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Study Abroad and Liminality: Examining U.S. American Undergraduate Risky Behavioral Choices Betwixt and Between Borders

Jill L. Creighton

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STUDY ABROAD AND LIMINALITY: EXAMINING U.S. AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATE RISKY BEHAVIORAL CHOICES BETWIXT AND BETWEEN BORDERS

PRESENTING A DISSERTATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

JILL L. CREIGHTON, DOCTORAL CANDIDATE, CLASS OF 2020

DISSERTATION CHAIR: KRISTEN CROSSNEY, PH.D, PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC POLICY AND
ADMINISTRATION

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BACKGROUND & DISCIPLINARY CONTEXT



One of the most niche sub-arenas of public administration, higher education administration, involves preparing future leaders and scholars for global perspectives

U.S. higher education institutions send over 300,000 U.S. American college students to embark on a study abroad journey annually (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014)



The higher education sub-fields of study abroad, international education, health promotion, student conduct, and risk management have begun to quantify the risky decisions made by U.S. American undergraduate students both in the home, collegiate environment and during the study abroad experience (American Health Association, 2015; The Forum on Education Abroad, 2016; Leigh, 1999; Pedersen, LaBrie, Hummer, Larimer, & Lee, 2010; Van Tine, 2011)



A significant gap in the literature exists to explain the context and rationale for such risky behaviors. Students seem to be engaging in riskier behaviors while studying abroad compared to how they behave while at their home institutions (Pedersen et al, 2010)



The goal of this research was to learn whether or not the study abroad experience explained changes in undergraduate students' engagement in risky behaviors.



PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three primary research questions guided this study:

1. Do traditionally-aged, undergraduate student risky behavioral decisions change between the collegiate environment and the SA environment? If so, how?
2. Does age, gender, or previous alcohol use impact students' risky behavior while studying abroad?
3. With which components of liminality do students self-identify as having experienced while studying abroad?

LITERATURE REVIEW KEY AREAS

This dissertation lives in the nexus of four major areas contained within the higher education, tourism, and sociology discourses:

- Undergraduate risky behavior in a domestic context provides a sense of context for how students engage across 5 domains of risk:
 - Academic
 - Financial
 - Intimate Relationships
 - Alcohol
 - Other Substances
- U.S.American students who have studied abroad addresses which students study abroad, where they go, the value of the study abroad experience, and criticisms of study abroad programs
- Tourism literature, including eco and disaster tourism, poverty and slum tourism, and university alternative break tourism
- Liminality and liminal space demonstrates a conceptual perspective from which the risky behaviors of students while studying abroad can be explained



NOTES ON LIMINALITY AND LIMINAL SPACE (STUDY'S CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE)

- Liminality, an anthropological, ethnographic concept incepted by Van Gennep (1960), describes the physical and psychological space that exists in the “in between.”
- Turner (1967) broadened liminality to a more generalizable human experience of being “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1967, p. 1). The **betwixt and between** describes the nature of the period of individual development that occurs amidst the state of transition between societal constructs. Societal structures cease to bind – during study abroad students have one foot in and one foot out of each society.
- Both short and long-term sojourning correlated to increases in both openness and agreeableness while decreasing in neuroticism. Study identifies new international relationships as a primary factor in the process of personality change while abroad (Zimmerman and Neyer, 2013)
- Tenets of liminality used in this study: boundarylessness, feeling free to try new behaviors, feeling like the rules of everyday life did not apply, and/or the betwixt and between

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS



Epistemology:
Post-positivist



Methodology:
Quantitative
Non-experimental
design



Methods: Original
survey created,
analyzed using
descriptive and
inferential statistics

14 multiple choice questions, one open-ended survey question asked participants to share a story about risk taking during their study abroad experience



Participants identified
through non-
probability sampling in
partnership with a
public higher education
institution located on
the east coast of the
United States, aka “the
site”



Study participant
inclusion criteria

Must have departed between 2017-2019

Study abroad duration was short-term (one semester or less) to retain sense of liminal space

Participant must be traditionally-aged (18-24) and pursuing first bachelor's degree

