Utilizing Culturally Relevant Leisure as an Experiential Learning Tool: Implications for Leisure Studies and Recreation Education

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To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1937156X.2020.1760743

Published online: 14 May 2020.
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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

Study abroad provides a unique context in which opportunities for culturally relevant leisure are extremely abundant. These programs provide varying levels of cultural immersion, and culture is inherently connected to leisure. Research has demonstrated relationships between various aspects of study abroad and desired transferable skills such as intercultural sensitivity (IS). However, little is known about the relationship between frequency of participation in culturally relevant leisure and IS. This quantitative study investigated the relationship between participation in culturally relevant leisure during study abroad and level of IS. Findings suggest the importance of leisure engagement in culturally relevant media during study abroad. Implications of the use of culturally relevant leisure in study abroad and additional forms of classroom and experiential learning will be discussed.

\textbf{KEYWORDS}

Study abroad; culturally relevant leisure; intercultural sensitivity; recreation education; experiential education

Introduction

University graduates entering careers in recreation and leisure are expected to have transferable skills which aid them in serving diverse populations. At its most basic definition, intercultural sensitivity (IS) is the way in which people interact with those of different backgrounds (Bennett, 2014). The varying environments and populations served by leisure and recreation services demand the need for professionals who can be culturally sensitive and can easily adapt to and excel at serving diverse communities.

Study abroad programs, as well as other experiential education programs, represent a useful way for students and emerging adults to experience and understand a culture different from their own, and moreover, develop IS. Leisure and culture are inherently connected, and as “the Greeks believed… without leisure, there could be no culture” (Brightbill, 1960, p. 1). While the concrete definition of leisure time has been debated for centuries, its role in culture has always had value. As Pieper suggests, “culture depends for its very existence on leisure” (Pieper, 1963, p. 15). From arts, sports, or philosophy, the recreational pursuits of people reflect their cultural upbringing (Brightbill, 1960).

It is important to note that while opportunities for culturally relevant leisure are certainly not limited to international education, study abroad provides a unique context in which opportunities for culturally relevant leisure are extremely abundant. There are a variety of culturally relevant activities that students can participate in both during and beyond study abroad. These activities do not require one to be fully immersed in a culture, but there may be a relationship between
study abroad and frequency of participation in these activities (Murphy et al., 2014). If participation in these culturally relevant activities were to have a relationship with IS (when controlling for study abroad program characteristics), this could provide justification for their expanded inclusion in education settings beyond study abroad. However, to date, little is known about the relationship between culturally relevant leisure and one’s level of IS. This study sought to add to the body of knowledge by investigating this connection between culturally relevant leisure and IS.

**Literature review**

The following review of literature begins with a discussion of the importance of transferable skills for students entering the field of recreation and leisure, with a particular focus on intercultural sensitivity. Next, we discuss how experiential education, with an emphasis on study abroad, can contribute to IS development through exposing students to communities different from their own. Then, we examine the connections between study abroad, IS, and culturally relevant leisure. Finally, we introduce our purpose and research questions for the present study.

**Important transferable skills**

Within the field of recreation and leisure, professionals may work in a variety of diverse environments and with people of many different backgrounds. University graduates are expected to have many transferable skills (Hurd et al., 2008) including global awareness, international communication, and intercultural sensitivity (Black & Duhon, 2006; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Olson & Kroeger, 2001). Global awareness is often conceptualized as knowledge of international issues and global interdependence (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). On the other hand, international communication refers to the ability to effectively communicate with people of different cultures with the “perceptual acuity to observe and interpret the other’s actions through a broad cultural lens” (Williams, 2005, p. 359). While global awareness and international communication are valuable concepts, intercultural sensitivity (IS) is a broader domain which focuses more on one’s ability to understand and adapt to cultures different from their own (Bennett, 2014). Relative to IS, the term ‘culture’ is used broadly and ultimately refers to any group with cultural capital; therefore, the concept, trajectory, and education outcomes are not limited to a country’s culture, per se. Rather, cultural capital can be found among individuals residing in a specific neighborhood or city, people of color, people with disabilities, etc. In our globalized world, professionals should be able to adopt an ethnorelative perspective to understand and effectively deliver services to people of many cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

