

Spring 2015

## Does Study Abroad Impact Students' Personality?

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Honors Thesis

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Advisor: Jack J. Bauer, Ph.D.

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## Abstract

International education is universally valued both in academics and the job market because of the perception that those who study abroad have increased intercultural awareness, experience with diversity, and opportunity for personal growth. Given that students who are studying abroad are experiencing increased independence and experience with a new culture, this is a potential time for the development of perspective-taking, empathic concern, non-prejudice, and other forms of personal growth. The present, longitudinal study collected narrative and non-narrative data on these qualities of personality development before, during, and after the participants' studies. For comparison, we gathered the same measures with a group of students who were taking a summer course on campus. Contrary to popular views of studying abroad, we did not find evidence that summer study abroad facilitated personality development more than summer study on campus. We did find that students were more likely to report personal growth after studying abroad than studying on campus, but this was explained by the fact that the study-abroad group had higher expectations for personal growth before summer studies.

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## Introduction

Though study abroad seems like a common experience for many college-age students, during the 2012-2013 academic year only 289,408 U.S. college students studied abroad, which represents only about 1% of U.S. students enrolled in higher education institutions (NAFSA). This statistic demonstrates that students who study abroad are receiving a unique educational experience. International education is universally valued in the job market because of the perception that those who study abroad have increased intercultural awareness and experience with diversity (Mapp, 2012). Patterson (2006) performed a study that compared students who studied abroad to students who completed intercultural classes on-campus. She found that students who studied abroad had a slight improvement in intercultural sensitivity, whereas those who studied on-campus had no improvement.

However strong these arguments, it has not been determined the impact that individual personality characteristics have on those who choose to study abroad and their experience abroad. Personality characteristics, including perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice have been relatively unstudied as they correlate with personality development of students who study abroad. Perspective-taking is defined as the “tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others” (Davis, 1983, p. 115). Assessing the levels of these personality characteristics is significant because this has the potential to provide insight into the impact that personality has on study abroad, and vice versa. Another trait that might be exercised while studying abroad is empathic concern. This is an other-oriented emotion that is felt when another is in need (Block-Learner, et al., 2007). Non-prejudice, or the ability to free one’s self from the

pressures of categorizing people, may also be implicated when individuals are having international experiences (Phillips & Ziller, 1997). Furthermore, the study of personal growth as it correlates with personality has not been reviewed in relation to study abroad. The present study uses a combination of self-report measures and narrative responses to provide more in depth information about personality development and personal growth among emerging adults. I will begin by discussing relevant literature on study abroad and the discrepant findings on its influence on personal growth. Second, I will examine the importance of these personality traits and their correlation with eudaimonic growth and well-being. Finally, I will discuss how the integration of narrative analysis poises this study to illuminate the relation between study abroad and personality development.

### **Is It Study Abroad or Personality?**

A set of studies indicates that study abroad can be a catalyst for numerous types of growth among college students. Beginning with the literature on the reasons that students choose to study abroad, Pope, Sánchez, Lehnert, and Schmid (2014) find that students' main motivation for studying abroad is that it is an opportunity for personal growth. Carlson and Widaman (1988) found that students who studied abroad a semester returned with "increased levels of international political concern, cross-cultural interests, and cultural cosmopolitanism" (p. 1). Similar increases have also been documented in short-term study abroad programs, such as the one examined in the current study. Furthermore, this impact was found to last beyond the expiration of the program with students reporting that they "continued to develop their self-confidence and world-view after returning home as a result of their study abroad experience" (Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton, & Hubbard, 2008, p. 4). In Mapp's (2012) study of students abroad, she found

that the result of increased cultural adaptability while studying abroad was not influenced by trip length, if the country was English-Speaking, the number of countries earlier visited by the student, or the longest amount of time previously spent in a country. Her finding that none of these are co-variants with the increase in cultural adaptability implies that changes were a result of time spent studying in that particular country. Patterson's (2006) measure of adaptation, which is a subscale of "cognitive frame shifting, indicating taking the perspective of another culture," found that students' perspective-taking abilities increased as a result of studying abroad (p. 67). This increase, though small, indicates that the study-abroad group grew in their ability to take on the perspectives of other cultures.

Despite the extensive research on positive outcomes associated with studying abroad, there are numerous critiques of this research and of studying abroad as a whole. One critic finds that though studying abroad is widely viewed to increase intercultural competency, it rather serves as a tool to aid the U.S. in economic and diplomatic policy (Study Abroad: Critical Perspectives, 2012). They assert that students who study abroad are not necessarily increasing intercultural awareness or perspective-taking, but rather forming a "third culture" that is neither American, nor the country in which they are studying (Citron, 2002). They assert that this formation of a third culture hinders students' ability to truly grow as a result of studying abroad. The assumption that intercultural competence increases as a result of studying abroad is founded on the contact hypothesis that proposes that prejudices are reduced in the context of lasting interpersonal contact (Study Abroad Outcomes, 2012). However, it has been discovered that this sustained interpersonal contact is not effective at decreasing prejudices if one or

more unfavorable experiences occur during the exposure. Therefore, the assumptions of the contact hypothesis are not likely to decrease prejudice in the context of studying abroad. Furthermore, it is argued that the findings on studying abroad might be the result of a selection bias. This would mean that students who chose to study abroad already had increased interest in global affairs and appreciation for culture compared to other students without the desire to study abroad (Study Abroad Outcomes, 2012). Overall, the bulk of research on personal growth and study abroad is lacking and contradictory at best. Nevertheless, there are many studies that indicate personal growth and personality are correlated with study abroad in some fashion.

