Research Article

Emotions, Vulnerability, and Dependency in Student Research Abroad: An Ethics of Care Toolkit

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Abstract

While leading students to Thailand for an eight-week undergraduate research experience, we observed challenges in stacking the high-impact practices of study abroad and undergraduate research and became compelled by the usefulness of an Ethics of Care approach to facilitate the kind of transformation these practices can have for students. We observed students during the trip and conducted interviews with them after the trip. From those observations and interviews, we conclude that Care Ethics is particularly helpful for mitigating the risks of emotional exhaustion, for navigating dependency and vulnerability, and for re-framing student difficulties in positively transformative ways. Faculty can facilitate the advantages of high-impact practices by: treating emotions as pedagogical sources for learning; acknowledging dependencies; identifying vulnerabilities; devoting attention to how public and private spaces are framed; and cultivating care as a feminist and anti-racist practice.

Abstract in Spanish

 Mientras guiábamos a un grupo de estudiantes a Tailandia para una experiencia de investigación de pregrado, observamos desafíos al combinar prácticas de alto impacto. Combinabamos los estudios en el extranjero e investigación de pregrado, y para enfrentar los desafios que surgieron, adoptamos un enfoque de ética del cuidado. Observamos a los estudiantes durante el viaje y realizamos entrevistas con ellos después del viaje. A partir de esas observaciones y entrevistas,

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concluimos que la ética del cuidado es particularmente útil para mitigar los riesgos del agotamiento emocional, para navegar por la dependencia y la vulnerabilidad, y para reformular las dificultades de los estudiantes de manera positivamente transformadora. El profesorado puede facilitar las ventajas de las prácticas de alto impacto al: considerar las emociones como fuentes pedagógicas para el aprendizaje; reconocimento de las dependencias; identificación de las vulnerabilidades; atención a cómo se enmarcan los espacios públicos y privados; y cultivo del cuidado como práctica feminista y antirracista.

Keywords:
Care Ethics, emotions, vulnerability, dependency, study abroad

Introduction

Anticipating the benefits of an experience that "stacked" the high impact practices of undergraduate research and studying abroad in Thailand, we spent a year crafting our curriculum, mapping out excursions, securing research contacts with various organizations, and poring over books and articles on Thai politics, history, and culture e prepared in all the ways academics typically prepare—by focusing on the content of our program. What we failed to prepare was a plan for navigating the emotions, vulnerabilities, and dependencies our students would deal with during these eight weeks. Upon return we analyzed our program using an Ethics of Care framework, which helped determine changes needed to optimize students' potential to benefit from these kinds of high-impact practices. Here we propose using an Ethics of Care framework to enhance attentiveness and responsiveness to students' needs, which may thereby deepen the learning benefits of faculty-led programs. Such an approach advocates treating emotions as pedagogical sources for learning; acknowledging dependencies; identifying vulnerabilities; devoting attention to how public and private spaces are framed; and cultivating care as a feminist and anti-racist practice.

High-Impact Practices

High-impact practices create learning conditions to facilitate a mindset shift among students so that they become, in the words of transformative learning theorist Jack Mezirow (2006, p. 92), "more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change." That is, high-impact practices are a vehicle to create the kind of student transformation many teaching-

focused faculty crave. As George Kuh (2008, p. 28), who defined high-impact practices, argues, a high-impact practice:

> deepens learning and brings one's values and beliefs into awareness; it helps students develop the ability to take the measure of events and actions and put them in perspective. As a result, students better understand themselves in relation to others and the larger world, and they acquire the intellectual tools and ethical grounding to act with confidence for the betterment of the human condition.

Several student activities have been identified as bringing about this kind of deep and transformative learning, including capstone courses and projects, collaborative assignments and projects, common intellectual experiences, ePortfolios, first-year seminars and experiences, internships, learning communities, service learning or community-based learning, writing-intensive courses, undergraduate research, and diversity or global learning. When designing this program, we focused primarily on study abroad (as a vehicle for diversity or global learning) and undergraduate research.