Self-identify as U.S. American by culture regardless of citizenship or documentation status

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Non-experimental design results in correlations, but not causations

- No cause and effect results available
- Original survey not yet validated

Study results generalizable only to the site and to those falling within the study's inclusion criteria

- Cannot be extrapolated to students over 25 or students originating their study abroad experience from any other country

Many study abroad participants come from privileged socioeconomic strata and other privileged identities

- Study does not disaggregate what impact socioeconomic status might have on risky behavior

Does not dive into the social equity and inclusion components of the study abroad experience

- Experiences of students of color, students identifying gender as non-binary, students identifying as LGBTQQIA+, etc., may have critically different experiences

FOCUSED RESEARCH QUESTIONS – FOCUSING AND EXPANDING ON THE OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THIS STUDY SOUGHT TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING, SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE ADDRESSED USING STATISTICAL TESTS:

Research Question 1: Is there a correlation between pre-study abroad and during study abroad risky behavior patterns among students?

Sub-Question 1.1: Does the variable of age matter in identifying higher risk behavior during study abroad?

Sub-Question 1.2: Does the variable gender matter in identifying higher risk behavior during study abroad?

Sub-Question 1.3: Does engagement in alcohol-related pre-study abroad risky behavior matter in identifying higher risk behavior during study abroad?



Research Question 2: Does a relationship exist between students reporting engaging in risky behaviors during study abroad and the tenets of liminality (boundarylessness, feeling free to try new behaviors, feeling like the rules of everyday life did not apply, and/or the betwixt and between)?

STUDY VARIABLES

Variable	Abbreviation	Risk Factors	Ordinal Scale	Theoretical Maximum	Description
Academic*	Acad	3	1-4	12	Level of engagement in academic risky behaviors
Financial*	Fin	3	1-4	12	Level of engagement in financial risky behaviors
Intimate Relationships*	Relat	4	1-4	16	Level of engagement in intimate relationship risky behaviors
Alcohol*	Alc	7	1-4	28	Level of engagement in alcohol-related risky behaviors
Other Substances*	Subst	6	1-4	24	Level of engagement in other substances-related risky behaviors
Home Rules**	HRules	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the rules of the home environment applied abroad
Try New Things**	TryNew	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler felt free to try new things while abroad

Personality Change**	PerCha	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler changed aspects of their personality while abroad
Physical Appearance**	PhysApp	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler changed their physical appearance while abroad
Friend Similarity**	Friend	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler's friends were similar at home and abroad
Good Decisions**	Decis	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler made good decisions while abroad
Pushed Boundaries**	Bound	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler pushed their own boundaries while abroad
One Risk Taken**	OneRisk	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler performed at least one risky behavior while abroad
Not at Home**	NHome	1	1-5	5	Level of agreement the traveler engaged in at least one behavior they would not have while at home

*Variable capturing the 5 domains of risk. **Variable capturing a tenet of liminality

Respondent Category	Frequency	%
Age at time of study abroad departure	N=147	
18-20 years of age	72	48.98%
20-24 years of age	75	51.02%
Class standing at time of study abroad departure	N=147	%
Freshman	8	5.44%
Sophomore	27	18.37%
Junior	70	47.62%
Senior	43	29.25%
Gender identity	N=147	
Cis-gender woman	107	72.11%
Cis-gender man	33	23.81%
Transgender man	1	0.68%
Gender non-binary	2	1.36%
Another gender	3	2.04%
Self-reported socio-economic status	N=147	
Living at or below the poverty line	8	5.44%
Lower middle class	21	14.29%
Middle class	76	51.70%
Upper middle class	39	26.53%
Wealthy	3	2.04%

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

RESULTS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 1: IS THERE A CORRELATION BETWEEN PRE-STUDY ABROAD AND DURING STUDY ABROAD RISKY BEHAVIOR PATTERNS AMONG STUDENTS?

