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An Inquiry-Based Research Essay

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### Internationalization

Everyone has their own set of morals and way of thinking. Whether it be from the area you grew up in, the culture surrounding you, or beliefs passed down generations. Different things make up you and how you see the world. Certain things can completely change those views. Long term travel can be one of those. But how does it change you exactly?

Studying abroad is quite common among older teens and young adults. Whether it be a couple months to an entire year, everyone takes something away from it. Some of those things are more than just memories and experiences; they're a new outlook and mindset on how we perceive the world.

Exchange students typically stay with a host family when they're studying abroad. Leaving their familiarities at home and facing culture shock can have some serious psychological effects on them. While they're there, they'll be faced with culture shock and undergo acculturation, a process of assimilation in a different culture (Jang & Kim "The Influence of Host Cultures on the Role of Personality in the Acculturation of Exchange Students." 2010). Many challenges will be present, from culture shock, language barriers, loneliness to having to adapt to everything in order to survive. Though there are cases of people with no significant amount of change, most come back with noticeable changes.

Those effects can be measured in numerous ways, but Colleen Ward, author of “*The A, B, Cs of Acculturation*”, arranges the effects in three separate categories. She centers in on the affective, behavioral, and cognitive changes that each experience gives, otherwise known as the A, B, C’s.

Affective change zooms in on the emotional aspects of human experiences versus the behavioral and cognitive sides (Savicki 2015). It goes into detail of the stress, anxiety, feelings and moods one might have while faced with culture shock. Humans are habitual creatures so being placed in all unknowns can have an emotional toll on them. Its unnerving being in a situation where you have no control or understanding on what’s going on, for example riding public transportation and the bus driver is starting to get impatient while explaining you don’t have enough for fare in a language you don’t understand. The stress and frustration in this situation may push people to learn the words for fare and not enough so next time it happens, it’ll be easier for them. As Victor Savicki, author of “*The Effects of Affect on Study Abroad Students*”, stated “Some may see the stressor, coupled with their adequate coping resources, as a challenge that mobilizes them to higher levels of performance and resulting higher levels of self-satisfaction and self-esteem.” Further reinstating, a stressful event may lead to higher motivation to cope and succeed.

The second part of the three effects, behavior, shows us how someone is fitting in when faced with culture shock. The people living abroad will be required to learn new behaviors in order to fit in a new culture. However, “such learning might not only form a more culture fitting personality, but also suppress or even fade out more natural cultural behaviors” (Savicki 2015). Another example, the way people interact while riding on public transportation. People in the USA may talk to their friends in a loud manner whilst eating on the subway. But in Japan, a very

reserved culture, everyone keeps to themselves and refrains from eating on public transportation. An American exchange student to Japan will also follow those unspoken cultural rules and might even bring them back to the USA.

The amount someone adapts their cultural behaviors also depends on “how much of a study abroad student’s time is spent in direct contact with host culture nationals, and how much the student uses the host culture language in various intercultural situations”. (Savicki 2015). If a student spends a lot time with host country acquaintances, then they’ll gain more experience inside the culture and using the language, therefore exceling their assimilation and adaption of said culture.

The last effect, cognition, pertains to self and social identity. The way individuals perceive themselves in a social situation, people’s level of analysis, and interpersonal behaviors all reacted in a way that showed more openness (Ward 2001). Most people are raised in a monocultural environment with not much room to embrace other cultural interests. Studying abroad not only opens their door to another culture, but also allows even more opportunity in meeting other exchange students from other countries. Humans tend to pick up habits from the environments and people surrounding them. Having multiple cultures prevalent in a student’s life will allow them to become multicultural and aware of the world around them.

Not only are students being shown a different culture and are learning from there, they are also looking at their home culture in a new light. Some students may even start to appreciate certain things back home even more (Savicki 2015). Realizing how much a host family takes care of you and how much they don’t can make a student be more thankful towards everything their own parents have done for them. The saying “you don’t know what you have until its gone” rings true to a lot of people. The case with monocultural people being placed in a new culture

even more so. That grocery store that was a one-stop-shop might've been replaced with now four different stores. Sometimes you don't realize how good or bad something is until you have another thing to compare it to.

Imane Karroumi, contributor of "*The Exchange Experience Changed My Life Forever*", was only sixteen-years old when she flew from Morocco to the United States to leave for a year. She claims,

After my own experience, I now believe that exchange students can help change some of the assumptions and preconceived ideas in their societies because people are more likely to accept the change from within their society rather than from the outside.

(Karroumi 2009)

She expresses belief that by having students live in other countries, then they'll be able to have first-hand experience with dealing with that culture, instead of learning from stereotypes from movies, news, or other online media. Ignorance is a dangerous state, but by living in a foreign country you're constantly educating yourself and tear down those assumptions. Most countries outside of the United States believe Americans are fat and only eat hamburgers, fries, and hotdogs. While those foods are a big part of the culture and obesity is present in the United States, it's not the entire case. Americans do like to exercise and have quite a large palette when it comes to food, whether it be participating on a sports team or marathons to barbeque or pies.

Cultural identity is also present in immigrants. Their want and need to be able to fit in motivates them to adjust their behavior to blend in with a certain culture. (Jang 2010) As Emily Lemanczyk, author of "*Acculturation and Adaptation Among Immigrants and Refugees*", says "Acculturation can morph into adaptation, a long-term form of acculturation, given a stable

environment.” Being able to blend into a different culture provides a sense of stability that immigrants need.