**Intercultural sensitivity**

Intercultural sensitivity is defined as the way in which people interact with different cultures as well as the world around them (Bennett, 2014). Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity is a continuum which represents levels of IS from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. The model has suggested that those who are more ethnocentric typically experience the world through the lens of their own culture, as opposed to those who are more ethnorelative and experience cultures relative to one another (Bennett, 1993; Bennett, 2014). As Bennett (2013) described, the model is based on the underlying assumption that “the more [complex] the experience of cultural difference, the more intercultural sensitivity and potential for exercising intercultural competence one has” (p. 130). The model outlines six stages of IS development: denial of difference, defense against difference, minimization of difference, acceptance of difference, adaptation to difference, and integration of difference. The first three stages represent ethnocentric perspectives while the later three reflect more complex ethnorelative understandings (Bennett, 2013).
Beyond education, Bennett’s model is used in many contexts where the most basic definition of culture can be applied. The model can be used to explain interactions with varying levels of cultures, from that of a specific population or community to that of a country or region. At its most basic definition, a community essentially represents a level of culture. It is crucial that students develop the ethnorelative skills necessary to engage with communities, or cultures, different from their own.

While much of the research on IS is in the context of study abroad, the implications of IS extend far beyond that of international experiences. As Bennett suggested, once individuals achieve a more complex understanding of cultural difference, they can apply their skills in other situations, particularly in “any phenomenon that fits the category of culture” (Bennett, 2013, p. 130). IS is important in all aspects of life because it dictates how people, as professionals as well as global citizens, interact with the world. Depending on one's level of IS, there are specific intentional experiences that a person can engage in to become more sensitive and therefore move further along the continuum (Bennett, 2014). For each stage in the model, Bennett (1993) provides examples of experiential learning opportunities to assist learners in becoming more ethnorelative. Students who are able to adopt more ethnorelative worldviews may be able to more successfully adapt to varying demands of the globalized workforce. Many of these suggestions include culturally relevant leisure experiences such as eating cuisine of a culture, visiting local art museums, or participating in cultural festivals (Bennett, 1993). One of the main assumptions of the model is that as one's experience within a culture increases, so does their competence in intercultural interactions.

Chen and Starosta (2000) identified five conceptual domains of IS relative to Bennett’s model: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. They defined interaction engagement as feelings about participating in intercultural communication. Respect for cultural differences referred to how people “orient to or tolerate their counterparts’ culture and opinion” (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 9). Interaction confidence was defined as how confident people are in their abilities to interact with people of other cultures. Additionally, they conceptualized interaction enjoyment as how people react to communicating with people of other cultures. And finally, interaction attentiveness was defined as an “effort to understand what is going on in intercultural interactions” (p. 9). Relative to Bennett’s model, as one’s competence in respect for cultural differences and interaction engagement, confidence, enjoyment, and attentiveness increases, they simultaneously move along the IS continuum, progressing from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

Experiential education and intercultural sensitivity

Recreation and leisure education often incorporates varying forms of experiential learning which emphasize the development of IS. From leading hands-on project based courses, to engaging with local communities, and even incorporating culturally relevant materials and assignments, instructors and universities have a variety of tools to draw from. International education also provides opportunities to expose students to different cultures and provides opportunities for the development of IS (Dolby, 2004; Pedersen, 2010; Westrick, 2004; Williams, 2005).

While educators can encourage development of IS in contexts as close to home as the classroom, study abroad provides a unique experiential learning opportunity which enables students to experience life in a community different than what they might be familiar with at their home university. This provides a more immersive experience (as compared to classroom settings) for students to enhance their IS. In fact, studies have found significant differences in IS and other internationally-oriented skills between students who have studied abroad and students who have not (Pedersen, 2010; Williams, 2005).
This heightened experience of culture provides an important context for the study of IS as it relates to educational strategies. The diversity of study abroad program types reflects the overall diverse nature of experiential education. There are many different classifications of study abroad programs which vary in duration, timing, location, and management style (Engle & Engle, 2004). In terms of program management, there are two main program types: those managed by the home university and those managed by a third-party provider. University managed programs, often referred to as faculty-led or sponsored programs, are the ones that recreation and leisure studies educators can most readily influence. While study abroad is just one example of an experiential education tool which immerses students in a community, others with similar intentions include service learning, internships, field work, practicums, and even course-based objectives such as local program or event design. In any of these learning opportunities, there is an inherent connection to a community or a population with which one is working, studying, or serving.

