed "intercultural communicative competence" to "intercultural citizenship" (Deardorff 2016, p. 252). In the first research-based framework of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2016, pp. 249-250) found that intercultural scholars concurred on the importance of "cultural self-awareness (meaning the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity and worldview)" as part of intercultural competence.

Analysis of study abroad's impact on attitudes toward participants' cultures of origin also may speak to some critiques of current study abroad practices, and whether they effectively promote more cosmopolitan mindsets. As well documented by Moreno (2021, p. 93), scholars working from a critical perspective have highlighted

⁹This suggests the importance of program specificities in determining intercultural competence and cultural engagement impacts of study abroad, and thus runs counter to the findings reported here.

the “neoliberal and neocolonial ideologies embedded within discourses surrounding US study abroad, specifically regarding global citizenship.” Moreno argues that educators must “actively guide students in their self-reflection and critical thinking” on such matters (p. 106). Ogden (2007) had highlighted the problem of “colonial students” experiencing study abroad from inside comfortable US bubbles, presumably a situation unlikely to promote critical reflection on one’s home culture. But it also seems that local students at institutions hosting international students do not automatically engage with their visiting counterparts and help introduce them to host country culture and society, something institutions could do more to encourage (King et al., 2021).

Methodology and Research Design

I tested Research Hypotheses 1 and 2—regarding the impact of study abroad on attitudes toward one’s culture of origin and how personal history and demographic factors might play a role—using pre- to post-test change in IDI Cultural Disengagement (CD) scores, a metric referred to below as DeltaCD, as the outcome variable. I compared mean DeltaCD for an experimental group, who studied abroad for a semester, and a control group who remained on the home campus for a comparable period, using analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical techniques, after having confirmed that the data satisfied the required assumptions¹⁰.

Testing RH 1 required one-way ANOVA (essentially the equivalent of an independent-sample *t* test), with DeltaCD as the dependent variable and group (experimental or control) as the categorical independent variable. To test RH 2, I employed two-way between-groups ANOVA, adding a series of personal characteristics¹¹, one at a time, as a *second* categorical independent variable. ANOVA was used to identify any statistically significant association between group and personal characteristics in determining DeltaCD. To test RH 3, I used correlation analysis to identify any statistically significant associations between DeltaCD and study abroad program characteristics¹² for the Experimental Group members. Statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS 23 software.

For ANOVA, the samples were large enough to meet the social science standard of 0.80 statistical power. I attributed significance to mean differences that were statistically significant at the alpha= 0.10 level *and* had effect sizes greater than Cohen’s $d = 0.2$ (considered small). For correlation analysis, the sample provided statistical power close to 0.90, and correlation of r greater than or equal to 0.300 (or less than/equal to -0.300) was considered significant.

The intention in employing a control group, rather than looking only at study abroad participants, was to help protect the internal validity of the research from the threat posed by maturation, “any naturally occurring growth or change in individuals

¹⁰While experimental and control groups had Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics indicating non-normal distributions, both histogram and Q-Q plots were consistent with normal distributions, as required for ANOVA (Terzuolo, 2016).

¹¹See footnote 6.

¹²See footnote 7.

that affects the measured outcome” (Ogden & Streitwieser, 2016, p. 8) and to do a better job of isolating the effects of study abroad. For what are in fact very young people, a single semester can hold the prospect of significant natural maturation, whether or not one is studying abroad. Using an experimental group and a control group also offered the possibility of exploring whether a series of demographic and life experience factors were significantly associated with differential impacts on IDI scores for those who studied abroad and those who did not.

All participants were students at a large, urban, private university in the United States. The experimental group (study abroad participants), numbering 108 in total, was recruited via direct outreach, during pre-departure orientation, to students approved for study abroad in the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 semesters. The control group, consisting of 65 students who remained on the home campus during the Fall 2014 semester, volunteered to participate in response to outreach in classes focused on international and social science themes. The university’s Institutional Review Board approved all aspects of recruitment and engagement of human subjects.

To ensure that the study abroad participants could be combined into a single experimental group, I used a chi-square test, employing the demographic/life experience profiles of members of the Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 sub-groups. I found no reason the two sub-groups could not be combined into a single experimental group. Similar detailed comparison of the experimental and control groups confirmed that they were statistically comparable. There were some differences in the demographic composition of the two groups, but the differences did not appear to impact IDI scores¹³.

