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# Reexamining a "working holiday": An autoethnography

## Abstract

*This paper offers a new look at a "working holiday" from autoethnographic and qualitative research findings amongst working holiday makers in Australia – young travelers who chase both work and travel simultaneously within Australia's Working Holiday Maker Program. Work and tourism activities have generally been viewed as opposite fields of study and definitions within each field often reflect this. Such disparities reflect the apparent oxymoronic notion of the phrase "working holiday" and potential misconceptions or lack in understanding of what activities one undertakes while on a "working holiday" and the reasons for pursuing such. Through autoethnographic participant observation and qualitative interviews, this paper will discuss a contemporary conception of "working holiday" as revealed by travelers, and myself, who pursue such activity under a visa category of the same name, in contrast with existing academic interpretations.*

*Key words: autoethnography; working holiday; working holiday makers; working holiday visa; Australia*

## Introduction

Within the flocks of young travelers that seek sun and fun in Australia each year, many do so under the auspices of the Australian government's Working Holiday Maker Program (WHMP)<sup>1</sup>. This visa program<sup>2</sup>, allows young travelers from select countries legally work and live within Australia for up to one year, with the possibility for a second year stay for some upon completion of work in certain Australia industries<sup>3</sup>. While Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) are often categorized as *backpackers*<sup>4</sup>, not all backpackers can be called WHMs since WHMs have a specific legal right to work obtained from the Australian government, and with such right comes the taxation of wages earned and rights in applicable work situations. Regardless, the "backpacker" colloquial label often remains due to WHMs touristic trends and significant contribution in spending toward the Australian tourism industry<sup>5</sup>. But WHMs are not just on a holiday; they undertake employment, which sets some of their activities apart from that of a regular tourist. They are even reported to be a valuable labor source for some Australian employers by demonstrating a willingness to "have a go" at any job, head on, often undertaking jobs most Australians won't do (Allon, Bushell & Anderson, 2008). In contrast, however, they have also been reported as, at times, apathetic toward work commitment and quit if work becomes too difficult or their touristic ambitions suddenly become priority (Bell & Hanson, 2007; Mares, 2005). Although there is little doubt that many WHMs come to Australia intent to visit the "land down under" and see the unique landscapes and wildlife native to the continent, the additional activity of paid employment

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on such a journey can become extraordinary compared to a customary tourist escapade, resulting in extraordinary behavior as employees and treatment by employers.

According to Australian government documents and reports, the WHMP has fundamentally been purported as intent on supporting cultural exchange from its inception, however, it is marketed in the realms of Australian tourism. Numerous international private companies<sup>6</sup> offer "working holiday" or "work and travel" travel packages in which they secure visas for youths, as well as offer supplementary services and products such as international flights, travel insurance, accommodation, bank accounts, mobile phone cards, and more. The Australian government's promotion of a "working holiday" actively takes place through the website of *Tourism Australia* (TA), "...the Australian Government statutory authority responsible for international and domestic tourism marketing..." (Australia.com, 2013, Privacy Policy). TA's website, *Australia.com*, describes a "working holiday" in Australia as,

*Skippy, tinnies, cork hats and Kath & Kim... Think you know Australia? Get real! Get off your sofa and get yourself down to the country where adventure and the laidback lifestyle rule. If you're aged between 18 and 30, with a Working Holiday Visa you can live and travel anywhere in Australia for one year and do any job you like.*

*'Course, you don't have to work, but it's a great way to get extra cash so you can travel more and get to know the real Australia. Whether you're a beach babe wanting to chill by the sea, the rugged outdoor type looking for adventure or a party person for the clubs, bars and restaurants of our dynamic cities, Australia's got everything you could ever want (2013).*

From this advertisement, language such as ...*beach babe wanting to chill by the sea, rugged outdoor type looking for adventure, party person for the clubs...* paint a glorious picture of the prospective holiday escapades of a "working holiday", while ...*get extra cash so you can travel more and get to know the real Australia...* suggest its prospective function of work – travel longer and learn about Australian culture. The statement that you *don't have to work*, however, reveals that work is an optional activity, potentially implying this form of travel and work should have more to do with holiday than employment. This falls in line with those who pursue a "working holiday" primary role as tourists in theoretical discussion, which will be presented shortly, albeit that this is an advertisement and not necessarily acute depiction of practice. Regardless, it is government promotion of the activity in question, which demonstrates a state's depiction of a "working holiday", yet it may not necessarily represent how participants of this activity view or would explain such. This is the goal this paper attempts to shed light on – explain a "working holiday" through the views of working holiday makers.