**Study abroad**

Study abroad is an ideal setting to apply intentional pedagogy related to IS because students often already have this aspect of cultural immersion. For the purposes of this paper, study abroad has been defined broadly as referring to many types of programs varying in duration, program provider, etc. According to the Institute of International Education (IES), more than 332,000 U.S. university students studied abroad in 2017; this represents approximately 10 percent of U.S. university graduates (IES, 2018). Within study abroad, certain program designs (i.e., those which involve direct contact with people of the host culture) appear to promote the development of IS (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Engle & Engle, 2004; Salisbury, 2013; Pedersen, 2010). However, research has demonstrated that simply spending time abroad often does not lead to IS development (Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016; Pedersen, 2010; Richards & Doorenbos, 2016). As Engle and Engle (2004) suggested, American students abroad face many obstacles that inhibit full participation in the host community, including widespread use of English, lack of foreign language skills, and domination of American culture. While some study abroad students may remain predominately surrounded by these facets of American culture while abroad, others delve deep into their host culture and experience life-long benefits. Successful study abroad programs seem to promote host culture engagement through encouraging longer stays and certain types of accommodation (e.g. homestays), offering language courses, and encouraging engagement with the host culture (Engle & Engle, 2004). While research has continually demonstrated the importance of length of stay, accommodation type, and language abilities, few studies have examined the connection between culturally relevant leisure and IS in the context of study abroad.

**Culturally relevant leisure and intercultural sensitivity**

Research has suggested connections between studying abroad, participating in culturally relevant leisure, and IS (e.g., Engle & Engle, 2004; Kim et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2014). However, relevant studies have considered these connections more as an afterthought than a premise for empirical evaluation. For example, results of Engle and Engle (2004) and Kim et al. (2015) both suggested the importance of organized activities within the host community, but neither study directly examined the relationship between culturally relevant leisure activities and IS. Kim et al. (2015) examined the effects of frequency of participation in organized activities upon cultural sensitivity (similar to IS) as well as personal and social development. While this study demonstrated significant relationships between these constructs, the measurement of organized activities captured the organizer (e.g., school based activity, community based activity), not the activity...
itself. Therefore, one cannot infer the cultural relevance of specific types of activities. However, this study did establish a valuable connection between participation in organized activities and cultural sensitivity outcomes. Moreover, when evaluating language and IS outcomes of one particular study abroad program, Engle and Engle (2004) noted the importance of various programmed activities within the community. However, they did not directly examine the relationship between participation in these activities and either of the measured outcomes.

On the contrary, Murphy et al. (2014) specifically examined participation in culturally relevant leisure activities—they established a connection between study abroad and future participation in culturally relevant leisure. That is, those who had previously studied abroad were more likely than students who had not studied abroad to engage in culturally relevant leisure such as cooking cuisine of another culture, traveling internationally, listening to music in a language other than English, or reading international publications (Murphy et al., 2014). This study, however, did not examine levels of participation during study abroad or evaluate the connection to IS.

While previous research has considered various aspects of leisure related to study abroad and IS, none of these studies assessed the impacts of participation in culturally relevant leisure during study abroad upon levels of IS. The present study combined elements of these key studies including measurement of the frequency of participation in culturally relevant leisure activities as established by Murphy et al. (2014) as well as testing the connection between activity participation and IS, an extension of the work on Kim et al. (2015) and Engle and Engle (2004).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the relationship between participation in culturally relevant leisure during study abroad and IS through the theoretical framework of Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. This study sought to assess students’ opportunities for culturally relevant leisure through assessment of the frequency of participation in a variety of culturally relevant leisure activities. This research aimed to provide direction for recreation and leisure studies educators in the design of experiential education opportunities including but not limited to study abroad, which focus on the intentional outcomes of IS development.