Experimental group participants completed the IDI v3 before and after studying abroad for a semester, while control group members completed the instrument at the beginning and end of the Fall 2014 semester. All participants provided demographic and life experience data, and experimental group members also provided information regarding their study abroad programs. The IDI v3 consisted of demographic and contexting questions, along with 50 statements regarding stances toward cultural difference. Participants expressed agreement or disagreement with those 50 statements on a five-item Likert scale. The IDI generated Cultural Disengagement scores on a five-point scale. The higher the score, the *less* the participant was experiencing disengagement from their own principal cultural identity.

Results

With respect to Research Hypothesis 1, the data in Table 1 indicate that, while disengagement from one’s primary cultural identity *decreased* for students who studied abroad for one semester, it *increased* for students who remained at their home campus for a semester. The mean pre-study abroad (pre-test) CD score for the Experimental (study abroad) Group actually had been *lower* than for the Control Group, indicating greater *disengagement* from their primary culture for the Experimental Group. But that relationship was reversed when post-test data were taken into account. Pre-test, the Control Group mean score was 0.13 points higher,

¹³For detailed analysis, see Terzuolo (2016).

while post-test the Experimental Group's mean was higher by 0.29 (out of a maximum of 5.0 points).

Table 1. IDI Cultural Disengagement (CD) Scores by Group

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Control Group			
Pre-Test	65	4.11	0.84
Post-Test	65	3.99	0.89
DeltaCD	65	-0.12	0.62
Experimental Group			
Pre-Test	108	3.98	0.89
Post-Test	108	4.28	0.66
DeltaCD	108	0.30	0.83

The mean scores moved around 4.0 (out of 5.0), which is the border between “resolved” and “unresolved” cultural disengagement for purposes of IDI version 3 interpretation. Scores of less than 4.0 indicate an “unresolved” condition, in which one may be experiencing “some degree of lack of involvement in core aspects of being a member of a cultural community”¹⁴.

Between-groups analysis of variance gave the following result: $F(1,171) = 7.012$, $p = .001$, $d = .57$. The difference between the two groups in how their CD scores changed, pre- to post-test, was thus statistically significant at the alpha = .01 level, more demanding than the alpha = .05 level that is standard in the social sciences. The effect size, measured using Cohen's d , was medium, based on Cohen's rule of thumb that 0.2 is a small effect size, 0.5 is medium, and 0.8 is large.

With respect to Research Hypothesis 2, and as illustrated in Table 2, two-way between-groups ANOVA found *no* statistically significant interactions between group difference and any of the demographic/personal history independent variables (as listed in footnote 3, current page 6). In other words, none of the demographic/personal experience characteristics were significantly related to how the mean CD scores between the study abroad and control groups diverged, pre- to post-test.

Table 2. Interactions Between Personal Characteristics Variables and Group (Experimental vs. Control)

Variable	<i>F</i> (1, 169)	<i>p</i>
Gender	.90	.30
Academic Major	1.70	.19
Ethnic Minority	.62	.43
Foreign Language Ability	.05	.82
College-Level Language Study	.28	.60
Multicultural Identity	.28	.60
Foreign Grandparent	.52	.47
Time Abroad	.44	.85

Note: None of the interactions were statistically significant, even at the alpha = .10 level, less demanding than the alpha=.05 level standard in the social sciences.

¹⁴This is explanatory language used in Individual Profile Reports generated by IDI v3.

With respect to Research Hypothesis 3, and as illustrated in Table 3, *none* of the study abroad program characteristics under consideration had a statistically significant correlation with DeltaCD for the members of the Experimental Group. In other words, study abroad in a non-Anglophone country, in a program with intentional intercultural pedagogy (IPED), taking courses specifically intended for host-country students (Immersion), using a language other than English in classes, and residing primarily with host country nationals *did not* impact significantly on Cultural Disengagement score change pre- to post-test for study abroad participants. Table 4 summarizes the characteristics of the study abroad experiences of the experimental group members.

Table 3. Correlations Between Study Abroad Program Characteristics and IDI Cultural Disengagement Score Change

	DeltaCD	Non-Anglophone	IPED	Immersion	For. Language	Host Housing
DeltaCD	1.00					
Non-Anglo	-.085	1.00				
IPED	.004	.303***	1.00			
Immersion	.081	-.409***	-.147	1.00		
For. Lang.	-.124	.637***	.235**	-.246**	1.00	
Host Hous.	.116	-.041	.092	.000	.061	1.00

Note: * statistically significant at alpha= .10 level; ** statistically significant at alpha = .05 level; *** statistically significant at alpha = .01 level.