While the discussion hereafter deals specifically with an Australian context, the presence of "working holiday makers" or "working holiday travelers" is growing worldwide as more countries embark on reciprocal agreements allowing youth from other countries to travel and work for extended periods within their sovereign borders. Argentina, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, Japan, Ireland, Norway, Germany, plus multiple others nations, all offer "working holiday" programs and visas. Many of these visa programs or agreement have only appeared or gained popularity in the international travel scene over the last decade or so. For example, the number of working holiday makers in Australia in 2001 totaled 78,642, whereas in 2011, the cumulative total of all visa granted reached 192,922<sup>7</sup>.

Nevertheless, before presenting theoretical discussions of "working holiday", first let me explain the method of my research into this combined concept of work plus travel.

## Research and methodology

Utilizing autoethnographic participant observation and qualitative interviews to investigate the scope of a "working holiday", my fieldwork took place in Australia over a period of roughly five and a half months in 2011. With prior obtainment of a *Work and Holiday Visa (Subclass 462)*, my Australian working holiday research, and journey, took me through Melbourne, Alice Springs, Darwin, a Watermelon farm in the "middle-of-no-where", and Adelaide. Correspondingly, these locales served as settings for interviews with other various working holiday makers. Beyond endless casual conversations held with other travelers, the exact number of respondents in digitally recorded structured interviews was 22; 7 males and 15 females, from Canada, USA, Sweden, Germany, Scotland, England, France, Italy, Japan, Estonia, Norway, Belgium, Denmark, and Taiwan. All but one held WHV (Subclass 417) visas; one respondent held a WHV (Subclass 462) visa, like myself. The youngest respondent was 19 years of age and the oldest 32. A research journal was kept, detailing my personal experiences as a working holiday maker, recording the various work environments and tourist escapades I participated in throughout the duration of my "working holiday". A research questionnaire developed prior to embarking on fieldwork served as a guide for qualitative interviews and questions only varied, if slightly, on a few occasions, due to occasional difficulties with some interviewees whose English skills were less than others; paraphrasing or occasional metaphorical examples to evoke insightful answers proved successful now and then. To offer anonymity and privacy to interviewees, names were changed in interview transcriptions, albeit all respondents consented to having their answers recorded at time of interviewing.

When deliberating which manner to present my research findings, I reflected on those pieces of academic literature I have read myself which somehow seemed to personify the topic of examination in a clear, deliberate, and attentive manner. For me, the challenge was how to emulate such attracting literature, complimenting my chosen research methods. I chose ethnography as a method as I find participant observation to be a valuable research method because it is simply, "...the most basic form of social research" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1995, p. 2). In this sense, I seek to explain my findings in a similar basic, yet comprehensive and authentic, style. Observation is a skill everyone is born with. The extent to which individuals utilize it, however, differs from person to person, or within the researchers world, academic to academic. It goes without saying, of course, that authority, accountability and credibility in presentation strongly coincide with any attempts of maintaining "objectivity" while living the experiences of the research phenomena in ethnography. Although an ethnographer attempts to discover the intricacies of a specific social or cultural setting, group or community, their research, "...does not claim to produce an objective or 'truthful' account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations, and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced" (Pink, 2001). In other words, the ethnographer must seek to convey their own experience as best as possible, biases and prejudices notwithstanding (Blumer, 1969; Taylor & Bogdan, 1989). But further, I seek to present in a manner that is least complex as possible for a reader to understand, not just academics but also an everyday reader. As Einstein is reported to have once reminisced, "...if you cant explain it simply, you

don't understand it well enough". This mantra considered, in terms of how to represent my personal experience as well as revelations of my qualitative interviews, I have decided to present such through a combination of a relative and conceptual responses from my interviewees surrounding a "working holiday" with a conversational and reflexive autoethnographic account of my own experiences. Such similar presentation styles have been used by other academics (see Cook, 1998; Katz, 1994; Clifford, 1997) warranting a precedent of such style, albeit it may still appear as a departure from academic norms in qualitative studies. Cook infers that researchers can, "...write about their involvement in their own research because they may or should feel that they have to try to make sense of the tricky circumstances in which they studied before claiming to know anything about what they have studied" (1998, p. 6). Likewise, Ateljević, Harris, Wilson and Collins believe that, "Reflexivity leads us to open up our minds with respect intersectionality with the researched" and, "...helps us to question how we see ourselves and others" (2005, p. 18). Further, according to Marcus and Cushman, *"The presentation of interpretation and analysis is inseparably bound up with the systematic and vivid representation of a world that seems total and real to the reader"* (1982, p. 29). *Such vividness and authenticity is what I attempt to present through conversing about my first-hand experiences, which also incorporates several other "working holidays" I had been on prior to this research; in 2003 I traveled to New Zealand with a working holiday visa, and in 2006 repeated this type of visa-specific related travel to Ireland. But It was when I went to Australia in 2008 on a 4-month work and travel type visa, acquired through one of the private companies mentioned prior<sup>8</sup>, that I became interested in researching this type of travel more deeply.*