## **Perspective-Taking**

A personality characteristic that has been relatively unexamined as it relates to study abroad and that is correlated with increased ability to understand the point of view of others is perspective-taking. Perspective-taking is described as an empathic experience where there is a merging between the self and the other (Skoe, 2010). Perspective-taking is correlated with compassion, which helps individuals to form a self-identity that promotes well-being (Wayment, Bauer, & Sylaksa, 2014). It is also associated with eudaimonic growth or the measure of changes in well-being, maturity, and experiential growth motivation which “emphasizes a desire for deepening or strengthening one’s experiences or relationships, helping others, and building skills in activities of personal interests” (Bauer, Park, Montoya, & Wayment, 2014, p. 7). This means that individuals with high levels of growth motivation are more likely to exhibit higher levels of eudaimonic growth and thus perspective-taking.



Perspective-taking is also related to the quiet ego and is used as a measure in this scale. The quiet ego is “the subjective stance toward the self and others in which the volume of the ego is turned down so that it might listen to others as well as the self in an effort to approach life more humanely and compassionately” (Wayment et al., 2014, p. 2). Perspective-taking is included in the measures of the quiet ego and was found to be correlated with growth. The development of the characteristics associated with the quiet ego are correlated with increased well-being and more specifically with “self-esteem, the ability to savor everyday experiences, life satisfaction, subjective well-being, psychological resilience, and the feeling that life is meaningful” (Wayment et al., 2014, p. 28). The fact that perspective-taking is correlated with both well-being and eudaimonic growth make this measure one of great importance for the study abroad experience, as this is a time where many claim to experience personal growth.

Perspective-taking is not only associated with growth and eudaimonic well-being, but is also related to “better interpersonal functioning, higher self-esteem and dispositional regulation” (Skoie, 2010, p. 194). Perspective-taking is inversely correlated with personal distress, which is related to emotional vulnerability and fearfulness. A study by Fresko, Reich, Sjöo, and Lönroth (2013) examined the role that narratives have in the development of interpersonal skills among college students, with the goal of career development. The researchers emphasized the importance of empathy and perspective-taking within some careers, such as social work, teaching, and mentoring at-risk youth. They used narratives to aid in students’ growth of interpersonal competency in a seminar setting where students were prompted to write about recent emotionally salient events in their lives. When writing about these events, students wrote them both from their own

point of view and from that of another. Following this exercise in perspective-taking, one education student stated, “I learned how people think when they don’t think like me. What is right for me is not necessarily right for others. There are always two sides or more and one needs to respect that others think otherwise” (Fresko et al., 2013, p. 236). This particular experiment demonstrates how narratives can facilitate perspective-taking because through writing about personal experiences, one shapes their life events through a narrative framework.

Furthermore, increased perspective-taking abilities in college-aged students is correlated with more thorough decision-making processes. Considering how a decision would be viewed by other important individuals in their lives leads to a more conscientious decision-making process. In a study by Morey and Dansereau (2010), students who were taught perspective-taking strategies created more alternative plans, more complexly evaluated options, and developed stronger plans than students who did not engage in perspective-taking. This demonstrates that perspective-taking is not only important for being able to understand the views of others, but also for making thoughtful and personal decisions. This has important implications for students who are studying abroad, because those who are able to engage in perspective-taking will be better able to make strong decisions that will positively impact their study abroad experience and more likely lead to growth.

## **Empathic Concern**

Another personality characteristic that can be related to growth is empathic concern, which is an other-oriented emotion that is felt when another is in need. Empathic concern is considered by some to be a condition that must be met for growth to occur and

also has significant impacts on interpersonal relationships (Block-Lerner, et al., 2007). Block-Lerner et al. find that empathy is developed as a “natural outgrowth of both the separation/individual process and the decline and egocentrism that comes with increasing age through childhood” (p. 504). As advanced cognitive abilities develop, the capability to empathize with entire categories of people increases. Long, et al. (1999) assert that there are six components of empathy, including: “empathic sensitivity, suspension of one’s thoughts and feelings, empathic listening, empathic communication, the communication of an understanding through paraphrasing, and empathic checking with a partner.” Block-Lerner et al. (2007) created an experiment where community volunteers were given mindfulness exercises to aid in their growth of empathic capabilities. They found that participants in this program displayed increases in empathy in all six of these aforementioned components. Although the generalizability of these findings cannot be assured and there may be the presence of a sampling bias, this communicates that experiential activities have been previously found to increase empathic concern. This is an important finding, because this demonstrates that perhaps the personality characteristic of empathic concern can be strengthened through experiences.