**Research questions**

1. Is there a significant difference in intercultural sensitivity between students who have studied abroad and students who have not studied abroad?
2. Is there a significant relationship between participation in culturally relevant leisure during study abroad and level of intercultural sensitivity?
3. Among study abroad students, which culturally relevant leisure experiences are positively related to intercultural sensitivity when controlling for study abroad program characteristics?

**Methods**

This quantitative, quasi-experimental design study (n = 121) examined the relationships between culturally relevant leisure and IS. An online Qualtrics survey was distributed to a study abroad group and a control group at a mid-size, public university in the northeastern United States. The study was available to all students who participated in study abroad programs for academic credit during Summer 2017 and Fall 2017. The study’s control group was assessed through a general education humanities course at the university with a class standing distribution which closely matched that of the study abroad population. Participants in the control group were selected because they had not previously studied abroad, but did express an interest in studying abroad in
the future. Moreover, this sample represented a diverse cross-section of students at the university. We eliminated anyone with previous study abroad experience as well as those who expressed no interest in future study abroad.

Prior to its distribution, the survey instrument was reviewed and assessed for readability and logic by a small group of students who had previously studied abroad. Surveys were distributed by email from the university’s study abroad office and distribution timing aligned closely with when students returned from studying abroad. Distribution followed a modified Dillman method of three contact points to increase response rate and also included monetary incentives in the form of a gift card drawing (Dillman et al., 2009). The study abroad group had a response rate of 22% (total of 232 students who studied abroad in the selected time frame) as compared to the control group’s response rate of 43%. All activities associated with this research were approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board.

**Instrumentation**

The survey instrument for study abroad participants contained four main sections: demographics, study abroad program characteristics, frequency of participation in culturally relevant leisure during study abroad, and Chen and Starosta’s (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). The control group survey included demographics, questions about previous study abroad and future interest in study abroad, and the ISS.

**Demographics**

In terms of demographics, respondents were asked to identify their gender, class standing, and college. Characteristics of study abroad programs included provider, timing, length, location, and host country language. Students were also asked to assess their comfort with the host country culture and language on a scale from 1 = very uncomfortable to 4 = very comfortable, similar to home.

**Culturally relevant leisure**

Participation in culturally relevant leisure during study abroad was operationalized through a series of questions from Murphy et al. (2014). Respondents were asked to self-report their frequency of participation (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently) in a variety of culturally relevant leisure experiences during their time abroad. For example, the measure included items such as “read international newspapers, journals, or magazines,” “cook international or local cuisine,” and “travel internationally for pleasure.” One item from the original scale was removed, “host international visitors, e.g., students, guests,” due to anticipated confusion among our population (per review by the researchers and the group of students who had previously studied abroad). Additionally, the following two items were added based on interest from the university’s study abroad office: “attend local sporting events” and “attend extracurricular classes or clubs (for example, music, art, dance, cooking, etc.).”

**Intercultural sensitivity**

Chen and Starosta’s (2000) ISS was the primary instrument used in this study. Based on Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, the ISS was designed to measures one’s level of IS. Bennett’s model has been widely used in research with students, education professionals, employees, and large organizations. Research has shown support for adapting intercultural development inventories such as the ISS for use in research with study abroad students (Clarke et al., 2009). The ISS is a 24 item Likert scale instrument which measures five composite
variables to assess one’s level of IS as described in Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. A higher score reflects higher IS. The following domains are included in the measurement: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Each item in the ISS is measured on a scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Nine of the items are reverse coded and then all 24 items are summed to an overall score with a maximum score of 120. The use of a sum score and overall scoring of the ISS was done following the aforementioned parameters based upon scale guidelines (Chen & Starosta, 2000). When the ISS was tested for reliability in this study, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Huck, 2012) was 0.896. To test the reliability of the ISS subdomains, we used partial confirmatory factor analysis (Gignac, 2009). Results suggested an adequate model fit for the five factors (model $\chi^2 = 167.831, p = .446; \text{RMSEA} = 0.010; \text{TLI} = 0.997; \text{CFI} = 0.998$).

Furthermore, the ISS has been used in previous research with study abroad students and has been shown to be both a valid and reliable measure of a person’s stage in Bennett’s model. To test the validity, researchers Chen and Starosta (2000) have also compared the scale to five other similar measures and found significant correlation between them ($p < .05$ with values ranging from $r = 0.17$ to $r = 0.52$).