If still a bit opaque, autoethnography attempts to explain, thoroughly examine, and understand ethnographic experiences through personal experience by combining tools of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). Consequently, it also defies traditional research approaches and how study groups are represented in analysis by attempting to, "Make text of an explicit nature", and, "Respond to the need to be explicit in moving your readers and audiences intellectually, emotionally, and toward concerted social, cultural, and political action (Holmes Jones, 2005, p. 784). Further, it seeks to, "Perform the testimony and witnessing of personal stories, in, through, and with larger social contexts" and "Consider that when we bring our texts to contexts, we can make work that constitutes a first step toward social change" (Holmes Jones, 2005, p. 784). Nonetheless, before presenting my analysis in this manner, however, it is with the utmost courtesy to the reader to present some background of existing literature in which work and holiday have been examined jointly.

## Literature review

While "work" has various definitions from various academics (see Giddens, 2002; Grint, 2005; Pekkarinen & Sutela, 1996), tourism is often specifically stated as the opposite of "work" in general. For example, Urry suggests that tourism, "...is a leisure activity which presupposes its opposite, namely regulated and organized work" (1990, p. 2). Equally, Graburn states tourism is a form of play incorporating travel and that, "...our conception of tourism is that it is not work" (1989, p. 22). This reflects an apparent oxymoronic notion of the phrase "working holiday" and potential misconceptions or lack in understanding of what activities one pursues or undertakes while on a "working holiday" and the reasons for pursuing such.

A starting point in exploring the connection between the two fields of "work" and "holiday" is with Pape's take on the term "touristy", which encompasses, "...a form of journeying that depends upon occupation, but only in a secondary sense in that it serves the more primary goal, the travel itself" (Pape, 1965). Some academics have even gone so far as to categorize different versions of those who work and travel (see Cohen, 1973; Uriely, 2001). For example, Uriely's "traveling workers" versus "working tourist" below:

Figure 1  
Types of 'traveling workers' and 'working tourists'

Dimensions of comparison	Types of travelers			
	Working tourists		Travelling workers	
	Working-holiday tourists	Non-institutionalized working tourists	Migrant tourism workers	Traveling professional workers
Work and touristic motivations	Work is grasped as a recreational activity that is part of the tourist experience.	Work in order to finance a prolonged travel.	Travel in order to 'make a living' and 'have fun' at the same time.	Travel in order to exercise work. Engage in tourist related activities as a by-product of the excursion.
Work characteristics	Unskilled but usually recreational manual labor. Extraordinary work. Unpaid work.	Unskilled and usually unpleasant manual labor. Occasional work. Low-paid and non-prestigious work.	Skilled or semi-skilled work in tourism economy. Repetitive seasonal employment. Unsecured and low-paid employment.	Professional, official role, or business related work. Repetitive, career related work. Prestigious and well-paid work.
Demographic profile	Middle-class young adults.	Middle-class young adults.	Lower middle-class, or working class single and unattached adults. Periodically unemployed in their home societies.	Middle, or upper-middle class adults.

Source: Uriely (2001).

The term "working tourist" was first defined by Uriely and Reichel as, "...tourists who engage in situations that combine work with tourism" (2000, 268). This is a wide categorization as it attempts to include all types of travelers who envelop themselves in situations where work and travel are combined. Going further alone, Uriely put forth the four categories above to differentiate in motivations and characteristics of travelers who pursue work. An interesting void within categorizations is that there is no differentiation between those having a legal right to work; fundamentally, a working tourist or traveling worker who travels internationally is enabled to pursue a wider scope of work opportunities during their travels because governments have provided them the legal ability to do so. The world in which we live in is one of man-made borders and boundaries that not only mark difference in culture and language, but also sovereignty and legal entitlement. This missing aspect is understandable though in that his categorizations attempt to define terminology abstractly to encompass wider tourist demographics of activity that involve work. Regardless, Uriely admits his categorizations only reflect some details of the commonalities in behaviors in which work and tourism overlap (2001, p. 7), and thus he does not present it as a concrete categorization.