In terms of undergraduate research, students not only gain skills in research design and data collection or analysis, but also have reported gaining more self-confidence, a sense of accomplishment, and an increased ability to cope with setbacks (Hunter et al., 2007; Lopatto, 2004, 2006; Sadler et al., 2010; Ward et al., 2002). Likewise, study abroad has the potential to transform student worldviews because many of their taken for granted cultural assumptions are explicitly challenged while studying in an unfamiliar cultural context. Study abroad students "cross many borders: political, cultural, socioeconomic, environmental, and national. They undergo disruptive experiences that often trigger a reevaluation of closely held assumptions and understanding" (Hartman et al., 2018, p. 4). The disruption of leaving their home country and living under cultural rules that are different from their own provides opportunities for students to see and question their taken-for-granted views of the world. As Hunter claims: "life experience that challenges students to reconsider the fundamental reasoning behind their most basic notions of the way the world works can precipitate an entire change in perspective" (2020, p. 94, emphasis in original).

Combining study abroad and undergraduate research purports to have even deeper impact. For example, Streitwieser (2009, p. 399) argues that

incorporating a research program into study abroad not only achieves good academic outcomes but can also create the kind of transformative worldview that allows students to effect positive change in the world: "When carefully prepared, guided, and focused research is undertaken it augments the important personal and academic development that takes place during study abroad and allows students to engage in a form of intellectual activity that can promote the broad goals of civic education: open-mindedness, critical thinking, and the willingness to constructively advance society and its diverse membership." Informed by these findings on the benefits of undergraduate research, study abroad, and, especially, the combination of the two, we designed the Thailand study abroad research program with the expectation that incorporating undergraduate research experiences into a study abroad program would provide the kind of deep engagement and transformation we sought for students.

And yet, we were unprepared to respond to the interpersonal, emotional, and situational problems that arose from stacking undergraduate research and study abroad, factors that considerably undermined the potential of these activities to transform students' worldviews. Based on our experiences, we suggest that, to create learning experiences that provide students with opportunities to engage in deep intellectual and personal development, faculty need an ethical framework to acknowledge and navigate the emotional impact created for students by stacking high-impact practices, such as the combination of study abroad and undergraduate research.

Program Design

In the summer of 2017, we led a two-month study abroad undergraduate research program to Thailand titled "Inequality and the Environment." This two-month program included curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular components centered around the theme of ethics, inequality, and the environment. The curricular component included interdisciplinary coursework in environmental ethics and environmental social movements, courses we both teach regularly at the home campus of our liberal arts university in the Midwest of the United States as faculty in Philosophy and Sociology, respectively. During the two months in Thailand, students interviewed representatives of environmental organizations, including the United Nations Environment Programme, the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC), and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), among others. These meetings helped students

build their research agenda and gather data around their research question, "How do cultural, social, and ideological factors affect responsiveness to, and responsibility for, environmental harm in Thailand?" Students also engaged in cultural activities, such as planting trees with a Buddhist organization, visiting animal sanctuaries to learn about problems with cultural tourism, participating in an environmentally-conscious Thai cooking class, and visiting Buddhist temples. As our university had a campus in Thailand, students from the Thailand campus attended the social movements and ethics classes with the U.S. students in the undergraduate research abroad program. The students from the Thailand campus did not engage in the research, although they did participate in some of the cultural activities. Our study abroad students lived in shared accommodations in an apartment building under contract with the university. The faculty stayed at a different apartment building under contract with the university.

Methodology

When we designed this research project, we were interested in studying the transformative and worldview-changing effects of stacking the high-impact practices of study abroad and undergraduate research. We gained Institutional Review Board approval to observe students during, and to interview students after, with questions about how conducting original research abroad affected their learning process. As we will discuss later, our research project took a significant turn as we observed that student learning was impeded by feelings of overwhelm and ambiguity due to the combination of navigating original research in a new culture.

Eight students from a small-sized private University in the U.S. Midwest who enrolled in a faculty-led research abroad program comprised the participants for this study. After we recruited students to the study abroad research program, we secured their consent to ask them about and observe their experiences conducting undergraduate research abroad. Students came from a variety of majors, including criminology, international human rights, philosophy, psychology, and communications, and ranged from graduating seniors to students entering their second year. All students identified as women. Seven students identified as White and one as Black. One student was non-traditional age, and the others were traditional age. We, the two lead faculty members, identify as White women.

To collect data on the transformative benefits of stacking undergraduate research and study abroad, we observed students' interactions with us, with each other, with the course material, and with the research process. We held formal weekly research meetings with the students as a group in the common area of their shared accommodations. We met with students individually or in small groups as needed to discuss and troubleshoot concerns with the academic workload, challenges students had with their research projects, difficulties with culture shock, and interpersonal dynamics among the students. As faculty, we kept observational notes and met daily to discuss our observations of students. Like our formal classroom pedagogy, we conducted many informal assessments about the progress and pace of the academic content, research experience, and cultural activities. We discussed these during our daily faculty meetings and made course corrections, when necessary.