**Analysis**

Data were analyzed in SPSS Version 24 using descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance, and multiple linear regression.

**Results**

**Descriptive statistics of study abroad students**

Of the 122 respondents, 51 were from the study abroad group and 71 from the control group. Of the study abroad respondents, 22% identified as male and 78% as female. In terms of class standing, a majority of respondents were seniors (51.1%), followed by juniors (37.5%), and a small portion of sophomores (10.4%; Table 1). Nearly half of respondents came from the College of Liberal Arts (49.0%). The College of Life Sciences and Agriculture and College of Health and Human Services each represented 18.4% of overall respondents. Students from the College of Business and Economics as well as College of Engineering and Physical sciences were very under-represented in this population (10.2% and 4.1%, respectively). In terms of study abroad program characteristics, respondents were fairly evenly split between university managed programs and third party approved programs (46.9% and 53.1%, respectively; Table 2). Most students participated in semester long study abroad programs in the fall (66.0%). Programs averaged a length of 11 weeks. Nearly half of respondents reported living in an apartment while abroad (44.0%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Study abroad N (%)</th>
<th>Control N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11 (22.0%)</td>
<td>41 (57.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39 (78.0%)</td>
<td>30 (42.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class standing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>5 (10.4%)</td>
<td>14 (19.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>18 (37.5%)</td>
<td>26 (36.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>25 (51.1%)</td>
<td>31 (43.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Sciences and Agriculture</td>
<td>9 (18.4%)</td>
<td>12 (16.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>24 (49.0%)</td>
<td>13 (18.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>5 (10.2%)</td>
<td>11 (15.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Physical Sciences</td>
<td>2 (4.1%)</td>
<td>20 (28.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twenty percent of students lived in a dormitory and 18% lived with a local family in a homestay. Seventy percent of respondents studied abroad in a country where English was not the predominant language. As compared to the study abroad group, the control group was more evenly split by gender and more equally distributed in terms of college of study (Table 1).

**Bivariate analysis of intercultural sensitivity**

To address our first research question, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance to compare levels of IS between students who had studied abroad and students who had not. Results of the ANOVA demonstrated that students who studied abroad had significantly higher levels of IS than students who did not study abroad, $F(1,100)=11.407$, $p<.001$, Cohen’s $d=0.33$. This difference was characterized by a moderate effect size. Study abroad students averaged a mean of 98.2 on the ISS out of a highest possible score of 120. In comparison, the control group averaged a score of 91.7. In addition to differences in the overall construct, significant differences were found within four of the five subdomains. Study abroad students compared to control group students scored 0.47 points higher on Respect for Cultural Differences ($M=4.54$; $M=4.07$, respectively, $p<.001$, Cohen’s $d=0.435$), 0.37 points higher on Interaction Engagement ($M=4.19$; $M=3.82$, respectively, $p<.001$, Cohen’s $d=0.421$), 0.26 points higher on Interaction Enjoyment ($M=4.23$; $M=3.97$, respectively, $p<.05$, Cohen’s $d=0.226$), and 0.28 points higher on Interaction Attentiveness ($M=3.92$; $M=3.64$, respectively, $p<.01$, Cohen’s $d=0.269$) (Table 3). These findings suggest that students who had studied abroad, as compared to those who had not, had greater respect for cultural differences, were more engaged in and attentive during intercultural interactions, and found intercultural interactions to be more enjoyable.

Due to the inconsistent gender composition between the two groups, we tested for potential differences in intercultural sensitivity by gender. Whether being used as a covariate or looking for differences within or between variables, no significant differences were found with regard to gender.

**Full regression model for intercultural sensitivity**

To investigate the factors accounting for the variance in IS among the study abroad students, we conducted a multiple linear regression. The proposed regression model for IS included the
following independent variables: items measuring the frequency of participation in culturally relevant leisure during study abroad, measures of comfort with the language and culture of the host country, and program characteristics including length of program, accommodation type, and predominant language in the host country (Figure 1; Table 4).