Table 4. Study Abroad Program Characteristics

Program Characteristic	Yes	%	No	%
Non-Anglophone Country	69	63.89	39	36.11
Intentional Intercultural Pedagogy	55	50.93	53	49.07
In Classes for Host-Country students	57	52.78	51	47.22
Classes in Non-English Language*	61	56.48	46	43.52
Housing with Host-Country Nationals	72	66.67	36	33.33

*Data was not available for one member of the Experimental Group. This data is based on self-reporting by participants.

The data also offered the possibility of assessing the impact of studying abroad in different world regions. The majority of experimental group members studied in Anglophone and non-Anglophone European countries, and the remainder were distributed primarily among Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific region (see Table 5). A mixed between-within subjects ANOVA using world regions, with separate groups for Anglophone and non-Anglophone Europe, as the between-groups categorical independent variable suggests no significant interaction effect between study abroad location and change in IDI Cultural Disengagement Score, pre- to post-test: Wilks' Lambda = .933, $F = (8, 99)$, $p = .528$, partial eta squared = .067¹⁵.

¹⁵To indicate statistical significance in line with standard social science criteria, p would have to be less than or equal to .05. It is worth noting, however, that the partial eta squared value indicates a

Table 5. Mean DeltaCD by Study Abroad Region

Region	N	M	SD
Europe (Anglophone)	27	.46	.76
Europe (Non-Anglophone)	41	.26	.98
Africa	9	.20	.87
Middle East + North Africa	9	.67	.57
Asia (East)	5	.40	.40
Asia (South)	1	-.60	
Asia (Southeast)	2	-.10	.71
Latin America	9	-.13	.36
Oceania	7	.37	.89
Total	108	.30	.83

Discussion

The aforementioned data and analysis suggest we should accept Research Hypothesis 1 but reject the other two research hypotheses. In this research, study abroad was significantly associated with reduced Cultural Disengagement. The personal characteristics variables studied here were not associated with differences in Cultural Disengagement outcomes for the study abroad and control groups. And geographical location and the specific program features under study appeared unrelated to Cultural Disengagement score change for those who studied abroad¹⁶.

Most study abroad research employing the IDI actually has focused on the intercultural competence impacts, generally found to be positive, albeit with some caveats. For example, the Georgetown Consortium Project, a noteworthy study (Ogden & Streitwieser, 2016) involving almost 1300 students, showed mean gains in intercultural development for study abroad participants as compared to a control group (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). A subsequent review of research at multiple institutions (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012) found consistent gains in intercultural competence for students who studied abroad, but also highlighted the importance of cultural mentoring and other faculty interventions in promoting IDI gains.

In previously reported research employing the same data set used here, but focusing on change in IDI Developmental Orientation (DO) score as the outcome variable (Terzuolo, 2018), the study abroad group moved significantly toward a more intercultural mindset than the control group members¹⁷. Some personal

medium effect size and the statistical power is only .393 for this particular test, below the social science standard of .80.

¹⁶There is, however, ample research indicating the significance of pre-departure orientations, a variable not addressed here, in influencing intercultural learning in study abroad. See for example Rathburn et al. (2020).

¹⁷The between-groups difference was $F(1,171) = 6.14, p = .014, d = .38$, statistically significant at the alpha = .05 level and with small-to-medium effect size.

characteristics variables¹⁸ were significantly associated with between-groups differences in DO score change. On the other hand, study abroad program characteristics and geographical locations were not associated with between-groups score change differences¹⁹. Summing in the results reported here, we find the combination of a more intercultural mindset and a *less* conflicted relationship with one's culture of origin.

Comparing these results to studies discussed in the Literature Review, which employed both the IDI's Cultural Disengagement and Encapsulated Marginality measures, is not entirely simple. Hao (2012) had found a small mean increase in CD score for Chinese high school students who studied abroad for a year, but the difference relative to the control group was not statistically significant. And of course the participants were quite different from the US undergraduates discussed here. One might speculate whether age and/or primary culture of origin can influence the intercultural development and cultural disengagement impacts of study abroad.