Correlations: Pre-Study Abroad Risk with During Study Abroad Risk

Variable	PAcad	PFin	PRelat	PAIc	PSubst	PRiskTot
SAAcad	0.25*					
SAFin		0.52***				
SARelat			0.19*			
SAIc				0.48***		
SASubst					0.49***	
SARiskTot	0.26**	0.33***	0.22**	0.36***	0.27*	0.40***

*p < .05 **p<.01 *** p < .001

Overall During Study Abroad Risk by Pre-Study Abroad Risk Regression

Variable	DF	F	B	SE(B)
Pre-study abroad total risk score	1	27.19	0.33***	0.06

N=147, R² = 0.16, *p < .05 **p<.01 *** p < .001

Pre-Study Abroad Risk and Cis-Man Bivariate Regression

Variable	DF	F	B	SE(B)
SA total risk score (DV)	2	13.50***		
Pre-study abroad risk total			0.33***	0.06
Cis-gender man			0.01	1.34

N=147, R² = 0.16, *p < .05 **p<.01 *** p < .001

Alcohol risk pre-study abroad and total study abroad risk Regression

Variable	DF	F	B	SE(B)
Alcohol pre-study abroad risk score	1	21.12	0.82***	0.18

N=147, R² = 0.13, *p < .05 **p<.01 *** p < .001

RESULTS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 2: DOES A RELATIONSHIP EXIST BETWEEN STUDENTS REPORTING ENGAGING IN RISKY BEHAVIORS DURING STUDY ABROAD AND THE TENETS OF LIMINALITY? & GRAND RESULT

Liminality Tenets Correlations

Variable	FreeTry	PerCha	Phys App	Bound	NHome	OneRisk
SAAcad	0.14	0.21**	0.18*	0.05	0.14	0.28***
SAFin	0.13	0.16*	0.21*	0.10	0.14	0.29***
SARelat	0.07	0.10	0.12	0.05	0.13	0.13
SAAlc	0.19*	0.26**	0.15	0.20*	0.18*	0.34***
SASubst	0.01	0.16	0.09	0.11	0.08	0.14
SARiskTot	0.17*	0.26**	0.22**	0.16	0.19*	0.37***

*p < .05 **p<.01 *** p < .001

Inverse Liminality Tenets Correlations

Variable	HRules	Friend	Decis
SAAcad	-0.30***	-0.12	-0.35***
SAFin	-0.22**	-0.10	-0.35***
SARelat	-0.08	0.02	-0.30***
SAAlc	-0.26**	-0.13	-0.40***
SASubst	-0.21*	-0.18	-0.32***
SARiskTot	-0.31***	-0.15	-0.49***

*p < .05 **p<.01 *** p < .001

Totality of Study Abroad Risk

Variable	DF	F	B	SE(B)
SA total risk score (DV)	6	9.04***		
Pre-study abroad risk total			0.31***	0.06
Cis-gender men			-0.58	1.29
Age 21+			-2.18	1.13
OneRisk			4.16***	1.21
NHome			0.45	1.18
FreeTry			1.21	1.62