**Final linear regression for intercultural sensitivity**

When controlling for program characteristics as well as comfort with the language and culture of the host country, a final stepwise regression model revealed a significant relationship between participation in two of the culturally relevant leisure activities and IS (Figure 2; Table 5). More specifically, reading international newspapers, journals, or magazines and watching films or listening to music in a language other than English accounted for 34% of the variance in overall IS ($r = 0.587$, $F(2,37) = 9.720$, $p < .001$). On a scale of 1–4, study abroad students had a mean of 2.25 for watching films or listening to music in a language other than English and a mean of 1.40 for reading international newspapers, journals, or magazines. Reading international news had the strongest relationship with IS, followed closely by watching films and listening to music in a foreign language ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < .01$; $\beta = 0.301$, $p < .05$, respectively). Both items had direct, positive relationships with IS, suggesting the existence of a significant relationship between culturally relevant leisure during study abroad and IS.

**Discussion**

Overall, results of this quantitative study suggested high levels of IS among study abroad students and limited variance in their IS. Students who had studied abroad had significantly higher IS (with a moderate effect size) than students who had not studied abroad. However, as Dwyer (2005) stated, obtaining a true comparison group in study abroad research is very difficult. While participants in the control group expressed an interest in study abroad, we do not know whether they will ultimately decide to study aboard. Additionally, among the few demographic variables measured in this study, there were differences between the control group and the study abroad group. For instance, our study abroad sample was heavily dominated by female, liberal arts students. While these demographics closely resemble the overall profile of U.S. study abroad students (Institute of International Education, 2018), comparing to a control sample of a different demographic makeup is not ideal. Moreover, as Murphy et al. (2014) suggested, there is some debate over the existence of a selection bias which suggests that students who opt to study abroad may be fundamentally different than those who do not and therefore may be predisposed to higher IS. This may explain the limited variance in IS among study abroad students such that the group is somewhat homogenous in terms of how they view and interact with other cultures. It is possible,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Overall Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Study abroad Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Non-study abroad Mean (SD)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Intercultural Sensitivity Score ($\alpha = 0.896$)</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>4.24 (0.59)</td>
<td>4.54 (0.43)</td>
<td>4.07 (0.60)</td>
<td>19.176</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Cultural Differences</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>4.06 (0.61)</td>
<td>4.23 (0.64)</td>
<td>3.97 (0.57)</td>
<td>4.809</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>0.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Enjoyment</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>3.95 (0.48)</td>
<td>4.19 (0.40)</td>
<td>3.82 (0.48)</td>
<td>17.891</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Attentiveness</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>3.74 (0.54)</td>
<td>3.92 (0.55)</td>
<td>3.64 (0.51)</td>
<td>7.123</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>0.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Confidence</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>3.53 (0.61)</td>
<td>3.50 (0.70)</td>
<td>3.54 (0.55)</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>.732</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For study abroad respondents, $n = 41$, for control group respondents, $n = 71.$
however, that the study abroad experience does account for some of the differences between the study abroad and control groups, and future studies should seek to expand this investigation.

Study abroad is an important experiential education tool which can be easily tied to various leisure and recreation activities. Respondents reported most frequent participation in the following culturally relevant leisure experiences: trying international cuisine, traveling internationally, assessing foreign websites, and watching films and listening to music in a foreign language. While many of these leisure experiences were not significantly related to IS, respondents’ frequent participation in these areas speaks to the underlying role of leisure within the study abroad experience. To determine which leisure activities were significantly related to IS, we used stepwise multiple regression. While stepwise variable selection is not without its limitations, it allowed us to begin by examining our full proposed model and slowly narrow down to a more parsimonious model with only those activities that had significant relationships to IS.