Two months after the end of the Thailand program, we interviewed students about the study abroad research program. We asked them about their experiences conducting research abroad, interactions with us and other students, perceptions of the cultural or research activities, and whether their worldviews had been transformed by the experience (e.g., "discuss the way you interacted with or saw the world before the trip and the way you interact with or see the world now that you're back"). Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour and a half. We transcribed the interviews and compiled our observation notes. We reviewed these transcripts and observation notes iteratively, independently and together, to identify common themes across student experiences.

While our intention was to analyze the transformative effects of stacking the high-impact practices of undergraduate research and study abroad, the interviews and observations revealed several themes that confirmed concerns we had while in Thailand and that problematize stacking study abroad and undergraduate research, which include: raised levels of vulnerability; feelings of dependency that interfered with students' ability to learn; and emotional exhaustion that prevented students from fully absorbing either the culture or the research. As we will discuss later, each of these factors—vulnerability, dependency, and emotionality—also has a beneficial side with the potential to deepen learning. Faculty should take care to monitor these components so that students experience the transformative potential of vulnerability, dependency, and emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them. Ultimately, our

experience and findings convey the importance of an Ethics of Care approach to guide designing a faculty-led undergraduate research abroad program, and perhaps all high-impact practices.

We argue that an Ethics of Care framework can help ameliorate the most potentially harmful or negatively disruptive aspects of research abroad programs by attending to students' emotional states and prompting faculty responsiveness to students' absorption of course content. As we will discuss in the findings from this study, instead of magnifying the potential for deep and transformative learning, combining high-impact experiences that facilitate intellectual and personal development, such as cultural immersion and undergraduate research, could push student vulnerability past a transformative threshold and prevent students from learning in some cases. Without guidance, instead of becoming more open and emotionally able to change, students can shut down. Our findings encouraged us to consider how an Ethics of Care framework could facilitate transformative learning by providing a process to attend to the emotional and vulnerable aspects of the high-impact practices of study abroad and undergraduate research.

Other scholars studying the impact of study abroad have begun analyzing such an ethics of engagement by identifying program elements which can deepen student learning and facilitate the kind of mindset shift we aspired to when constructing our program, such as the novel "fair trade learning" model articulated by Hartman et al. (2014). This fair trade learning approach adds an important dimension for programs seeking to develop genuine intercultural competence, ethical engagement, and transformative learning for students by encouraging faculty and students to think through the ethical ramifications of "our profound global interdependence, such as consideration of the roles that Global North ideological framing, market desires, and policies play in influencing Global South structures, opportunities, and limitations" (Hartman et al., 2018, p. 10). This promising "fair trade" approach, however, does not address the concern we focus on here, namely that study abroad and the combination of study abroad and undergraduate research produce personal and emotional conditions for students that can be overwhelming and can cause them to shut down. We argue that the Ethics of Care has the potential to address this concern.

The Ethics of Care

The Ethics of Care emerged from the insights of feminists in a range of disciplines—psychology, education, political theory, philosophy, and sociology, initially (Collins, 1995; Gilligan, 1993; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2013; Ruddick, 1989; Tronto, 1993) and its scope continues to widen. The Ethics of Care originated from the collective insights that women's experiences, and the care work they have more often been socialized to perform, have typically been regarded as irrelevant to moral development and public life. This has important implications for the public sphere of the university and for academic learning. Care ethicists have asked what kind of improvements and insights might come from exploring and elevating women's unpaid care work (Held, 2006, p. 108) and thus prompts us to ask what role care does and should play in an academic setting. This is particularly important for undergraduate research abroad, as we observed that such approaches to learning can also exacerbate hierarchies that may be hidden in traditional learning contexts. To ameliorate the problems associated with emotionality, vulnerability, and dependency we noticed during the research abroad program, we offer an Ethics of Care "toolkit" that elucidates relevant aspects of the theory and applies it to the case of a study abroad student research program. Using our experience in Thailand, the toolkit informed by the Ethics of Care that we recommend includes: treating emotions as pedagogical sources for learning; acknowledging dependencies; identifying vulnerabilities; devoting attention to how public and private spaces are framed; and cultivating care as a feminist and anti-racist practice. Following the recommendations in this toolkit will allow faculty to design and lead programs that unlock the full transformative potential of high-impact practices such as study abroad and undergraduate research. This model may also help prevent risks to students' mental health that can emerge when students are deeply engaged in such practices.