Another topic related to the study of empathic concern is the motivation for experiencing empathy and acting in an other-oriented fashion. An experiment by Shroeder, et al. (1987) assessed whether empathic concern was motivated by an “egoistic motivation to reduce one’s own distress or an altruistic motivation to reduce another person’s distress” (p. 333). They found that the main motivation for helping was concern about another person’s distress over their own, when helping was not personally costly. This personality characteristic can be measured through questionnaires that assess one’s

pattern of helping responses. Some argue that “international learning provides opportunities for students to expand their worldviews and develop empathy through exploration of those worldviews, communication styles, personal assumptions and community and cultural knowledges from multiple perspectives” (Mendoza & Matyók, 2013, p.219). One study analyzed the changes in empathic concern for white education students in a summer study abroad program that traveled to Mexico. They found that “those sojourning or living in a new culture may also experience racism and discrimination due to their race or native origin for the first time” (Marx & Pray, 2011, p. 509). They found that those with empathic characteristics were better able to advocate for the social needs of those being discriminated against and that though white students were not able to temporarily become students of color, “they could briefly experience some of the struggles second language learners typically face” (p. 511). They found that after students studied abroad in Mexico they were better able to understand the challenges and prejudices faced by English language learners. This communicates that students participating in study abroad have the ability to experienced increased empathy for unlike others.

While the previously mentioned studies argue that empathy can be increased through experiences where one engages with diverse others, some researchers assert that empathy is a stable personality trait that can be exercised through certain experiences, but is not altered through this process. When encountering other races, possibly through international experiences, some contend that what is felt is essentially ‘false empathy’ where a “white person believes he or she is identifying with a person of color, but in fact is doing so only in a slight or superficial way” (Marx & Pray, 2011, p. 518). They find

that having empathy for those who are radically different from us emphasizes differences and can be dangerous. When empathy is more related to sympathy rather than social justice, one risks being able to “recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront” (Marx & Pray, 2011, p. 510). Furthermore, empathic characteristics are found to correlate with the Big 5 personality traits, which have been found in numerous empirical studies to be relatively stable throughout adulthood. A study by Del Barrio, Aluja, and García (2004) found that empathy was strongly correlated with conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness in both sexes. The fact that these Big 5 personality traits are highly correlated with empathy could provide support for the position that empathy is a stable personality trait. Overall, examining if there are changes in empathy over the short term study abroad experiences could provide insight into the influence that international experiences have on the strength of this personality characteristic.

## **Non-Prejudice**

Prejudice is usually defined as a negative view of other social groups based on prior knowledge or experiences. Instead of measuring prejudice, this scale examines non-prejudice, which has been described as “habitual open mindedness” and a diminished need to organize people within categories (Phillips & Ziller, 1997, p. 420). There have been numerous proposed explanations for the existence of prejudice. One finds that prejudice exists because of the tendency to organize information encountered in the environment into groups in order to simplify experiences. Another explanation called the minimum-group paradigm states that people experience prejudice because of the inclination to favor one’s own group. Therefore, the key to increasing non-prejudice is

“being able to sort and classify in terms of similarity ... and the ability to draw connections between differentiated stimuli, forming more wholistic [sic] dimensions or characteristics” (Phillips & Ziller, 1997, p. 420). This means that the score a person earns on the scale is representative of their ability to non-judgmentally accept those they encounter.

Another study finds that non-prejudice personality traits are highly correlated with well-being in college students. They found that forms of prejudice, including sexism and racism, were correlated with poorer psychological social, and/or physical well-being (Dinh, Holmberg, Ho, & Haynes, 2014). They found that White students reported more prejudice towards immigrant populations than did ethnic minority students. They also found that participants who reported they were heterosexual and religious had higher levels of homophobia. The correlation with well-being is important because individuals who possess non-prejudice characteristics in college have higher psychological, physical, and social well-being. Psychosocial well-being is a component of eudaimonic growth and if non-prejudice ratings are related to growth present in narratives, this research will be corroborated.

Others argue that prejudice occurs on a macro-level cultural scale and not based on personality characteristics, as people may be virtually unaware of the prejudices they are harboring. A study on prejudice in Australia measured the reconciliation between aboriginal people, which constitute less than 3% of the population, and non-aboriginals in Australia. They revealed that stereotypes towards Aborigines were “driven by a deep-seated aggressive emotional reaction of distaste, which framed them in stereotypes such as lazy and drunks” (Beresford & Beresford, 2006, p. 74). They found that despite this

prejudice, the majority of whites in Australia believed in color-blindness and that the law was neutral towards people of color, which was untrue. They argue that despite people's personal beliefs, many prejudices are socially constructed and are often adopted unconsciously. This would mean that non-prejudice is not a personality characteristic, but something to be adopted depending on the particular cultural environment.