Jones, Hof, and Tillman (2016) found inconsistent Encapsulated Marginality impacts for an intercultural service-learning experience at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. But most of literature reviewed above that employed the IDI Encapsulated Marginality (EM) measure, for example Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2018), suggested that study abroad could promote progress in resolving encapsulated marginality issues. Pedersen (2010, n.d.), though, found EM score increases specifically for study abroad participants in programs that featured significant intentional intercultural pedagogy, speculating that "perhaps the guided reflection and exploration of one's own sense of culture allows the sojourner to hold a solid sense of cultural self while increasing his/her ability to navigate the complex realities of the culture of 'other'" (Pedersen, 2010, p.77). This seems to suggest that increased intercultural competence and reduced disengagement from one's own culture can go together, as Terzuolo (2018) and this report taken together suggest.

Other findings appeared to confirm Pedersen's conclusions regarding the importance of specific study abroad program features in influencing EM score change. Westrick (2004) had found a statistically significant increase in Encapsulated Marginality score for students at an international secondary school in Hong Kong who participated in a year-long humanities course with an intercultural service experience at an orphanage in China, but not in other intercultural programs²⁰. Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2021) found a similar impact on Encapsulated Marginality score among those who participated in service learning among people from other

¹⁸Female gender, self-declared multicultural identity, and having a grandparent who was born or raised abroad.

¹⁹With respect to the impact of location on study abroad outcomes. Douglas and Jones-Ridders (2001) found that cultural distance between students' points of origin and their study abroad destinations was directly and significantly related to development of worldmindedness. Davis and Knight (2021, p. 124), on the other hand, found "some truth" in the assumption that students learn more if they "travel to a destination 'farther' outside their comfort zone," but "reality is more complicated."

²⁰This suggests the importance of program specificities in determining intercultural competence and cultural engagement impacts of study abroad and runs counter to the findings of the research reported here. But again, one should be wary of overly close analogies between the experiences of high school and college students.

cultures. The research reported here, however, does not confirm a link between study abroad program features and change in Cultural Disengagement scores.

In any case, one should be cautious in seeking analogies between EM and CD research results. As explained above, EM was one among several measures of intercultural development in IDI version 2, while in version 3 CD was a stand-alone measure, distinct from the IDI measure of intercultural development. It is significant that validation research had identified an unexpectedly significant positive correlation between scores for EM and for Reversal, the stage in the IDI's Intercultural Development Continuum in which an individual actually *rejects* their culture of origin and seeks to adopt a new culture (Hammer, 2011), rather than becoming more engaged with their culture of origin.

In sum, research employing IDI Cultural Disengagement and Encapsulated Marginality measures to assess the impact of cross-cultural education experiences has been limited and inconclusive. The results reported here would seem to confirm some conclusions from earlier research, while calling others into question.

The same could be said for research employing global citizenship as the outcome variable. At a certain point the widely used Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) included a "Global Citizenship" subscale. The Office of Institutional Assessment at Texas A&M University (2010-2011) found statistically significant positive impacts of study abroad on undergraduates' global citizenship scores. But, while Gaia (2015) found a pre- to post-study abroad increase in mean GPI scores for 136 students from a small, private liberal arts college, the difference was *not* statistically significant.

Even if the quantitative research were more ample and less contradictory, there would be reason for caution. The research reported here is only *quasi-experimental*, rather than *experimental*. In the real world of higher education, it is not feasible to assign participants randomly to a study abroad or control group, or to specific study abroad programs. This makes it difficult to isolate the effects of any given independent variable. Statistical techniques allow one to reasonably infer possible connections among variables. But we cannot make judgments about causation, and no such judgments are implied here. Also, the quantitative approach employed here cannot in itself shed light on the *process* whereby a study abroad participant might come to reduced cultural disengagement. And finally, it will not be possible to replicate, or at least attempt to replicate, the research reported here. As noted above, IDI, LLC no longer reports Cultural Disengagement scores.

Making meaning of this research, with its limits as discussed, and of a scholarly literature which does not speak with a unified voice, is not simple. But there are grounds for a few potentially useful observations.

Those who believe that the proper purpose of study abroad is to promote global citizenship/cosmopolitanism and a more critical stance toward participants' cultures of origin (Baker, 2019) may find the results difficult to accept. But experiences during study abroad clearly can promote more positive views of one's country and/or culture of origins. Research on Chinese students in the United States, for example, highlights the existence of precisely such effects (Hail, 2015; Zhao, 2020), including reinforcement of outright nationalist sentiments (Jiang, 2021). Jones (2014), using a large sample, found that cross-border contact heightened nationalism, though at the same time lowering perceptions of threats.