Within the "working tourist" category of travelers is where we find the "working holiday tourist"<sup>9</sup>; the one whose travels are considered a "working holiday". In an academic context, a "working holiday" has been discussed in various studies and theories, but most often involving the working tourists discussed above. Cohen first introduced the plural of the phrase, "working holidays" as a special form

of tourism, "...in which youth from one country travel into another to work for short periods, mostly during summer school vacations" (1973, p. 91). Uriely proposes that, "...the term 'working holiday' is attached to various forms of tourism, in which working activity is offered as part of the tourist experience" (2001, p. 4), and, correspondingly, whose practitioners motivations for pursuing such are parallel in explanation. He further writes,

*Compared with members of the three (other) categories...the working holiday tourists are less likely to apply a mercenary approach toward their work involvement and more likely to grasp it as a recreational activity...however, the participants are usually engaged in work that differs sharply from what they normally do in their daily life back home" (2001, p. 4).*

From another perspective, Wilson, Fisher, and Moore believe that a "working holiday" typically, "... involves extended stays in other countries by 'holidaymakers' with consequential immersion, to varying degrees, in the economic, social and cultural dimensions of the host locales" (2010, p. 4). To me this explanation can be perplexing in that it does not reference any mentioned activity of "work" in its proposal; however, this is most likely due to the approach taken toward their distinct conceptual and contextual evaluation<sup>10</sup>. State of the art considered, a universal academic consent in definition for a "working holiday" does not seem to exist at present, although a universal foundation of travel activity is evident.

If one were to abandon academia and search for a layman's definition of a "working holiday" in the Oxford Dictionaries, they would find that no such definition exists. More so, if one were to utilize the internet in hopes of finding a definition for this oxymoronic term, most search results<sup>11</sup> will reference a "working holiday visa" - a category of tourist visa offered by various countries, and quite obviously, in the context of this research, Australia. Albeit this explanation is of a visa category more so than an outright definition of activity and motivation for such, it does suggest that a "working holiday" bears correlation with those activities associated with legal work and travel under possession of a visa of the same name. In fact, as these working holiday visas are offered by numerous nations<sup>12</sup>, in practice, they are very likely what enables pursuit of such activity for "working holiday makers" or "working holiday tourists" today, with many contemporary understandings of the phrase in multiple cultural contexts often referencing such; one can pursue or go on a "working holiday" because a working holiday visa enables them to do so, granting a legal opportunity, and rights, to work while traveling. Thus while Australian studies of WHMs associate them to backpackers and migrant workers, they may in fact be their own unique demographic of international working tourist.

As explanations of a "working holiday" vary, further understanding of this concept may appropriately lie in examining the activities involved and personal motivations with travel and work on a working holiday visa to account for actual contemporary practice associated with discourse. Such an examination was a part of my field research conducted in Australia, which the findings of I will now elaborate.

## Discussion

If listing the given explanations of a "working holiday", as presented by the marketing of *Tourism Australia*, within academia above, and various internet explanations, a table of explanations would look like below:

Figure 2  
**Explanations of a "working holiday"**

Explanations of a working holiday	
Source	Description
Tourism Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can live and travel anywhere in Australia for one year and do any job you like</li> <li>Course, you don't have to work, but it's a great way to get extra cash so you can travel more and get to know the real Australia</li> </ul>
Uriely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work is grasped as a recreational activity that is part of the tourist experience</li> <li>Attached to various forms of tourism, in which working activity is offered as part of the tourist experience</li> <li>Working holiday tourists are less likely to apply a mercenary approach toward their work involvement</li> <li>Participants are usually engaged in work that differs sharply from what they normally do in their daily life back home</li> </ul>
Cohen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special form of tourism in which youth from one country travel into another to work for short periods, mostly during summer school vacations</li> </ul>
Wilson, Fisher, Moore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involves extended stays in other countries by 'holidaymakers' with consequential immersion, to varying degrees, in the economic, social and cultural dimensions of the host locales</li> </ul>
The internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References a working holiday visa – a travel permit which allows travelers to undertake employment in the country issuing the visa for the purpose of supplementing their travel funds</li> <li>Most working holiday visas are offered under reciprocal agreements between certain countries, to encourage travel and cultural exchange between their citizens</li> </ul>

While these sources purport what a "working holiday" involves conceptually, they do not necessarily address specific work or travel activities one practices while on a working holiday, nor why one embarks on such an oxymoronic adventure in the first place. Hence, to address such perceived gaps in explanations, the questionnaire applied in my research utilized the following questions to gauge perceptions of working holiday makers themselves: "What is a Working Holiday?", "What activities do you do on a working holiday?", "Why do people go on working holidays?", and "Why do you go on a working holiday?". Nevertheless, let us examine the responses to these questions from my qualitative research intent on clarifying what is the contemporary practice of going on a "working holiday" all about.