## **Growth Narratives**

The use of narrative coding to research personal growth and to correlate this with the personality questionnaires provides an increasingly complex and personal approach to study abroad research. Narratives are an important resource because “people use narratives to try to derive some measure of unity and purpose out of what may otherwise seem to be an incomprehensible array of life events and experiences” (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008, p. 84). Emerging adulthood (ages 18-25) is a time where individuals are shaping their life stories around particular themes and often demonstrate a greater understanding of personal development later in emerging adulthood than they did previously (McAdams et al., 2006). Moreover, in emerging adulthood individuals frequently have high levels of optimism because of their ability at this age to alter their lives (Gottlieb, Still, & Newby-Clark, 2007). Additionally, these authors emphasize that emerging adulthood is a time when individuals are self-focused and more likely to perceive experiences as bringing about growth. College students who are studying abroad are well within this range of emerging adulthood, which makes narrative research of the study abroad experience increasingly informative. Studying abroad can be a time where individuals experience eudaimonic growth, or changes in beliefs about one's life, otherwise known as subjective well-being and how deeply and thoughtfully one thinks

about life, otherwise known as psychosocial maturity (Bauer & McAdams, 2010).

Quantifying narratives for eudaimonic growth allows for studying people's interpretations and expectations of studying abroad in relation to quantitative measures of happiness, as well as psychosocial maturity "in terms of meaning-making complexity and perspective taking" (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008, p. 84).

McAdams et al. (2006) performed a three-year longitudinal study where he measured the changes in narrative formation over the college experience. He and his colleagues found that narratives significantly increased in their complexity and emotional tone over time. They also found that other traits, such as the Big-5 personality traits remained fairly stable. While the measures on these inventories remained stable, the narrative identities offered a larger amount of variable information because of the open-ended and therefore less controlled nature. Though they are more varied, narratives can provide more extensive information to researchers about growth during the study abroad experience, as emerging adulthood is a pivotal time for narrative identity development. Furthermore, Bauer and McAdams (2004a) found that the social institutions in which individuals are participating influences their narrative identities. An example of the change of a social institution is a change in religion. When students are studying abroad, they are joining numerous social institutions, even if for a short amount of time, which likely increases the probability of changes in their narratives. Bauer and McAdams assert that the ways that individuals think about their lives and plan their lives in a narrative context are predictive of changes in self-development. This is because people are more likely to mention themes in their narratives that are important to them. For example, if a student mentions in their narrative that they are motivated to learn about themselves



while abroad, we would expect that they would exhibit more personal growth than an individual who writes that they have the desire to find love abroad. Overall, narratives provide a great amount of information on personal growth because they provide an insight into individuals' personal values and growth motivation.

Additionally, when narratives are used in longitudinal studies, they deliver substantial information about the individual's ability to integrate new perspectives, which increases their capacity for growth (Bauer & McAdams, 2004b). Bauer and McAdams (2004b) study measured "exploratory life span goals, which involved the explicit expression of intentions to conceptually explore, integrate, deepen, or otherwise learn about new perspectives in the individuals' life" (p. 589). They found that the presence of growth goals predicted higher levels of growth in future narratives. They assert that this supports the intentional self-development model, which states that if people have an intention and explicitly state it within their narrative, they are more likely to fulfill this goal (Bauer & McAdams, 2004b). It is important to examine the correlation between the goals that one communicates through narratives because this has the potential to have predictive value for personality development. Narratives provide greater insight into the individual thoughts and actions than self-report measures because it allows the experimenter to ascertain the values of the participant in a method that is rather open ended.

## **The Present Study**

In the present study, a longitudinal design is used to measure correlations between personal growth and personality characteristics in students who studied abroad and who studied on-campus over the summer. Data was collected from the students on three

occasions: once before, during, and after their summer studies. For the purposes of this thesis, I will analyze only time 1 (T1) and time 3 (T3) data, before and after the experience over the summer. At each stage of data collection, students responded to questionnaires and narrative prompts. Given that students who are studying abroad are experiencing increased independence and experience with a new culture, this is a time where perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice could contribute to personal growth.

**Hypothesis 1.** The study-abroad group will show increased levels of perspective-taking, empathic concern, non-prejudice, and growth narratives from T1 to T3 compared to the study-on-campus group.

**Hypothesis 2.** Those with higher levels of perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice at T1 will have higher levels of growth narratives at T3, controlling for baseline measures of growth narratives at T1, regardless of if they were studying abroad or on-campus for the summer. If these personality characteristics do predict higher levels of growth regardless of setting, this communicates that these are catalysts growth for the individuals who possess it whether or not they are in situations that traditionally inspire growth.

**Hypothesis 3.** Growth narratives at T1 will predict perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice at T3, controlling for baseline measures of those personality characteristics at T1, regardless of if they were studying abroad or on-campus for the summer. This tests whether those with growth-oriented expectations for their summer studies yields increased levels of personality development.

**Exploration.** Furthermore, I will test for interactions between the two groups and each of the three characteristics at T1 in predicting increases in growth narratives from T1 to T3. Also, I will test for interactions between the two groups and growth narratives at T1 predicting changes over time in the three personality characteristics.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

In this longitudinal study, data was collected from students both studying abroad and studying on-campus at the University of Dayton at three times. All participants who were studying on-campus were enrolled in at least one class at the University of Dayton. All participants in the study abroad group were taking classes while abroad in a summer program lasting at least one month. T1 data was collected in the spring before classes abroad or on-campus had begun. T2 data was collected during the summer, while students were completing their classes abroad and on-campus. Finally, T3 data was collected in the fall after the courses had ended. At T1, there were 26 participants in the study-abroad group and 40 participants in the campus group. At T2, there were 20 participants in the study-abroad group and 19 participants in the campus group. At T3, there were 17 participants in the study-abroad group and 18 participants in the campus group.