It is crucial, however, not to equate reduced disengagement from one's primary culture, as measured by the IDI Cultural Disengagement score, with nationalism. (Note that CD is not a gauge of ideology.) In their review of the political psychology of national identity, Yogeewaran and Verkuyten (2022) point to a core distinction in the literature between patriotism, as a positive attitude toward one's nation, and nationalism, as a sense of national superiority and desire for greater national power. A distinction is made also between the sense of national attachment and the specific "content" of a given nation. In this context, engagement with one's primary culture looks like attachment and national identification, i.e. patriotism, rather than nationalism.

That said, nationalism can come in different stripes. Jones (2014), for example, posited a "feeling of 'enlightened nationalism' and appreciation for difference" emerging from study abroad. The school of thought termed "liberal nationalism" (Gustavsson & Miller, 2019) in fact theorizes that national identities can help unify culturally diverse liberal societies, and thus support democracy and social justice.

If one avoids stigmatizing reduced cultural disengagement as a negative manifestation of nationalism, it is easier to avoid a zero-sum view of the relationship between intercultural development/sensitivity/competence and how one views their own culture of origin. Increased intercultural competence need not imply or require a more negative view of one's own culture, and vice versa. Indeed, the research reported here, when combined with Terzuolo (2018), suggests that increased intercultural competence and reduced disengagement from one's own culture can go together.

This apparent coexistence of study abroad effects that some might consider contradictory merits better theorization. Reflecting on study abroad programs that included very intentional intercultural pedagogy, Pedersen as noted speculated that "perhaps the guided reflection and exploration of one's own sense of culture allows the sojourner to hold a solid sense of cultural self while increasing his/her ability to navigate the complex realities of the culture of 'other'" (Pedersen, 2010, p.77).

The political psychology literature on national identity supports, at least in part, the "importance of secure national identification for out-group openness" (Yogeewaran & Verkuyten, 2022, p. 314). This seems to be particularly true for individuals with strong national identification who engage in exploration of their national identity. One could hypothesize that, in study abroad, even those who come out with reduced disengagement from their own primary culture may have engaged in some form of identity exploration, increasing their openness to other groups and intercultural competence.

The data reported here suggest that geographical location and curriculum/program structure may be less important than the simple fact of being abroad, as far as cultural disengagement impacts are concerned. If true, this could be significant in designing future research strategies, but it certainly requires further testing. Other literature, for example, strongly identified the importance of intercultural pedagogy in promoting intercultural development in study abroad.

The statistically significant association between study abroad and reduced cultural disengagement reported here could be a useful signpost for future researchers. Broadly speaking, the impact of study abroad on participants' views of their cultures of origin merits further investigation. Looking at a wide range of national pairs, in the sense of "students from country X studying in country Y" could provide useful insights.

Understanding, however, *how* students make meaning of their study abroad experiences in ways that reduce disengagement from their culture of origin would require a different form of research than is presented here, certainly applying qualitative approaches. In fact, structuring future research based on a mixed-methods approach seems optimal. In such a mix, quantitative methods could allow identification of overall trends and *possible* associations among variables, as are reported here. They also would allow researchers to identify study participants of particular interest for in-depth qualitative research focused on the process leading to given outcomes.

Seifen, Rodriguez, and Johnson (2019) actually highlight the possibility that quantitative and qualitative approaches will provide diverging assessments of study abroad impacts. Their research group consisted of 123 undergraduates who studied abroad. Pre- to post-study abroad score change on several instruments—the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire, the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension, and the Purpose in Life-Short Form—was not statistically significant. Only one scale on the Meaning in Life Questionnaire showed significant change. Qualitative data derived from open-ended questions, however, “suggested an increase in personal growth and uncertainty about how to interpret the international experience” (p. 6). This divergence is not a weakness and arguably helps make the case for mixed-methods approaches. Quantitative and qualitative data need not overlap entirely to be complementary and to generate productive insights. Paras et al. (2019), for example, effectively combined IDI data and targeted writing samples to produce a very nuanced data set on the intercultural learning impact of study abroad program factors.

