

Missing Males: The Gender Gap in Study Abroad

Zach Mohs
University of Minnesota

Introduction

Abstract

As study abroad has become exponentially more popular over the last few decades, many groups have remained underrepresented in the number of students that study abroad. One such group is males, who are outnumbered by females in study abroad participation at an average rate of two to one. This study attempts to gain a greater understanding of the large gender imbalance in study abroad by surveying over 100 college-aged males to learn more about their perceptions of study abroad and the barriers to their participation.

Purpose

- Attempting to gain a greater understanding of the large gender imbalance in study abroad participation
- Get information from a diverse set of traditional college-aged males on perceptions and experiences with regards to study abroad

Motivation

- Positive outcomes of study abroad from the literature
 - Knowledge of foreign affairs, language proficiency, self-confidence, maturity, civic engagement, career and academic impact (Carlson et al. 1990, Paige & Fry 2008, Dwyer & Peters 2004)

- Lack of research on gender gap

Research Questions

- Do the psychology and socialization of males make them apprehensive about study abroad?
- What are the perceived and experienced barriers that males encounter to participating in a study abroad program?
- In what way is fear involved in males' apprehension of studying abroad?

Methods

- Qualitative
- Online Survey of 25 Questions
 - Over 100 18-25 year-old males primarily from University of Minnesota and Saint John's University (MN)
 - About half have studied abroad, half have not
 - Small group of 14% have not studied abroad and do not intend to study abroad prior to graduation

Results

Educational Barrier Themes

- Finances
- Academics
- Language
- Athletics

Personal Barrier Themes

- Fear of leaving comfort zone
- Conflict between study abroad and traditional male gender role
- Disengagement
- Less desire for adventure

Participation by Gender

United States Statistics

Gender	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Female	64.8%	65.2%	64.6%	65.0%	64.9%	64.7%	65.6%	65.5%	65.5%
Male	35.2%	34.8%	35.4%	35.0%	35.1%	35.3%	34.4%	34.5%	34.5%

Adapted from Institute of International Educators *Open Doors 2008* (IIE, 2008)

University of Minnesota Statistics

Gender	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Female	72.3%	67.5%	70.3%	70.5%	66.1%	65.3%	63.2%	62.4%	66.7%
Male	27.7%	32.5%	29.7%	29.5%	33.9%	34.7%	36.8%	37.6%	33.3%

Adapted from University of Minnesota *Study Abroad Statistics* (U of M, 2008)

Conclusions

Limitations

- Cannot generalize
- Online survey restrictive as a research method
- Personal bias in analyzing data

Significance of Findings

- Males face unique set of barriers to studying abroad
- These barriers should be considered when designing and marketing programs

Recommendations

- Increase scholarships and academic flexibility for study abroad programs
- Make sure diverse set of programs are available in terms of on-site support
- Emphasize skill development and increased employment prospects more in marketing
- Decrease amount of paperwork required

Future Research

- Focus groups or one-on-one interviews with males not considering study abroad
- More research on male disengagement in education more broadly