## What is a working holiday?

The answers to this question were diverse, but did not drift too far from the already discussed versions of explanation, both within academia or working holiday marketing. Earning money to travel while your traveling, learning about another culture by working in another country, taking on jobs you wouldn't do at home – these were the reoccurring messages in many responses:

*A working holiday is for me, um, to yeah on the one hand that you're traveling and so I think a working holiday is - that's my main factor in holiday, so to go to another place, so for me going to another country like Australia - but working is also very important that to see how much everything costs and to get sense for spending money and saving money.*

- Madeline, Germany

*...it is an opportunity to just - yeah to be able to uh, to fund your trip for one year, if you're not really rich and you don't get 10 grand from your parents.*

- Rudy, Belgium

*Where the idea of it is that you are working enough to... you get to see a new place, to get to travel, and help afford that by being allowed to work overseas for a while.*

- Elle, Canada

*Staying in a country so that you can I suppose get experience with working there and then you travel with what you've earned.*

- Erica, UK (Scotland)

*Working holiday? Uh, so this is a holiday first. And you can work to uh, you can work during this holiday to earn money. That's why you can continue your holiday.*

- Anne, France

*Um, working holiday is in another country, you have the opportunity to work there to get the money you need to travel around the country.*

- Dustin, Germany

*Working holiday is doing a bit of work and also - it's not doing the kind of work you do at home, like not seriously for a career, but working and meeting new people where you go.*

- Cathy, UK (England)

Surprisingly, a few respondents drifted from the norm with slight additions, which bore a trace of negativity in tone. Hating the work you do, earning a "rubbish" paycheck, and even one girl from Taiwan referenced – when asked what is a working holiday – that it has to do with being an Australian labor source. Perhaps she did not understand the question so clearly, but nonetheless her answer was interesting.

*Where you work, like when your not - when you're just, your only purpose is to work to make money even though you hate it, and then you can spend it all on traveling.*

- Mary, Norway

*I think its split up in two, but I think if you get the right jobs you can enjoy it, the whole part of it rather than having like a really nice time on a holiday and then jumping into earning a rubbish pay check.*

-Jackie, UK (England)

*Hmm that I think this person...that Australia government need labor, much more labor work in their farms so...*

- Eva, Taiwan

For myself, a working holiday is, and was, a form of travel in which I have a legal right to work, if necessary, in order to gain additional funds to keep traveling and keep my bank account afloat; I could travel longer as I could work if I needed to. Motives were not about experiencing another culture through work like others above, despite the fact that I did learn some things from my work encounters. When detailing cars during my participant observation, I can't say that I learned much about the *Real* Australia, unless I was learning about the work most Australians won't do, as reported by Allon *et al.* (2008). While I did work with Australians, what I learned most in that job was that I had to be adamant about not being pushed into doing more tasks than agreed upon; a by-product of apparently doing my job well was that I was delegated more duties that seemingly belonged to my supervisors.



I was even told by the girlfriend of one of my supervisors that I was "...the best backpacker they ever had", revealing that my position was one usually reserved for foreign travelers. When I worked on a watermelon farm, I worked with 7 other WHMs from Europe. No Australians stood next to us as we lifted hundreds of bowling-ball heavy watermelons each day, putting them onto the boom crane conveyor belt which carried them away to the tractor pulled trailer. Even the farm manager wasn't Australian. But of course my own experiences and perceptions about learning culture from a job are indeed that – my own. It is well plausible that other WHM experiences produce different perceptions, for example those WHMs who are not fully fluent in English more than likely have very different job experiences and outcomes than myself. Yet as mentioned – for me a working holiday was about an activity of prolonged travel supported by occasional work as needed.

## What activities do you do on a working holiday?

With this inquiry, some respondents kept to a general explanation of simply working and traveling.