Given the strong push, discussed above, to employ study abroad as a tool for building “global citizenship,” the research reported here can stand as a useful reminder that things may go in a rather different direction, thus potentially helping manage the risk of confirmation bias²¹. In a qualitative study of US and Australian undergraduates abroad, Dolby (2008), for example, drew on philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s view that “critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions” (p. 53) is a necessary first step toward fostering global human connections as a basis for global citizenship. Dolby found that US undergraduates “generally focused inward on the meaning of their national identity” (p. 54) as they experienced life abroad. But she also argued that “most of the American students [demonstrated] ‘critical self-awareness’ [that] involved a re-evaluation of their national identity” (p. 58). In an earlier analysis of the same students, Dolby (2004, pp. 172-173) saw the possible emergence of a “postnational American identity,” including a better understanding of the “multiple articulations of ‘America,’” while recognizing that this had “not been fully realized through these students’ experiences” abroad. These results align markedly with the author’s own clearly indicated aspirations and preferences, and it is fair to be on the lookout for what McSweeney (2021b) terms *consequentialism* in qualitative research, i.e., desired research outcomes prevailing over evidence gathering and impartial analysis. In fairness, Dolby does provide important caveats. Still,

²¹McSweeney (2021a) discusses in detail how confirmation bias can manifest itself in qualitative research, including in failure to consider “plausible alternative/additional explanations,” to undertake “a reasonable search for contrary evidence,” and use of “imaginary supportive secondary evidence.”

having to address evidence of increased attachment to one's culture of origin in connection with study abroad could be beneficial to researchers starting from a global citizenship perspective.

Conclusions

Expectations for study abroad run high. Intercultural learning, enhanced intercultural sensitivity, a sense of global citizenship, and a more analytical and reflective perspective on one's culture of origin all figure in statements of study abroad goals and expectations. But the impact of study abroad on participants' attitudes toward their own cultures is an understudied area, compared to how study abroad may influence perceptions and ways of dealing with *other* cultures.

Version 3 of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a rigorously validated and widely used instrument, provided scores for what was termed Cultural Disengagement (CD), indicating "the degree to which an individual or group experiences a sense of disconnection from a primary cultural community" (Hammer, 2012, p. 119). The research reported here compared pre- and post-test CD scores for an experimental group of 108 students who studied abroad for a semester, and a statistically comparable control group of 65 students who remained at their home institution for a semester. All were undergraduates at a large, urban private university in the US.

Study abroad was statistically significantly associated with *reduced* cultural disengagement, as compared with the control group. Earlier research using the same data set had indicated *increased* intercultural competence in association with study abroad. A series of demographic and life experience variables were tested for statistically significant associations with CD score change differences between the study abroad and control groups. None were found. A series of study abroad program factors were found *not* to be correlated with CD score change for the experimental group.

Previous research on the impact of intercultural learning experiences on participants' comfort with their own cultures of origin, using the IDI and other measures, was limited and inconclusive. The research reported here suggests a significant association between study abroad and a less conflicted view of one's own culture, which arguably runs counter to the expectations of the global citizenship view of study abroad. Further research employing CD scores is not possible because the current version of the IDI does not report a CD score. But the topic merits further research, as the impacts and virtues of study abroad, and the desirability of expanding it, remain a matter of debate. While the research reported here is strictly quantitative, mixed-methods approaches are probably more desirable, as quantitative and qualitative data appear to yield different insights.

Funding

Mitchell Hammer, President of IDI, LLC, supported this research by providing a dissertation research discount on the price of the Intercultural Development Inventory.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for their advice on the conduct and presentation of my research: Laura Engel, Mitchell Hammer, Deborah Park, Donna Scarboro, Bernhard Streitwieser, Tracy Tachiera, Brandi Weiss, and Roger Whitaker. I am grateful also to the anonymous reviewers who carefully read an earlier, less extensive version of this article and provided many valuable recommendations.