While increased engagement in media based activities such as reading international news, listening to international music, or watching films in a foreign language appear to relate to higher...
levels of IS, there are likely many more opportunities for culturally relevant leisure within study abroad that were not measured in this study. These leisure activities are in no way exhaustive of how students spend their free time while studying abroad. Future research on this topic should use a more comprehensive assessment of culturally relevant leisure experiences. Researchers need to make an attempt to measure leisure activities that provide enhanced opportunities for cross-cultural contact and direct engagement with the host culture. As Engle and Engle (2004) noted, level of cross-cultural contact is the main differentiator of study abroad program types. Cross-cultural contact is what should set study abroad apart from on-campus and classroom learning. Some of the study abroad experience relies on the quality of the program and its inherent expectations for student engagement with the host community; some of the experience relies on the students themselves, specifically with how they spend their free time. Currently, the

Table 4. Full regression model for intercultural sensitivity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Mean (SD) or n(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in culturally relevant leisure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying international cuisine</td>
<td>3.66 (0.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel internationally for pleasure</td>
<td>2.78 (1.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access foreign websites</td>
<td>2.37 (1.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch films or listen to music in a language other than English</td>
<td>2.25 (1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take language classes</td>
<td>2.03 (1.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend clubs</td>
<td>1.73 (1.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend local sporting events</td>
<td>1.73 (1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend talks or presentations with an international focus</td>
<td>1.55 (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read international newspapers, journals, or magazines</td>
<td>1.40 (1.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer or participate in international organizations</td>
<td>0.70 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural comfort/Difference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of host country</td>
<td>3.34 (0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language of host country</td>
<td>2.80 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program length</td>
<td>10.96 (4.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living situation: homestay</td>
<td>9 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living situation: apartment</td>
<td>22 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant language: English</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program provider: university managed</td>
<td>23 (46.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  
\(^a\)Frequency of participation in culturally relevant leisure, (1 = never to 4 = frequently).  
\(^b\)Level of comfort, (1 = very uncomfortable, 2 = somewhat uncomfortable but able to manage, 3 = somewhat comfortable, but still different from home, 4 = very comfortable, similar to home).  
\(^c\)Dummy coded with “dorm” as reference group.  
\(^d\)Dummy coded with “non-English” as reference group.  
\(^e\)Dummy coded with “approved program” as reference group.

Figure 2. Final regression model for intercultural sensitivity.

\[ B = 0.412 \]
\[ B = 0.301 \]

*R p ≤ 0.050, ** p ≤ 0.010, *** p ≤ 0.001. Only significant variables were used in this model.

Table 5. Final regression for intercultural sensitivity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Sensitivity</td>
<td>0.344***</td>
<td>Read international newspapers, journals, or magazines</td>
<td>0.412</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Watch films or listen to music in a language other than English</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>0.040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p ≤ 0.001, only significant variables were used in this model.
quantitative measurement of culturally relevant leisure which includes cross-cultural contact is limited. A mixed methods approach to examining the relationships between culturally relevant leisure, cross-cultural contact and engagement in the host community, and IS is needed. Future qualitative studies should use this framework and quantitative basis to inform what questions might be asked in qualitative interviews or focus groups. Or even, in strictly quantitative research, when participants report frequent participation in culturally relevant leisure, they should be redirected to more detailed open-ended prompts to elaborate on their level of cross-cultural contact through leisure participation.

When considering practical implications for study abroad and other experiential education programs, it is important that program managers recognize the importance and value in incorporating culturally relevant leisure. As previous research has suggested (Engle & Engle, 2004; Kim et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2014) and findings of this study confirmed, participation in culturally relevant leisure relates to IS. Results of this study suggest the importance of participation in media based leisure activities including reading of news and watching of television and films. As Dickason (2000) suggested, media outlets through television such as films, programs, or advertising are culturally specific. Similar concepts can be applied to the portrayal of news whether through print, television, or online sources. These media activities reflect cultural nuances within the host community. As Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity suggested, students in the higher stages of the model toward ethnorelativism can experience and understand cultural nuances. Given Murphy et al.’s (2014) theory that study abroad students are predisposed to higher levels of IS as well as empirical data of levels of IS among study abroad students, one can infer that study abroad students may be able to experience and understand these cultural nuances through media in their host country, thus rationalizing the role of participation in media activities in explaining the variance in IS. International media provides diverse perspectives that add to the complexity of understanding of different topics and newsworthy items. Engagement in these media sources suggests an investment and connection with the affairs and culture of the host community (Murphy, et al., 2014).