### **Procedure**

Students were recruited for participation through a representative visiting preparation meetings for study abroad programs and later sending out an email asking for their participation. Furthermore, a list of students taking classes at the University of Dayton over the summer was received from the college and students were then sent an

email. Upon the receipt of the first email for T1 in the spring, students had 3 weeks to complete the questionnaires and narrative prompt. Before each data collection, students were sent an email asking for their participation. Emails for T2 were only sent to participants who completed T1, and emails for participants for T3 were sent to participants who completed either T1, T2, or both. At each time of data collection, students were asked to respond to a narrative prompt as well as questionnaires through an online program called SurveyMonkey®. Following their participation in each round of data collection, students were sent \$10 restaurant gift cards as compensation for their participation. On average, it took students about 45 minutes to an hour complete each round of the study.

### **Measures**

**Narratives.** Narrative prompts differed depending on the group of participants and the time of data collection. The participants in the T1 study-abroad group were given a narrative prompt asking them to write about their expectations for studying abroad over the summer. They were asked to explore their hopes, fears, plans, and motivations for their study abroad experiences. The participants in the study-on-campus group at T1 were given a similar prompt asking about their expectations for their summer studies. At T2, participants in the study-abroad group were given a prompt asking them to write about an especially positive event that occurred during the study abroad program and the significance and insight that it provided. They were also asked to report on a negative event that led them to feel strong negative emotions and to describe the factors made this event significant. Similarly, participants in the study-on-campus group at T2 were asked to write about both a positive and negative event that occurred within the last month.

Participants in the study-abroad group at T3 were asked to write about the impact of the study abroad program and any impact that this program had on their life, or changed them in any way. Likewise, participants in the study-on-campus group at T3 were asked to write about the impact of their recent summer studies and any impact this program had on their lives or changes in their lives resulting from their program of studies.

Following the collection of these narratives, the narratives were coded for experiential and reflective growth goals, in an effort to better understand participant's interpretations of their lives. Numerical codes were used where a narrative was assigned either 0, 1, or 2 points. If there was no presence of growth motivation, the narrative was coded a 0. If it was coded as a 1, there was the presence of one form of growth motivation and a 2 if both were present. The following is an excerpt from a narrative with high growth motivation from a participant in the study-abroad group at T1:

“Studying abroad has always been a dream of mine. Coming into college, I knew that one day I would want to have the experience of leaving my comfort zone, diving into the unknown, and experience something new and exciting. I feel very strongly about connecting to other cultures to have a greater understanding about how the world functions. Never being abroad before, I thought the perfect place would be London. While abroad I hope to gain a greater understanding and respect for those who come from a other culture or background. I hope to strengthen my skills in psychology and test my comfort zone.”

This contains reflective growth because its author is motivated to gain new perspectives and understandings. Reflective growth goals are coded when the “reason for the goal is explicitly to learn, to conceptually explore, to encounter new perspectives, or to seek conceptual challenges” (Coding for growth goals). This also contains experiential growth goals because the participant is stating that their interest in meaningful activities

and learning about culture. Experiential growth goals are “explicitly to foster personal growth, personally meaningful activities, a personally meaningful relationship, or contributions to society or future generations” (Coding for growth goals). An example of a narrative lacking these growth motivations is from a participant in T1 in the study-on-campus group:

“I am studying online this summer because I will have very full schedules for my remaining semesters at UD. I saw that a course I needed to take to fulfill requirements was available online, so I decided to take it now over the summer rather than to wait and add more stress later. I want to get ahead on my studies as much as possible. I am not really afraid of anything going into this summer. I have done an online course through UD before and have a general idea of what to expect. Right now, I am simply still focused on this semester’s work and will worry about that course when the time comes.”

This example of a narrative that does not contain growth motivation because this participant is taking a course over the summer to get ahead in their studies, rather than to promote personal growth. Interrater reliability for coding growth narratives between my adviser and me was strong, kappa = .96.

**Perspective-Taking and Empathic Concern Scale (PTEC).** This is from two subscales of the interpersonal reactivity index (Davis, 1983). The two subscales are perspective-taking and empathic concern. The PTEC is a well-validated scale, which consists of 16 questions where participants responded on a five-point Likert scale with 1 indicating “does NOT describe me well at all” and 5 indicating “describes me very well”. An example of a question is, “I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.” This measure was used at all three times.

**Universal Orientation Scale (UOS).** Consists of 20 questions answered using the same Likert scale, where 1 indicates “does not describe me well at all” and 5 means “describes me very well.” An example of a question on this scale is “When I meet someone I tend to notice similarities between myself and the other person.” Another example of a question is, “*Between* describes my position with regard to groups better than does *in* and *out*.” This measure was also used at all three times for individuals in both groups.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics on relevant measures of personality.