References

- AAC&U (n.d.). *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric*. Available at: <https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics/value-rubrics-intercultural-knowledge-and-competence>.
- Baker, S. (2019). *Returning home: making meaning of study abroad experience to facilitate transformative learning*. Doctoral Dissertation. Northeastern University. ProQuest LLC.
- Bennett, J. M. (1993). Cultural marginality: Identity issues in intercultural training. In R. M. Paige (ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 109-135). 2nd Edition. Intercultural Press.
- Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71). 2nd Edition. Intercultural Press.
- Brewer, E., & Cunningham, K. (2009). Capturing study abroad's transformative potential. In E. Brewer, & K. Cunningham (eds.), *Integrating study abroad into the curriculum: Theory and practice across the disciplines* (pp. 1-19). Stylus.
- Byram, M., Nichols, A., & Stevens, D. (2001). Introduction. In M. Byram, A. Nichols, & D. Stevens (eds.), *Developing intercultural competence in practice* (pp. 1-8). Multilingual Matters.
- Campbell, K. (2016). Short-term study abroad programmes: Objectives and accomplishments. *Journal of International Mobility*, 1(4), 189-204.
- Chan, E. K. (2011). Response 2: In defense of encapsulated marginality. In S. R. Robbins, S. H. Smith & F. Santini (eds.), *Bridging cultures: International women faculty transforming the US academy* (pp. 123-128). University Press of America.
- Davis, K. A., & Knight, D. B. (2021). Comparing students' study abroad experiences and outcomes across global contexts. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 83, 114-127.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2014). Why engage in mobility? Key issues within global mobility: The big picture. In B. Streitwieser (ed.), *Internationalisation of higher education and global mobility* (pp. 35-42). Symposium Books.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2016). Key theoretical frameworks guiding the scholar-practitioner in international education. In B. Streitwieser, & A. C. Ogden (eds.), *International higher education's scholar-practitioners: bridging research and practice* (pp. 247-263). Symposium Books.

- Dolby, N. (2004). Encountering an American self: Study abroad and national identity. *Comparative Education Review*, 48(2), 150-173.
- Dolby, N. (2008). Global citizenship and study abroad: A comparative study of American and Australian undergraduates. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 17(1), 51-67.
- Douglas, C., & Jones-Rikkens, C. G. (2001). Study abroad programs and American student worldmindedness: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 13(1), 55-66.
- Forum on Education Abroad (2023). *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad: Enhanced 6th Edition*. Available at: https://www.forumea.org/uploads/1/4/4/6/144699749/forumea_-_standards_-_2023_update.pdf.
- Gaia, A. C. (2015). Short-term faculty-led study abroad programs enhance cultural exchange and self-awareness. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(1), 21-31.
- Goldstein, S. B. (2022). A systematic review of short-term study abroad research methodology and intercultural competence outcomes. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 87(Mar), 23-36.
- Gustavsson, G., & Miller, D. (Eds.) (2019). *Liberal nationalism and its critics: Normative and empirical questions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hail, H. C. (2015). Patriotism abroad. Overseas Chinese students' encounters with criticisms of China. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 19(4), 311-326.
- Hammer, M. R. (2011). Additional cross-cultural validity testing of the Intercultural Development Inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(4), 475- 487.
- Hammer, M. R. (2012). The Intercultural Development Inventory: A new frontier in assessment and development of intercultural competence. In M. Vande Berg, R. M. Paige, & K. H. Lou (eds.), *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it* (pp. 115-136). Stylus.
- Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The Intercultural Development Inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2(4), 421-443.
- Hao, C. (2012). *The effect of study abroad on the development of intercultural sensitivity among Mainland Chinese high school students*. Doctoral Dissertation. Virginia Commonwealth University. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Jiang, S. (2021). The call of the homeland: Transnational education and the rising nationalism among Chinese overseas students. *Comparative Education Review*, 65(1), 34-55.
- Jones, C. W. (2014). Exploring the microfoundations of international community: Toward a theory of enlightened nationalism. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(4), 682-705.
- Jones, S. W., Hof, D. D., & Tillman, D. R. (2016). Assessing global service-learning: A mixed-methods approach to evaluating students' intercultural development. *International Journal of Psychology: Biopsychosocial Approach*, 18(Jan), 29-50.
- King, M., Courtier, M., Shaw, C., Anderson, C., & Widdowson, J. (2021). Different views? The experiences of international students studying HE in three non-university settings. *Athens Journal of Education*, 8(3), 239-262.
- Lewin, R. (Ed.) (2009). *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship*. New York & London: American Association of Colleges and Universities and Routledge.
- McSweeney, B. (2021a). Fooling ourselves and others: Confirmation bias and the trustworthiness of qualitative research – Part 1 (the threats). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 34(5), 1063-1075.