Though Ward claims there’s three major components in the psychological change, Julia Zimmer and Franz J. Neyer, authors of *“Do We Become a Different Person When Hitting the Road? Personality Development of Sojourners”* researched the main five different personality traits: extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism (Zimmermann & Neyer 2013).

Dr. Edwin van Thiel, CEO of 123test, gives us a clear explanation of the five traits. Extraverted people tend to need to be around others to feel at home. They also show signs of being energetic and talkative with ease. Openness pertains to willing to try and experience new things, they’re more open to being in difficult or awkward situations. Being conscientiousness means you’re thorough and want to succeed to your greatest ability. Agreeable individuals will be friendly and unified when it comes to others. Neuroticism can also be referred to “Emotional Stability” (van Thiel 2018) and correlates to the amount of negative emotions. A higher score on neuroticism means more emotional instability. (van Thiel "What are the Big Five Personality Test Traits? - Learn all about the Theory" 2018)

Scientists explored and conducted research on how traveling for longer than a couple weeks affect young adults' way of living. Ajou University, in South Korea, surveyed exchange students from individualist countries going to South Korea, a collectivist country, and exchange students leaving South Korea for individualist countries, such as Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, and the USA. (Jang & Kim “The influence of host cultures on the role of personality in the acculturation of exchange students” 2010) Their research showed a decreased in neuroticism for both individualist and collectivist country bound students, meaning more

emotional stability. Openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness showed significant improvement across the board. Students were becoming more adaptable and understanding to other cultures. Interestingly though, students who came from South Korea, a more reserved country, and went to individualist countries showed a huge increase in extraversion. Meanwhile, individualist students headed to South Korea only showed a slight increase. (Jang & Kim 2018) Students being shown an outgoing and extraverted country will have some of those qualities rub off on them, especially if they're considered extraverted but live in an overbearing conservative culture.

While most of these changes can be considered improvements, Zimmerman and Neyer argue there's also effects on our social relationships. There was proof friends and acquaintances back home and that subjected student had more strain in their relationships. While "simultaneously, sojourning individuals are confronted with the challenge to establish and maintain new social relationships within a foreign and intercultural context" (Zimmermann & Neyer 2013). The emotional strain of having stability break down and needing to build ones can overwhelm an exchange student. Because not having your close friends and family near you, there was a change in who exchange students confided with. It led to an increase of them only being surrounded by people with similar experiences, whether it be fellow exchange students or host country friends.

Extended foreign travel takes people outside of their comfort zone. Travelers must adapt to new people and new cultural practices. Even people going from Germany to another EU country had to adapt to differences in language, food, and outlook (Zimmermann & Neyer 2013). The more that these travelers engaged with new people from different countries, the more that promoted goals related to openness. It also helped travelers to gain perspective on life, which

made them less emotionally reactive to day-to-day changes (which increased their emotional stability). The experience of meeting new people also helps with agreeableness, though this was not directly related to the size of people's new social networks (Savicki 2015).

Though, studying abroad has a lot of effects that most consider positive, there are cases that can affect a person in a negative way. Being surrounded by strangers in a foreign environment can cause a significant amount of stress and even discourage one to fall into a slump of no motivation and laziness. Instead of going out with host country friends to eat the host cuisine, they'll prefer to stay home and cook their home cuisine, removing them from the integration. The fear of not fitting in can later lead to depression or social anxiety. (Savicki 2015)

Not only living abroad with strangers who are different from you make it hard to find your group of people and fitting in; coming back to your home country or town can prove even more difficult. Multiple sojourners have reported that fitting back into their home culture proved to be even more difficult than the initial culture shock (Zimmerman & Neyer 2013). Reverse culture shock can have a more impacting effect on people. Having just experience a brand-new world and returning to what can seem like a dull and boring lifestyle can push them away. It becomes increasingly harder to fit in, now being bicultural or multicultural, instead of the surrounding friends who are only monocultural. (Jang 2010)

Being away from stability can lead them further down the hole of loneliness. Exchange students leave their friends and family back home to join a new host family and make new friends. Essentially starting over from the ground up. Not having the same emotional support they've relied on for so long can be damaging to one's self-esteem and eagerness (Savicki 2015). Trying to fit back in with your home culture can leave students with reverse culture shock (Ward 2001). Exchange students to the United States may be used to attending sports games frequently,

like Friday night football games. Going to their home country with no exciting sport events can leave one dissatisfied.

Many people are raised in a monoculture. There may be some diversity, but the overall society follows the same ideals and values. Immersing oneself into a new culture can change that person's nature identity. Living in a foreign country long term embraces individuality differences and opens personality development. It introduces people to multiple experiences and "beyond academic benefits ... had long-term personal and social consequences (Zimmermann & Neyer 2013)."

The core of a person's personality traits (conscientiousness and extraversion) were rarely affected while living abroad. Whether or not you're organized and thorough or messy, introverted or extraverted, living in a contrasting culture won't really affect those personality traits. Though, students from conservative and reserved cultures did come out of their shells and showed increase in extraversion and outgoingness.

Openness, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism showed significant proof of positive change. More people were becoming comfortable in stressful situations, emotionally stability and confidence backed them up. They had more worldly knowledge and became diverse in their thought process. Overall, people were educated in other cultures and learned differences between humans. The rights and wrongs between cultures dissolved into simply other ways people do things.

Living abroad and immersing yourself in another culture does have a positive impact on your psychology. Educating people in many cultures can eradicate racism and prejudice. Though firsthand experience of a culture succeeds reports from news and media.



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