While our model examined engagement in culturally relevant leisure as predictors of IS, it is possible that these relationships could be bi-directional. For instance, if students are engaging in media sources of their host country, they may already tend toward having higher IS. Moreover, if they are able to consume these media sources, it is possible that they may have a better grasp of the language or be more interested in the local culture than students who consume these types of media less frequently. Future research should examine the directionality of these complex relationships. Structural equation modeling of a more comprehensive assessment of participation in culturally relevant leisure activities, program characteristics, and IS may provide a more nuanced model of these relationships. Moreover, the inclusion of qualitative methods, ideally through a mixed methods approach, would allow researchers to gain a more holistic perspective of the role of culturally relevant leisure during study abroad in development of IS.

As previous research has suggested, there is a growing consumption of media among university students (Vorderer et al., 2016). Study abroad as well as other experiential education programs such as service learning or internship programs should embrace this and consider how to best integrate media into pre-program and in-program education. This should be of particular interest to university managed programs which can most readily influence pre-program or pre-departure curriculum. Introducing students to the media outlets of their host communities before they depart for their educational experience could increase participation in media based activities within their host communities as well as increase overall understanding of the community or populations that students will be living or working with. Building usage of media such as news, television, and films into core curriculum could provide additional opportunities to introduce students to host country media as well as encourage participation in these activities. Student
engagement in community or country specific media may be of highest importance as it may further enhance students’ connections with the host culture.

Despite being studied in an international education context, culturally relevant leisure as an educational tool need not happen abroad. In terms of professional practice for students of recreation and leisure studies, the ability to utilize media resources to learn about and connect with a community may be of particular interest in other experiential education components of university curriculum. Moreover, use of culturally relevant media sources, especially those referencing pop culture (e.g. film, television, music, news), provide opportunities for critical literacy development among students (Morell, 2002). While not directly related to IS, critical literacy shares some common ground with IS as it encourages a multicultural understanding of the power relations of society (Morgan, 2002; Morrell, 2002). As Morrell (2002) stated, “popular culture can help students deconstruct narratives and content with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society” (p. 72). Incorporating culturally relevant media into various aspects of university curriculum may help students become more critically literate and ethnorelative.

As the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Related Professions (2014) accredited programs require students complete an internship, educators should consider using this internship experience to help students not only develop skills in utilizing community specific media, but also use this experience to communicate the overall importance of IS regardless of the community or population with which that students may be working. It is important to recognize that a culture is not always connected to a place, just as a community is not necessarily defined by a geographic region. IS encompasses interactions with varying definitions of culture, for example, that of a geographic region of Spain to that of an ethnicity or religion which spans multiple continents. Furthermore, overall encouragement for students to spend time outside the university is important whether it be in the form of study, work, service, or professional practice. This does not have to come in the form of an international experience, but simply encouraging students to experience and work with people of different communities is beneficial to the overall goal of fostering development of IS.

Future research should seek to examine the ways in which students consume media abroad and how they are introduced to these media outlets. More specifically within the recreation and leisure studies field, research should examine how students utilize media sources in other educational settings, for example, within the required internship or even within the classroom. It is important to investigate how the use of culturally specific media sources relates to IS; it may also be interesting to examine the relationships between culturally relevant media, IS, and critical literacy. Additionally, future studies should focus on increasing sample size to include other universities for comparison as well as make comparisons between program types (i.e. university managed vs. third party providers). Previous research (i.e., Engle & Engle, 2004) has suggested the importance of program management type, but this variable was insignificant in our regression model for IS. It would be interesting for future research to consider a comparison of IS as well as participation in culturally relevant leisure by the study abroad program classifications laid out by Engle and Engle (2004). Moreover, it is important to recognize that the present study was conducted at only one university, and it is possible that researching students from universities in different regions of the county or at universities of varying sizes may yield different results.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the relationship between participation in culturally relevant leisure and IS among study abroad students. While students reported frequent participation in many activities, only those related to media consumption were significant predictors of IS. The results of this study provide a preliminary rationale for the incorporation of culturally relevant media sources
into various education settings. However, additional research is needed to more comprehensively examine how students spend their leisure time while studying abroad, with a particular focus on leisure which requires direct contact with people of with the host community and culture. Research should continue investigating the role of culturally relevant leisure—specifically that which requires cross-cultural contact—in IS development, ideally through a mixed-methods approach.

References