Treat Emotions as Pedagogical Sources for Learning

One of the major features of the Ethics of Care framework is the value placed on emotions (Held, 2006, p. 10). Faculty are typically socialized to hold a traditional Western, philosophical mindset that sees rationality (often coded as masculine) as the key to appropriate academic behavior and norms (Ruddick, 1989, pp. 3-12). Since emotionality (often coded as feminine) is seen as the opposite of rationality, it is conceived as a state to be avoided or shunned. We often associate the mind with rationality, control, order, and logic, and the body

with "messy" biological functions and "irrational" emotions. This mindset disinclines faculty to devote academic time to emotional processing, as academic spaces are viewed as the realm of the mind and reason. Care Ethics is rightly skeptical of the rational/emotional dichotomy, recognizing that emotions often help us to achieve what reason dictates (Held, 2006, p. 10) and also serve as a corrective to excessively calculating approaches. Furthermore, examination of and attentiveness to emotions can be crucial for learning and development. The Ethics of Care resists relegating emotions to the body, as categorically distinct from the mind, pushing back against the notion that emotions come "out of nowhere" or that they are always in need of control and in need of rationality's (mind-based) disciplinary hand. Because emotions often originate from our lived experiences, particularly our experiences with other people, it may be more useful to explore emotions than to squash them. In contrast to the notion that emotions ought to be ignored or considered irrelevant to the important insights, observations, and arguments that are critical to scholarly work, Care Ethics views emotions as potential sources for the reflection and moral guidance that we argue can deepen scholarly work.

In this toolkit item, we recommend encouraging students to process their emotions as part of their learning experiences. For example, students might be given a journaling assignment that prompts them to reflect on the emotions they experience and to analyze how those emotions are linked to their learning outcomes and goals. Such an explicit engagement with the emotional reaction to study abroad and undergraduate research may allow students to better regulate emotional reactions that might become too overwhelming for absorption of new information and thereby to deepen their learning.

Prompting students to process emotions might seem tangential to learning; emotions are widely seen as, at best, irrelevant to learning and, at worst, a serious impediment to it. Although educational contexts have not traditionally acknowledged the emotional aspect of students' lives, emotions can both positively and negatively affect students' ability to learn, as we found while observing the students in our Thailand student research abroad program. When engaging in high-impact practices that take students out of the familiar classroom setting, students may feel unsettled and frustrated. One student shared that, for her, it was:

more frustrating to me than I expected to not be able cook and to only have certain restaurants near me in walking distance of the public and to not be living in an environment that did not quite have the infrastructure that I'm used to. I guess it was more difficult for me to adapt to than I expected it would have been.

This was a student who had studied abroad in another location before, that we both viewed as quite confident and mature prior to the trip. During the trip, we watched her confidence drop and she expressed more self-doubt and anxiety about her writing skills than we had seen in our home setting. Given that most of our students struggled in similar ways, it became clear to us upon reflection that without a teaching and learning framework to help us focus on students' emotional states of mind, the transformative promise of high-impact practices to create more civically engaged and self-reflective students might not be reached.

The theme of our course, Inequality and the Environment, typically provokes emotional reactions in students in any setting. In the context of the Thailand program, however, we were dismayed by the levels of worry and anxiety students seemed to experience. In contrast with the versions of these courses we had previously taught at home, our study abroad students struggled more deeply on an emotional level. This group of highly intelligent, typically confident, and capable women were overcome with self-doubt and seemed increasingly unsure of themselves. At times they were almost paralyzed by questions centered on responsibilities and best practices. After the trip, when asked about these kinds of difficulties, one student said:

> I … I don't know why it was so difficult because I like to think I'm good at writing research papers, but, I don't know what my problem was. [laughs] Yeah, I guess, I don't know … when I was there, I was feeling … 'I can't say anything that hasn't been said before, other people have said this before, my theories aren't unique at all, so what's the point?'

From our faculty perspective, this was concerning. We often felt dismayed by the number of meetings that "devolved" into reassuring students and by the need to constantly talk them through their feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. This gave us pause and led us to re-evaluate our approach, both toward the end of the trip and upon return.