	Time 1	Time 3
Perspective-Taking	3.4226 (.5593) 1.83-4.50 <i>n</i> =56	3.5539 (.48673) 2.50-4.83 <i>n</i> =34
Empathic Concern	4.1758 (.54378) 2.83-5.33 <i>n</i> = 55	4.1505 (.50617) 3.33-5.17 <i>n</i> =31
Non-Prejudice	3.5000 (.33079) 2.65-4.15 <i>n</i> =53	3.5906 (.39174) 2.85-4.65 <i>n</i> =32

**Table 2** Frequencies of growth in narratives at T1 and T3.

	Time 1	Time 3
Non-Growth	35	15
Growth	23	19
Total	59	34

### Bivariate Relations

**Group and personality variables.** Participants in the study-abroad group reported significantly higher levels of empathic concern at T3 than those in the study-on-campus group,  $t(29) = 2.05, p = .05$ . The two groups did not differ significantly on perspective-taking at T1 or T3, empathic concern at T1, or non-prejudice at T1 or T3 ( $ps > .10$ ). A series of multiple regressions showed that the study-abroad group did not show

increases in these three personality characteristics from T1 to T3, compared to the study-on-campus group (see Table 1). Participants in the study-abroad group were significantly more likely than those in the study-on-campus group to have growth narratives of their expectations at T1,  $X^2(32) = 27.53, p < .001$ . At T3, participants in the study-abroad group were also significantly more likely than the study-on-campus group to have growth narratives while writing about the impact of their study abroad experience,  $X^2(32) = 16.90, p < .001$ . Growth narratives at T1 were significantly related only to empathic concern at T1,  $t(54) = 2.07, p < .05$ , and empathic concern at T3,  $t(30) = 2.65, p < .05$ . Growth narratives at T3 were significantly related only to empathic concern at T1,  $t(31) = 2.30, p < .05$ .

**Time and personality variables.** Perspective-taking at T1 correlated significantly with perspective-taking at T3, with  $r = .56, p < .01$ . Empathic concern at T1 also correlated significantly with empathic concern at T3, with  $r = .77, p < .01$ . Non-prejudice at T1 correlated significantly with non-prejudice at T3, with  $r = .67, p < .01$ . Growth narratives at T1 related significantly with growth narratives at T3, with  $X^2(32) = 14.44, p < .001$ .

### **Hypothesis 1**

My first hypothesis was that the study-abroad group will show increased levels of perspective-taking, empathic concern, non-prejudice, and growth narratives from T1 to T3 compared to the study-on-campus group. In a repeated-measures ANOVA, the study-abroad-group did not show increases in perspective-taking from T1 to T3 compared to the study on-campus group,  $F(1, 31) = .78, p > .10$ . In similar repeated-measures ANOVAs, the study-abroad-group did not show increases in empathic concern from T1



to T3 compared to the study on-campus group,  $F(1, 31) = .26, p > .10$ . Furthermore, the study-abroad-group did not show increases in non-prejudice from T1 to T3 compared to the study on-campus group,  $F(1, 31) = .06, p > .10$ .

### **Hypothesis 2**

My second hypothesis was that those with higher levels of perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice at T1 will have higher levels of growth narratives at T3, controlling for baseline measures of growth narratives at T1, regardless of if they were studying abroad or on-campus for the summer. An increase in growth narratives means that growth narratives at T3 were controlled for the participant's expectations for growth at T1, as described in their narratives. In a logistic-regression of growth narratives at T3, simultaneously on growth narratives at T1 and perspective-taking at T1, I found that perspective-taking at T1 did not predict increases in growth narratives,  $Wald = 2.54, p > .10$ . In the same procedure for the other two variables we found that neither empathic concern,  $Wald = .18, p > .10$ , nor non-prejudice,  $Wald = .20, p > .10$ , predicted increases in growth narratives significantly.

### **Hypothesis 3**

Finally, I predicted that growth narratives at T1 will predict perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice at T3, controlling for baseline measures of those personality characteristics at T1, regardless of if they were studying abroad or on-campus for the summer. This tests whether those with growth-oriented expectations for their summer studies yields increased levels of personality development. In a repeated-measures ANOVA, the growth narratives did not predict increases in perspective-taking from T1 to T3,  $F(1, 31) = .17, p > .10$ . In similar repeated-measures ANOVAs, the growth

narratives did not predict increases in empathic concern from T1 to T3,  $F(1, 31) = .02$   $p > .10$ . In similar repeated-measures ANOVAs, the growth narratives did not predict increases in non-prejudice from T1 to T3,  $F(1, 31) = .45$   $p > .10$ . In a repeated-measures ANOVA predicting change in perspective-taking from T1 to T3, in a model including group and growth narratives at T1 and their interaction, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 29) = 1.29$   $p > .10$ . In repeated-measures ANOVA predicting change in empathic concern from T1 to T3, in a model including group and growth narratives at T1 and their interaction, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 29) = .51$   $p > .10$ . In repeated-measures ANOVA predicting change in non-prejudice from T1 to T3, in a model including group and growth narratives at T1 and their interaction, the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 29) = .01$   $p > .10$ .