*I travel in for, three, four months and then work for six months.*

- Eva, Taiwan

*... I don't know, work and then travel.*

- Mary, Norway

Whereas some were more specific about the activities:

*Um, well I have worked and then I went on vacation and there I did sky diving and kayaking and all sorts of stuff.*

- Martha, Denmark

*Ah, mostly working on farms...*

- Rudy, Belgium

*So lots of visits, some sports, or um, some sports, and according to your work –*

- Anne, France

*... I work, go on tours, go to the beach, go drinking a lot.*

- Cathy, UK (England)

Some pointed out that they simply do the same things they do on a holiday:

*The same as you would do on a holiday. Travel around.*

-Erica, UK (Scotland)

*Um, make friends, make party, yes - all things what I do on my holiday.*

- Carol, Germany

One noted that improving language skills was involved with a working holiday:

*Umm meeting people, improve my English, see, see the country and the culture... Work like in an everyday life to get to know the people of Australia.*

- Sara, Germany

On my working holiday to New Zealand and Ireland, the majority of my time was spent hiking in the mountains, hitchhiking, drinking beers at local pubs, and for the most part pursuing tourism based leisure activities. I did work, but only for short periods because at some point when you are traveling with plans of doing this for an extended time, it's practical to stay in one place for a while and earn something as costs eventually add up and funds dwindle. In New Zealand, I worked as a bartender, waiter, and cleaner in a hostel, and in Ireland I did barter work on a small organic "farm" in exchange for room and board, and also worked at a café for a little while, before quitting due to pay issues with the owner. During my research in Australia, I of course took the role of a WHM myself and pursued both employment and went on tours, like any good "tourist" does. Beyond the jobs mentioned, I also worked at a hostel and as a bartender. My tourist activities included visiting Ayers Rock, Kings Canyon and Kata Tjuta, as well as a two-day tour to Kangaroo Island off the southern coast of Australia, a one-day winery tour of the Barossa Valley, and a three-day tour of the Great Ocean Road, from Adelaide to Melbourne. The funds procured from working helped supplement these tourist escapades, just as suggested by the language used in TA advertising.

## Why do people go on working holidays?

This question was utilized to reveal semantic reasons for why people, in general, go on working holidays. The question that follows will seek to reveal latent reasons as some working tourists utilize working holiday visas with different intentions. Most I encountered are after an extended holiday with the ability to work as a financial aid to support such, however, I have crossed paths with a handful who used the visa as a "backdoor" immigration method since they have access to securing employment in a new country; employment that can lead to long-term residency via employer sponsorship or other means. In fact, one Australian government study about working holiday makers suggested this immigration connection as well (see Gallus, 1997). Nonetheless, none of my interviewees were openly seeking to immigrate to Australia, yet it is an occurrence to acknowledge although not the norm. In a generalization of why persons pursue working holidays, a trend was that people go on a working holiday because it's a good way to see the world and learn about a new country, partially made possible with the possibility to earn money thru work:

*... it must be a good possibility to travel around the country and really get to know it...*

- Helen, Germany

*I think generally it's to see the world and help afford that without having to like work, save up the money beforehand, you can go and live in a place and get to know it in a different way than just passing through but also to help you pay for it.*

- Elle, Canada

*Just to, um, have an easier way to travel the country, for example, in Australia they get it just so they can travel, earn money, and move on...*

- Brad, USA

*It's a cheaper way to see the world because you can - if you were just coming to travel it would cost you a fortune.*

- Cathy, UK (England)

*Um, it - they want to see the world I guess, and they, they have to decide that they just can't um, travel because it's expensive so they have to work so they can travel.*

- Mary, Norway

For the second time, practicing language skills was mentioned as related to working holiday, this time as a motive instead of an activity.

*Searching for - new experience. Meeting new people - new cultures. - Develop your language.*

- Nancy & David, Sweden (were interviewed as a couple)

*To enjoy another country, to, maybe to improve uh, their - uh, another language - and to discover new things, new, new culture, and new styles um, um, uh, how do you say uh, style of life. no?*

- Anne, France

I had mostly been under the belief that people went on working holidays simply to finance their travels, which empirically proved true. But for travelers from different countries, the motivations can be different when the destination working holiday country speaks a foreign language you are interested in learning. It's not necessarily about learning English per se, as young Australians, New Zealanders, and Canadians all have working holiday visa travel opportunities with a wide scope of countries around the world since they are afforded such due to the width of nations their respective home countries offer working holiday visas too – its reciprocity. Yet in the case of WHMs coming to Australia, learning or practicing language is a motivation factor for some; the chance to practice language through work being a bonus.