Care Ethics offered us some insights which prove instructive in such circumstances. When academic approaches frame rationality as categorically superior to emotionality it is tempting to disregard emotions altogether and to ignore the lived experiences that might transform students and deepen learning. "[F]rom the care perspective, moral inquiries that rely entirely on reason and rationalistic deductions or calculations are seen as deficient" (Held, 2006, p. 10). While rational processing itself is not rejected, of course, the Ethics of Care rejects the categorical dismissal of emotionality and instead views it as critical to moral development and growth. Thinking through this theory led us to reflect on how both of our disciplines had trained us to idealize dispassionate scholarship, to place a premium on rationality, clarity, and consistency, and to "rise above" the messiness that allegedly comes from emotionality—bias, partiality, and parochialism. In teaching our program, which is centered on environmental ethics and environmental social movements, we recognize that the problems of climate change, oppression, environmental racism, and injustice simply are overwhelming problems, and anyone who does not feel sad, or helpless, or even angry is likely taking a superficial approach to the subject. However, the unexpected and intense emotions students were experiencing seemed different from those we typically witnessed when teaching these courses at the home campus; their struggles, we discovered as we processed, seemed intimately tied not only to the coursework, but also to the setting in which they were undertaking it. One student shared upon return: "I guess I just expected to, like, really be into the research and be, like, fully enjoying it...and be, like, a powerful badass [doing] research in Thailand, but instead I just spent most of the time just confused and lost, overwhelmed and stressed."

Processing such emotions can offer not only some coping mechanisms but also a corrective push against the tendency to detach—particularly against the apathetic or self-protective shoulder-shrug (i.e., "not my responsibility")— that can arise when observing unsettling or unfamiliar cultural patterns, when one begins to learn about oppression and overwhelming problems like climate change, or when one seeks to navigate the ambiguity and uncertainty of conducting original research. Such detachment decreases the positive potential of high-impact practices. If students are disengaged from the material and their cultural experiences, they are not likely to incorporate academic insights into their worldview. To view a topic with too much detachment can indicate a failure of engagement and ultimately of understanding. And to process these

feelings, in addition to those that come with living in a foreign setting and experiencing culture shock, is no small feat. As our students were working to clarify their understanding about the themes of the course and what they were learning experientially, we realized it was perfectly legitimate academically to help them process the feelings they were having, as these were in fact critical to unearthing issues of ethical behavior and social justice, both of which are implicated in the kind of deep, transformative learning promoted by high-impact practices. So, we started to work on helping the students think through how their emotions might be tied to the research, asking them directly how they were feeling about their research and learning.

Bolstered by Care Ethics' theoretical grounding for viewing emotions as academically legitimate and as a source for critical investigation in students' learning, we believe that the shift to emotional processing during our student meetings was beneficial, and we recommend doing so more intentionally in such a setting. We did so initially to help all of us cope, but now we believe this was also deepening their learning, and that it can be immensely useful to explicitly ask students how they are feeling about their research, the coursework, and culture shock. The weekly meetings became a place to discuss feelings, and this was perhaps more critical than we realized to help them link the research to the cultural experiences we were having. As one student said, "I think weekly meetings, just … sitting down with the entire group was good and let us all, like, collaborate and talk about what we were thinking." The group setting allowed us to guide the discussion and to link their emotional responses to the course material, to help them see what they were learning. We remained cognizant of the fact that we are not trained counselors, and when the emotional processing needed was beyond our capabilities and expertise (for instance, one student was simultaneously coping with the death of a friend back home), we made sure to refer students to trained counselors who were made available through our hosts. But when those emotions were relevant to the questions they were investigating, we helped the students dig into and reflect upon how those feelings linked to their research and the objectives of the study abroad research trip.

In sum, although it may feel awkward or out of place to explicitly engage with student emotions, this toolkit item recommends that doing so enables students to feel heard and to deepen their learning. Helping them link their emotions to their experiences allowed our students to acknowledge that their

emotions were part of real intellectual and intercultural growth. When faculty leaders acknowledge student emotions while simultaneously directing students' attention to the course material, student learning can be enriched.

Acknowledge Dependencies

This toolkit item recommends incorporating reflections on dependency. The concept of, and experience of, dependency can be troubling to students, and explicitly guiding students to see how they are dependent on others, and to analyze interdependence generally, may seem irrelevant to educational goals. We suggest, however, that such acknowledgment has the potential to help students navigate and process their learning more deeply.