N=147, R² = 0.28, *p < .05 **p<.01 *** p < .001

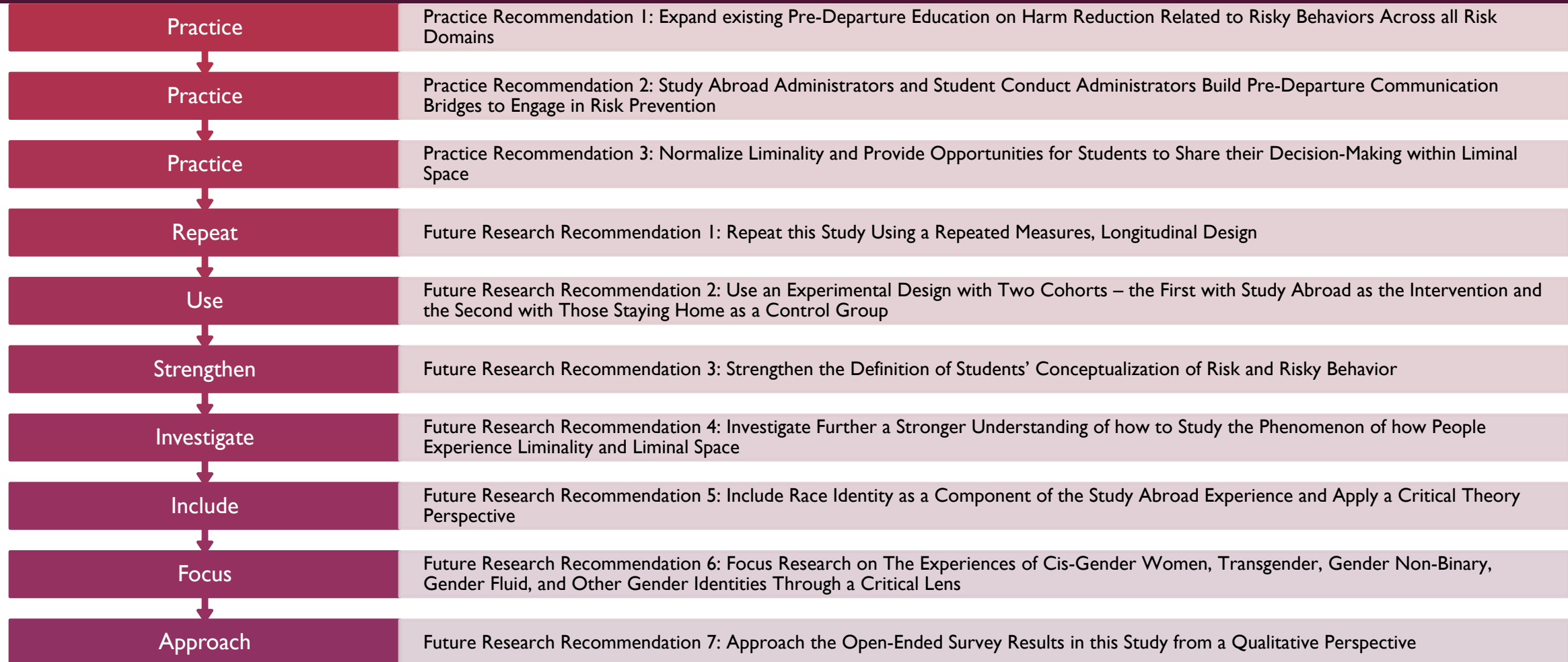
- Students make riskier choices during study abroad than while in their home environment; this is compounded when students are already predisposed to risky behavior while at home
- Students over 21 years of age are less likely to make risky behavioral choices during study abroad
- When students self-report experiencing the tenets of liminality, they are more likely to make riskier choices during study abroad

9 SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

- Finding 1: Traditionally-Aged Undergraduate Students do Engage in Riskier Behaviors While Abroad as Compared to their Behavior in the Home Context
- Finding 2: Students Who Engage in Risky Behaviors Prior to Study Abroad (SA) Engage in Even Riskier Behaviors While Studying Abroad
- Finding 3: Students Aged 21-24 Make Less Risky Choices Than Those Aged 18-20 During SA
- Finding 4: Cis-Gender Men Make Riskier Behavioral Choices Than Students of Other Genders Only When Already Making Risky Behavioral Choices in The Home Context
- Finding 5: Pre-SA Alcohol Risky Behaviors Serve as Important Predictors of Risk-Taking Behaviors During SA
- Finding 6: Self-Reporting Experiences in Liminal Space Directly Relates to an Increase in Risky Behaviors During SA
- Finding 7: Self-Reporting a Lack of Liminal Experience Correlates to a Decrease in Risky Behaviors During SA
- Finding 8: Not All Choices in Liminal Space are Risky

Grand Finding: SA Risky Behavioral Choices Were Best Explained by Self-Reporting Engaging in at Least One Risky Behavior in Combination with Pre-Departure Risky Behavioral Choices. This critical component of this finding shows that the tandem contribution of pre-SA personal choices with the intersection of liminal space really comprise the primary ingredients for future risky behavior when the SA experience finally arrives. **The recipe for risk is not just previous risk or the presence of liminal space. The recipe for risk, significantly, is both.**

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE & RESEARCH



THANK YOU FOR REVIEWING THIS RESEARCH!

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