- McSweeney, B. (2021b). Fooling ourselves and others: Confirmation bias and the trustworthiness of qualitative research – Part 2 (cross-examining the dismissals). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 34(5), 841-859.
- Moreno, R. (2021). Disrupting neoliberal and neocolonial ideologies in US study abroad: From discourse to intervention. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 33(2), 93-109.
- Office of Institutional Assessment - Texas A&M University (2010-2011). *Global Perspective Inventory (GPI) – Pilot: 2010-2011 report*. Available at: <https://assessment.tamu.edu/assessment/files/a2/a298fe18-9f82-4fc9-9161-667b07e8435d.pdf>.
- Ogden, A. (2007). The view from the veranda: Understanding today's colonial student. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 15(1), 35-56.
- Ogden, A., & Streitwieser, B. (2016). Research on US education abroad: A concise overview. In D. M. Velliaris, & D. Coleman-George (eds.), *Handbook of research on study abroad programs and outbound mobility* (pp. 1-39). Information Science Reference.
- Paige, R. M., & Vande Berg, M. (2012). Why students are and are not learning abroad: A review of recent research. In M. Vande Berg, R. M. Paige, & K. H. Lou (eds.), *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it* (pp. 29-58). Stylus.
- Paras, A., Carignan, M., Brenner, A., Hardy, J., Malmgren, J., & Rathburn, M. (2019). Understanding how program factors influence intercultural learning in study abroad: The benefits of mixed-methods analysis. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 31(1), 22-45.
- Pedersen, P. J. (n.d.). *Teaching toward an ethnorelative worldview through psychology study abroad*. Available at: https://www.idrinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/mbm_pedersen.pdf.
- Pedersen, P. J. (2010). Assessing intercultural effectiveness outcomes in a year-long study abroad program. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 70-80.
- Rathburn, M., Malmgren, J., Brenner, A., Carignan, M., Hardy, J., & Paras, A. (2020). Assessing intercultural competence in student writing: A multi-institutional study. In M. Namaste, A. Sturgill, M. Vande Berg, N. W. Sobania, J. L. Moore, & P. Felten (eds.), *Mind the gap: Global learning at home and abroad* (pp. 79-95). Routledge.
- Rodríguez-Izquierdo, R. M. (2018). Intercultural sensitivity among university students: Measurement of the construct and its relationship with international mobility programs. *Cultura y Educación/Culture and Education*, 30(1), 177-189.
- Rodríguez-Izquierdo, R. M. (2021). Does service learning affect the development of intercultural sensitivity? A study comparing students' progress in two different methodologies. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 82(May), 99-108.
- Schattle, H. (2009). Global citizenship in theory and practice. In R. Lewin (ed.), *The handbook of practice and research in study abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship* (pp. 3-20). American Association of Colleges and Universities and Routledge.
- Seifen, T., Rodriguez, Y., & Johnson, L. (2019). Growth and meaning through study abroad: Assessing student transformation with mixed methods. *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 6(1), 6-21.
- Tarbutton, T. M., & Doyle, L. B. (2023). Using teacher presence in online higher education to foster global citizenship among adult learners. *Athens Journal of Education*, 10(2), 233-248.
- Terzuolo, E. R. (2016). *Intercultural development and study abroad: Impact of student and program characteristics*. Doctoral Dissertation. The George Washington University. ProQuest LLC.

- Terzuolo, E. R. (2018). Intercultural development and study abroad: Influence of student and program characteristics. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 65(Jun), 86-95.
- Terzuolo, E. R., & Ungar, S. J. (2016). Worth the trip? Debating the value of study abroad. *Foreign Affairs*, September/October. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-america/2016-08-15/worth-trip>.
- Trilokekar, R. D., & Kukar, P. (2011). Disorienting experiences during study abroad: Reflections of pre-service teacher candidates. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(7), 1141-1150.
- Ungar, S. J. (2016). The study-abroad solution: How to open the American mind. *Foreign Affairs*, March/April. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-02-16/study-abroad-solution>.
- Vande Berg, M. (2007). Intervening in the learning of US students abroad. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4), 392-399.
- Vande Berg, M., Connor-Linton, J., & Paige, R. M. (2009). The Georgetown Consortium Project: Interventions for student learning abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 18(1), 1-76.
- Westrick, J. (2004). The influence of service-learning on intercultural sensitivity. A quantitative study. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 3(3), 277-299.
- Yogeeswaran, K., & Verkuyten, M. (2022). The political psychology of national identity. In D. Osborne, & C. G. Sibley (eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of political psychology* (pp. 311-328). Cambridge University Press.
- Zhao, K. (2020). Made in contemporary China: exploring the national identity of Chinese international undergraduate students in the US. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(12), 2451-2463.