Students often feel quite proud of the skills they acquire in high-impact practices, as they typically have more freedom to explore places and topics that are new and interesting to them. For example, study abroad testimony, at least in the U.S., often centers freedom and independence, whether explicitly or implicitly, as a core achievement of the experience. As one student proudly shared upon return:

> Actually, I feel like, well, I lived in Thailand for two months I can do anything. I feel more comfortable, I think, going out and doing things, like even something like navigating public transportation. I've never had to do that by myself until I lived in Thailand. So, I feel more comfortable, I guess, in public or going out into my own city. [Thailand] was a lot of things that I have never experienced before. I feel better about going out and doing things for the first time and going out by myself and navigating the world around me.

Likewise, a benefit of conducting undergraduate research is increased ability to act independently (Ward et al., 2002). Both undergraduate research and study abroad programs urge students to get out of their comfort zones or to think about the excitement of being away from all that they know as a way to cultivate independence. Yet we found it interesting that narratives of independence after the trip came from students who did not strike us as especially relishing their independence during the trip, including the student quoted above. Students who were proud of the independence they gained were some of the same students who consistently reported feeling adrift, unsure, and insecure during our in-country group meetings.

One of the insights that Care Ethics offers, that we realized we had not initially made explicit to ourselves or to our students in Thailand, is the importance of recognizing how and when we are dependent on the care and assistance of others. The Care Ethics framework highlights the noteworthy fact that we are all dependent on the caregiving of others at some point in our lives—including as infants, when injured or sick, or near the end of life. It also highlights the fact that some people are heavily dependent on others all their lives. This is not to be lamented but rather recognized and acknowledged in our conceptions of good societies (Kittay, 1999). The Ethics of Care regards ethical agents as ones who develop and are constituted in relational terms, different from the "self-sufficient independent individuals of the dominant moral theories" (Held, 2006, p. 13). In the dominant theories of the Western philosophical tradition, dependency is constructed as a non-ideal condition or state from which we ought to emerge. Yet, the idealization of independence has typically been crafted from the experiences of those who have had the most privilege—those who are physically, emotionally, and financially freed from caretaking responsibilities, for instance, or non-disabled people who are enabled by a world constructed primarily for them. Care Ethics reminds us that depending on others is not inherently problematic; what is problematic is failing to attend to how dependency arises and is created, particularly when it is under inequitable conditions.

Both undergraduate research and study abroad can be aided and facilitated by reflecting on dependency. For expediency, we will focus here on study abroad. Travelers are dependent in a range of ways upon those who provide transportation, directions, food, healthcare, and so on. Caregivers are typically everywhere, helping travelers make their way through unfamiliar settings. When we are made much more aware of the importance and relief provided by care-giving others, both abroad and in traditional learning contexts, students gain the potential to deepen their awareness of the good that comes not only from caregiving, but also from the connections that can result from recognition of our dependence on one another. For example, when traveling abroad, such connections come when a stranger guides us to the right platform on the train, or when we are provided with a menu with pictures; likewise, in the classroom, this comes when a student provides another with a pen or notes from a missed lecture. Such recognition of these moments of dependency may not happen naturally, so faculty should build touchpoints in their courses to

allow students to reflect on their dependencies on one another and on the teacher, in order to highlight instances of caregiving and caretaking and how those experiences relate to their learning. Explicit discussions of interdependence with students can aid them in seeing that perceptions and experiences of dependency are constructed and contingent, and thus could be constructed differently. Our observations of students revealed that when we acknowledged their reliance on us and others to help them, they were more able to let go of the need to act as if they should know how to navigate this environment on their own.

In sum, this toolkit item asks faculty to be aware of the relationships among students, between students and faculty, and between students and the community. Faculty should be especially mindful of their role as authority figures and explore the ways students are dependent on them, as well as the ways faculty are dependent on students and others. Such awareness of the interconnections between people and the way we all rely on each other can allow all of us to recognize how much we are able to learn from one another, and to rethink the assumption that independence is always preferable to dependence. Such a state allows students and faculty to learn and grow, benefiting from the uncertainty of study abroad, undergraduate research, or other high-impact practices.

Identify Vulnerabilities

This toolkit item recommends identifying and distinguishing between the kinds of vulnerability that can help students learn and the kinds of vulnerability that interfere with student learning. Given that high-impact practices compel students to branch out in ways that are often unfamiliar, and that stacking such practices may exacerbate worries that come when one is in unfamiliar territory, we suggest explicitly prompting students to reflect on vulnerability. Doing so may allow them to recognize both the positive aspects of vulnerability and to manage its potentially harmful aspects.