## Why do you go on a working holiday?

As mentioned above, this question was utilized to reveal the latent reasons of why interviewees go on a working holiday, individually. While many responses were merely echoes of the general motivations presented above, some had different personal goals, such as taking time to discover themselves, escape their homeland or life situation to see something new, earn money for future investments or, again, to learn a new language.

*Yeah, for me it was having a break of study and um - yeah coming clear about what I really want to do in my life or what I want to work.*

- Madeline, Germany

*Hmm because I now - uh, I don't want to work uh, again. Yeah, I don't want to go back my position.*

- Eva, Taiwan

*Oh, I went on a working holiday to earn some money before, hopefully, starting some kind of, uh, start-up for, like, phone apps.*

- Brad, USA

*My reason is to get - I don't know what to study back in Germany, and maybe to get to know different kinds of jobs, um, as well as meet other cultures I don't know and yeah - see a lot of things like I can't see at home.*

- Dustin, Germany

*To learn the language, to see the real life and yeah.*

- Carol, Germany

*Uhm, to go out of my hometown, leave the Netherlands...to work for money to travel farther.*

- Wendy, Netherlands

*Because I was fed up with working in England.*

- Jackie, UK (England)

*I, for those reason that I just to live, by, to go away from my country, to visit a new country, to see new people, to see a new reality, to, to work of course, and of course to have some great holidays in a great country.*

- Carl, Italy

*Because I want to discover myself.*

- Matt, Estonia

*Uh, as I said, more new experience, and it's a way to - for me it was more a way to live in a new place and find all the different or difficulties that starting a life in a place that you don't really know anyone, and not just seeing places, but to get to know the local people, uh, change all the things that how you look for work, get work, or all the denied for work, a different kind of vacation.*

- Mark, Italy

Asking myself this question, I would have to go back to my prior working holiday trips to New Zealand and Ireland since the main purpose of this trip was to conduct field research. Going back to my first working holiday to New Zealand, I shared a similar view with some above – I wanted to get away of my home country, to get away from my job. At 23, I had difficulties accepting the thought that sitting behind a desk in front of a computer is how the rest of my life would be. I wanted to do something unusual; to go someplace I knew little to nothing about...yet had the right to work in case I needed money. In Ireland, it wasn't so much in wanting to get away from home again, but more so to seek adventure in another country and culture, and likewise, having the legal right to work if necessary when needed. I did learn from work experiences in these countries yet most people learn from almost anything they undertake that provides a new challenge or experience; working in another country is indeed a challenging experience.

## Conclusion

Evaluating existing explanations of a "working holiday" in comparison with my research findings, its apparent that standing explanations ring true, yet seem to only represent independent aspects of the activity, respectively. While Cohen states that working holidays are a "...special form of tourism in which youth from one country travel into another to work for short periods" (1973, p. 91), a motivation is not clearly included, as if work is the only activity. It is overwhelmingly apparent that tourism and leisure activities are indeed involved with a "working holiday". Likewise, Uriley (2001) is quite accurate in his depiction of motivations in that work is *offered* as a part of the tourist experience, which in the Australia context would be learning about culture, similar to the advertisements of TA. However, work is not necessarily *undertaken* in the same manner amongst my interviewees.

For most, the work on a "working holiday" is often about earning money to support travel rather than working as part of the tourist experience; learning about culture may be a by-product of the job offer or experience, yet it's not necessarily an employment decision making factor – making money to continue traveling is the goal. This notion of working to support travels coincides with Uriely's non-institutionalized working tourists. However, it is difficult to consider working holiday makers, in the Australian context at least, as non-institutionalized as their work and travel is, in fact, made possible by a visa program administered by a government entity, advertised not only by *Tourism Australia*, but also private companies who coordinate "working holiday" trips, obtaining visas, arranging accommodation, bank accounts, mobile phones, and more. Although the activity of work while on holiday departs from normal conceptions of being a tourist, a working holiday is not necessarily an alternative or unconventional form of travel any longer. In fact, it enables travel by allowing work activity to supplement costs. While Uriely's explanation is most likely discussing those who seek forms of travel beyond traditional and convention methods associated with mass tourism, however, trends in tourism have and will, always continue to change. With the increased numbers globally of those who undertake a "working holiday" through the allotment of visas or programs under a similar name, these types of travelers may in fact be part of a new institutionalized form of modern travel and work.