### **Exploration**

For my exploration, I tested for interactions between the two groups and each of the three characteristics at T1 in predicting increases in growth narratives from T1 to T3. Also, I tested for interactions between the two groups and growth narratives at T1 predicting changes over time in the three personality characteristics. In a logistic-regression of growth narratives at T3 simultaneously on growth narratives at T1, group, perspective-taking at T1, and the interaction of group X perspective-taking at T1 was not significant, Wald (1, 29) = .81,  $p > .10$ . In a logistic-regression of growth narratives at T3 simultaneously on growth narratives at T1, group, empathic concern at T1, and the interaction of group X empathic concern at T1 was not significant, Wald (1, 29) = 2.90,  $p > .05$ . In a logistic-regression of growth narratives at T3 simultaneously on growth

narratives at T1, group, non-prejudice at T1, and the interaction of group X non-prejudice at T1 was not significant, Wald (1, 29)= 1.51,  $p > .10$ .

## Discussion

The argument made by study abroad agencies and universities is that studying abroad will facilitate personality development in a way that fosters a student's abilities to be more compassionate, accepting, and open. However, these claims are not supported by the present study's questionnaire findings. Overall, the questionnaire results indicate that there is a correlation between growth narratives and the discussed personality characteristics, but that this was not influenced by whether the participant was studying abroad or on-campus. This supports the perspective that characteristics related to eudaimonic growth and development are matters of personality, rather than particular experiences, even for experiences as personally meaningful as studying abroad. Nevertheless, there is support found in student's narratives that studying abroad motivated students to think about their lives in more meaningful ways.

My first hypothesis was that the study abroad group would show increased levels of perspective-taking, empathic concern, non-prejudice, and growth narratives from T1 to T3, as compared to the study-on-campus group. However, we found that the group that the participant was in had no influence on whether their growth narratives increased from T1 to T3. These are significant findings because a large portion of the literature on study abroad, especially the literature distributed by study abroad programs, communicates that studying abroad is a catalyst for personal growth and development. Past research has shown that study abroad is correlated with intercultural concern (Carlson and Widaman, 1988), self-confidence, and one's worldview (Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton, & Hubbard,

2008). Other studies report that experience with a culture different from one's own increases perspective-taking abilities and acceptance of other cultures (Patterson, 2006). However, our research indicates that study abroad does not act as the extreme personal growth facilitator, as it is often portrayed to be. A possible explanation for this could be found in the literature that argues against the contact hypothesis because it states that the simple exposure to other cultures may not have as strong of influences on personality as one might assume (Study Abroad Outcomes, 2012). This supports a large portion of research by personality psychologists who assert that personality is relatively stable throughout adulthood.

My second hypothesis was that those with higher levels of perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice at T1 would have higher levels of growth narratives at T3, controlling for baseline measures of growth narratives at T1, regardless of if they were studying abroad or on-campus for the summer. The results indicated that neither perspective-taking, empathic concern, nor non-prejudice at T1 predicted increases in growth narratives at T3. These results imply that personality is stable across time and is not affected by whether the person is simply studying on-campus or enjoying an international experience. Those who have high levels of growth narratives at T1 are likely to remain fairly stably at T3 and those with no growth narratives at T1 are still likely to not have growth narratives at T3, regardless of if they engaged in an international experience. This means that perspective-taking, described as a "desire for deepening or strengthening one's experiences or relationships, helping others, and building skills in activities of personal interests" is neither increased nor decreased through a study abroad experience (Bauer, Park, Montoya, & Wayment, 2014, p. 7). This is supported by

research that associates perspective-taking with the quiet ego, which is found to be stable throughout adulthood. Again, the quiet ego “refers to a self-identity that transcends egoism and identifies with a less defensive, balanced stance toward the self and others” (Wayment et al., 2014, p. 1). Bauer (2008) finds that as individuals grow in a eudaimonic, humanistic manner, the ego quiets and we become less self-centered and relate better to others. But this is largely a matter of individual differences in personality rather than situations (Bauer & McAdams, 2010). Furthermore, these results are supported by findings on empathic concern that relate this trait to Big 5 personality characteristics that have also been found to be stable throughout adulthood. One study finds that empathy was strongly correlated with conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness in both sexes (Del Barrio, Aluja, & García, 2004). The fact that these Big 5 personality traits are highly correlated with empathy could provide support for the position that empathy is a stable personality trait.