Vulnerability can be understood as a condition of exposure and, like dependency discussed above, can be difficult to navigate when one's culture idealizes independence and invulnerability. For some students, particularly those with considerable privilege or internalized dominance (Bell, 2016) related to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, language, mental or physical ability, experiencing vulnerabilities may be a good thing, as they may

not have felt much of it before, and this can facilitate the transformative benefits of engaging in high-impact practices. For other students, whose social statuses are underrepresented or marginalized, who internalize racism, sexism, heterosexism, or other forms of institutionalized oppression, feeling vulnerable and exposed beyond what they already regularly experience can pose significant risks for learning. In almost all cases vulnerability can be uncomfortable; in some cases, such discomfort can enhance learning, in others it can further disempower. Being vigilant about the conditions that create vulnerability in teaching and learning is important.

Following Alison Bailey and others who write on vulnerability, we suggest distinguishing between different types of vulnerability. Bailey (2015, p. 50) notes that we typically "equate vulnerability with being weak, helpless, defenseless, dependent, or susceptible to harm or injury," categorized as "vulnerability-as-weakness." This, of course, is vulnerability we should strive to avoid creating or exacerbating in a stacked high-impact experience such as faculty-led undergraduate research abroad. Yet there is an alternative: "vulnerability-as-potential." Taking her lead from Erinn Gilson, Bailey notes that, particularly when one is in a position of relative privilege or power (Bailey's focus is on whiteness), "Vulnerability is not just a condition that limits us, but also one that can enable us" (Gilson, 2011, as cited in Bailey, 2015, p. 50, emphasis in original). While vulnerability-as-weakness is a heightened awareness of our susceptibility to harm and suffering, vulnerability-as-potential can provide an opening up about how groups relate to one another. When re-cast or understood in this way, attending to vulnerability has tremendous potential for learning and is something that one can adapt to treat "as a source of knowledge" (Bailey, 2015, p. 50).

The notion of vulnerability-as-potential reminds those with privilege that, when we experience privileges and power, and when those contribute to internalized dominance, discomfort is a necessary pre-condition to facilitate the open-mindedness, critical thinking, and willingness to contribute to creating a more equitable and responsible society that high-impact practices seek to achieve. To alter one's taken for granted ways of seeing requires us to see the limitations and rigidity of our default worldview. While our impulse in a state of vulnerability might be to close ourselves up, protect ourselves, or detach, the insight of vulnerability-as-potential is that it takes courage to push against those impulses, to allow ourselves to "touch down" (Bailey, 2015) (instead of fluttering

above an issue), to actively listen, to be wary of defensiveness, to be open to making mistakes, to take risks, to engage. Despite its culturally-based bad rap, vulnerability is not always a bad thing. It is often the condition from which we connect with and learn from others.

Marginalized statuses on the other hand, can make students vulnerable in ways that can hamper learning (through internalization of oppressive messages, stereotype threat, or imposter syndrome), so faculty should take due care to navigate the distinction between "vulnerability-as-potential" and "vulnerability-as weakness" so as not to exacerbate vulnerability-as-weakness. In our program, we began to realize that the risks of students being too vulnerable, of becoming overwhelmed and shutting down, were significant. As Kahn (2014, p. 7) points out, "A student may become overwhelmed by the uncertainty associated with the progress of their learning project, whether because of the complexity of the capacity to be mastered or as a result of the pedagogic process." To mitigate the risk of heightening "vulnerability-as-weakness" we suggest creating a support structure through which students explore vulnerabilities. In particular, we recommend having an explicit discussion about, and prompting students to reflect on, the risks of how vulnerability-as-weakness can be exacerbated by paternalism. Care Ethics is particularly wary of paternalistic constructions of caregiving in which the caregiver assumes to know what is best for others, based on very little consultation or a superficial relationship with the cared-for. While there are certainly cases when a caregiver might have better insights into what is best for the cared-for (parenting offers some examples), Care Ethics resists the assumption that the caregiver can know what is best for the other without some consultation with, and/or intimate knowledge of, the cared-for. For students from underrepresented and marginalized/oppressed groups, the increased vulnerability that can come from paternalistic caring could decrease the potential of high-impact practices to facilitate personal and academic transformation for students.