In terms of Wilson, Fisher and Moore's (2009) explanation, it is too abstract and culturally narrowed to New Zealand youth who travel, not accounting for a wider base of travelers who undertake working holidays. Of course a generalization for all working holiday travelers would be rational, yet as mentioned before, a legal right to work is missing from any explanation and for one to pursue work in another country, it's a strong factor in that a "working holiday" is possible because of a "working holiday" type visa that is offered, and interviews revealed that work is indeed imperative to supporting travel and tourism activities, as suggested by Tourism Australia's advertisement.

Taking into consideration the activities and motivations revealed by interviewees and through my own participant observation, including those aspects that echoed the existing working holiday characteristics, and incorporating new factors for pursuing such activity not mentioned by academic explanations, I would like to propose the following explanation that may represent a more contemporary explanation of this phenomena:

*A working holiday is a form of travel offered to young international travelers who utilize special visas to pursue extended travel in another country for various personal reasons including, but not limited to, gaining new intercultural experiences, practicing language skills, and seeking paid employment, as needed, to finance further travel.*

As mentioned earlier, the occurrence of "working holiday makers" or "working holiday travelers" is indeed increasing globally, and such a widespread phenomena surely lessens the chance of working holiday makers or working holiday tourists being categorized as unconventional or non-institutionalized travelers simply due to an activity of work, particularly when work makes their travel possible. In some cultural contexts, such as Australia, they are quite common and well known of, although often colloquially incorporated into the group label of "backpackers".

The purpose of a fresh explanation such as above is to bring up-to-date perspectives about working holiday makers and the activity of "working holiday" travel to the forefront of academic studies. As

these working tourists pursue both work and holiday, their increased presence internationally may confront existing studies; as Allon *et al.* write, "The concept of a 'working holiday' disputes the large body of literature that positions tourism in opposition to work" (2008, 7). Only with further research can the scope of this emerging form of travel, or work mobility, can this concept be more understood and assessed in its new manifestations within international contexts.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations within:

WHMP = Working Holiday Maker Program

WHMs = Working Holiday Makers

WHV = Working Holiday Visa, Work and Holiday Visa

<sup>2</sup> Working Holiday Visa (Subclass 417): For persons from Belgium, Canada, Republic of Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan and United Kingdom. Work and Holiday Visa (Subclass 462): For persons from Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkey and the USA.

<sup>3</sup> This possibility is only available to WHV 417 holders

<sup>4</sup> WHMs are included in demographic studies of backpackers in Australia, such as those of Allon *et al.* 2008, and Locker-Murphy and Pierce 1995.

<sup>5</sup> As reported by the Australian Tourism Export Council in their positionary paper *The Importance of the Working Holiday Visa (Subclass 417)*, dated February 2012: "Backpackers stay (in Australia) an average of 73 nights and spend over \$5400, while working holiday makers have an extended stay averaging 8 months and spend over \$13,000 each".

<sup>6</sup> For example:

Work n Holiday - <http://worknholiday.com/>

International Exchange Programs - <http://www.iep.org.au>

STA Travel - <http://www.statravel.com>

BUNAC - <http://www.bunac.org>

SWAP - <http://www.swap.ca>

Travel Works - <http://www.travelworks.de>

<sup>7</sup> 2001 statistics from Tan *et al.* 2009 and 2011 statistics from combined visa totals from Dept. of Immigration and Citizenship report "Working Holiday Maker visa report: June 30 2011"

<sup>8</sup> BUNAC

<sup>9</sup> Can also be called a "working holiday maker" – both titles reference those travelers whose travels are considered a "working holiday"

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, Fisher, and Moore analyze a "working holiday" in the context of cultural understanding of the traditional Overseas Experience (OE) form of travel undertaken by New Zealand youth.

<sup>11</sup> The internet is a commonly used medium for investigating the utmost basic explanation of a phrase, activity, concept, etc. Beyond academia, it is not absurd to examine explanations in a colloquial sense

<sup>12</sup> "Working holiday" programs and visas are also offered by Argentina, Canada, Finland, New Zealand, Japan, Ireland, Norway, and numerous other countries.

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## Other Internet Resources from footnotes:

- <http://www.arg.org.nz>
- <http://www.whpcanada.org.au>
- <http://www.immigration.govt.nz>
- <http://www.mofa.go.jp>
- <http://www.dfa.ie>
- <http://www.norway.org.au>
- <http://worknholiday.com/>
- <http://www.iep.org.au>
- <http://www.statravel.com>
- <http://www.bunac.org>
- <http://www.swap.ca>
- <http://www.travelworks.de>

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