Finally, I predicted that growth narratives at T1 would predict perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice at T3, controlling for baseline measures of those personality characteristics at T1, regardless of if they were studying abroad or on-campus for the summer. We found that growth narratives at T1 did not predict increases in perspective-taking, empathic concern, and non-prejudice from T1 to T3. This means that the growth-orientation of participants at T1 was not predictive of increases in the personality characteristics of interest, which would mean that those who exhibited a growth orientation at the first round of data collection did not experience more growth than those who did not exhibit this orientation at T1. I also stated that I intended to explore a potential interaction between the groups that studied abroad and on-campus and

each of the three personality characteristics at T1 in predicting increases in growth narratives from T1 to T3. Also, I tested for interactions between the two groups and growth narratives at T1 predicting changes over time in the three personality characteristics. We did not find any significant interactions. These findings demonstrate that though these personality characteristics were predictive of personality growth, personality growth at T1 was not predictive of changes in these particular personality characteristics. This supports the perspective that personality characteristics are stable. While there are many perspectives that support the stability of personality, there are some that argue that “the individual’s choice or creation of situations that sustain his or her traits” can influence personality, such as those including half-way houses or monasteries that “rely on taking the individual out of his accustomed environment and providing a new set of social reactions and reinforcements” (Costa & McCrae, 1986, p.417). However, if environment was a true influence on personality, gains made in treating certain mental illnesses would be sustained through social reinforcement, while this is untrue because gains made in therapy are often difficult to maintain. This parallels to the suggestion that simply placing individuals in a situation that may foster growth, such as studying abroad, that personality will be forever changed, which is the opposite of our findings (Costa & McCrae, 1986, p.417). Research by the majority of personality psychologists supports that personality characteristics are stable throughout adulthood. Research by Costa and McCrae (1986) argues that though those who are older adults today have personality that differ from younger adults, this is not because their personality has changed throughout their development, but because of the different time periods in which their personalities were formed. Our research strongly supports that

personality characteristics, such as perspective-taking, do not increase as a result of studying abroad as they are often argued to. Another study by Hopwood, et al. (2013) measured the Big 5 personality traits over a 10-year period to find which were the most stable over time. They found that personality characteristics such as those that are listed in the Big 5 are more reliable than the traits associated with personality pathology (Hopwood, et al., 2013). This research explains how therapies are potentially effective for assisting with personality pathologies and the stability of other personality characteristics.

Despite the fact that statistical data collected from the surveys did not directly evidence that study abroad facilitated personality development, narratives provide a more optimistic view regarding the fruitfulness of the study abroad experience. In student's narratives, it is shown that experiences abroad did incline students to think about their lives in meaningful ways. Students studying abroad discussed culture and expanding comfort levels in terms of their own sense of self-identity in their narratives more frequently than students who were studying on-campus. In the narratives, students in the study abroad group emphasized personal growth as a motivation for studying abroad. For example, a student at T1 who was going to study abroad noted, "I think it will be so exciting to get to experience a new culture. I want to broaden my horizons and become more well rounded in my knowledge of the world." Another student at T1 also stated, "I think it will definitely be a growing experience, and comes with a lot of independence, which I need experiences with." However, students in the study on-campus groups were more likely to note that their reasons for studying abroad were mainly motivated by completing courses in order to graduate, improve their GPA, or get ahead on coursework. For example, a study on-campus student at T1 reported, "I am studying this summer

because I co-oped for the fall term and I am trying to catch up on credit hours to still graduate in the fall.” Another reported, “I need to catch up on a few classes. Grades are important to me so getting good grades during the summer is my main priority.” These responses were typical among students who studied on-campus over the summer, signifying that these students were less focused on facilitating their own personal development than the students who were planning to study abroad.

Additionally, the narratives at T3 indicated that students who studied abroad found their experiences to have greater meaning for their lives than students who took courses on-campus. For example, one student in the study abroad group at T3 reported that in their experience, they “learned a lot about myself on this program which will help me become a more independent person who can learn so much from different types of cultures.” Another claimed, “I don’t sweat the small stuff as much as a result of this experience. I had to learn to go with the flow and be flexible and adapt to unexpected situations, and I believe that this has helped me to be a more adaptable person.” Students who were in the study on-campus group were much less likely to report that their experiences over the summer had a major impact on their life in general. For example, one student at T3 reported, “My summer study allowed me to get to know members of the math department better, which has helped me realize that I really like linear algebra as an area of study.” Students who studied on-campus more frequently reported that their studies had specific impacts on more scholarly portions of their lives, rather than the comprehensive changes reported by the study abroad group. Another student stated, “I think that the class did have a slight impact of my self concept as it helped establish my film critiquing abilities. I don’t think, however, that there were any major changes.” The



differences in the narratives between the study abroad group and the study on-campus group demonstrate that though changes in personality were not evidenced by the questionnaire portion of this study, greater changes in perspective were seen in the narratives of those studying abroad.

One limitation of the present study is that there was a relatively small sample size of participants because some significant interactions may have been found with a larger sample size. In the future, research with a similar design should be performed with a larger number of participants. Another limitation is that our first collection of data came after the study-abroad group had taken a study abroad preparation course, where cultural sensitivity was a focus. This could potentially explain the differences between the two groups in empathic concern. A final limitation was that we only examined short-term study abroad experiences so it cannot be assumed that these findings would apply to longer-term study abroad programs. However, literature on the stability of personality indicates that findings would likely be similar. Further research should be performed to find how the studying abroad impacts individuals and their outlooks if these benefits do not lie in the promotion of personality development. This would allow higher education institutions and study abroad agencies to more accurately advertise the benefits of international study.

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