While these distinctions can be tricky to navigate, we explore some examples in the context of our specific program, Inequality and the Environment. "Vulnerability-as-potential," for instance, provided a guide to help students attend to the responsibilities that their privileges might require, particularly when one is coming from the Global North to the Global South. Within the safety of our research meetings, we asked students to regularly

assess the ways their own privileges and experiences relate and contribute to the problems of global wealth disparities, thereby evoking vulnerability-as-potential. When we asked students two months after the trip about how such experiences affect them, one student said:

> I guess I always liked the idea of the conscious consumer. Like, it really resonated with me and, like, I always thought about it. Like environmental impacts of what I was doing, but I guess it never really, like, hit home. As much as we know all these things we dump need releasing … they just simply go somewhere. But, like, to see how other people live, like, really, like, sets in for you, or for me [laughs nervously]. It was just weird to see people work so hard and know that I was, like, more well-off and causing all these problems.

When students from the Global North travel to the Global South, as in our program, exploring these connections helps prompt vulnerability-as-potential and thus helps resist tendencies to view impoverishment or environmental destruction as something unfortunate but unrelated to them. Really learning about and sinking into the facts about our disproportionate contributions to globalization or climate change—in terms of consumption patterns, transportation habits, and even our global footprint through airplane travel—is an uncomfortable and vulnerable process for those who are major contributors to it. Yet, it is also a critical step to understanding how inequality develops and is perpetuated. Reflections that link the place, the content of the course, and students' previous lived experiences can deepen learning to help mitigate the tendency to construe the people and places students visit as "objects" of their study, because the point is not just to learn about others, but also to recognize how one affects and relates to others. Seeing how the vulnerabilities of others relate to one's own position, behaviors, assumptions, or even privileges can prompt a range of feelings, from empathy to anger. When approached with care and with learning objectives in mind, such feelings prime students for vulnerability-as-potential and help facilitate the transformative benefits of faculty-led student research abroad.

Yet, in study abroad and research contexts sometimes well-meaning students with more privileges—particularly White, masculine-identified, cisgender, heterosexual, wealthy, and/or typically-abled students from the Global North—recognize the vulnerabilities of others and leap too quickly into

a paternalistic mindset and try to "solve," rather than to sink in, listen, absorb, and ask questions about differences that result from structural oppression. Sometimes, this can be motivated by interest in helping those perceived as vulnerable. *You're worried about money? I'll give you some! You need a source of water? I'll bring it to you in bottles! You don't feel comfortable going out at night? I'll escort you!* These well-meaning responses rely on an approach in which a "caregiver" is not particularly attentive to how their responses to perceived vulnerability replicate and further entrench existing hierarchies and imbalances of power. They participate in or exacerbate the problems the cared-for faces and can further re-entrench vulnerabilities that are based in oppression and structural inequalities, rather than on solutions that address expressed needs.

This tendency became particularly salient in one of our experiences in Thailand. In this cohort, the racial makeup of the group included one Black woman and seven White women. While sight-seeing, the Black student was "asked" (with virtually no time to respond or refuse) by other tourists—complete strangers—to take selfies with them. The experience effectively "Othered" the student, rendering her an object within the sights to be seen (rather than as a sight-seeing subject). It also effectively Othered her within our group, as this only happened to her. When she got up the nerve to share how distressing this racialized experience was, the rest of the group (ourselves included) jumped—probably too quickly—into trying to take care of her, attempting to shield her from experiencing it again. One student unintentionally yet harmfully minimized the trauma by relating it to something that happens to exceptionally tall people as well, setting off a substantial rift in the group which, despite various attempts to talk through the harm of minimizing racism, lasted the rest of the trip. As Bailey (2015, p. 47) notes, White subjects often position themselves as "fixers, missionaries, rescuers, and thus as outside of the critique of whiteness". Bewildered by the flurry of proffered solutions that were likely motivated by White guilt and the desire to "fix" racism, the Black student retreated and became quiet. In this case, her learning was hampered and "vulnerability-as-weakness" was exacerbated, as she felt exposed and harmed, and self-protectively shut down.

What she shared later was that she did not necessarily want anyone to do anything for her; she just wanted us to know, and mostly just to listen, to what she had experienced. Prompting a discussion about paternalism and its

relationship to these two types of vulnerability might have prevented or at least mitigated these effects. Examining the anxieties we and the other students had tied to our own whiteness, which prompted an unexamined desire to rescue her, might have made us see what she needed more quickly. If, as Care Ethics recommends, we had attended first to the needs of the person we were attempting to care for by asking what she wanted and taking our cues from her instead of assuming we knew the best solution for the problem, the harms she experienced might have been lessened.

Thus, this toolkit item recommends activities such as incorporating discussions and/or writing prompts that are mindful of the benefits and risks of both states of vulnerability. During faculty-led programs, particularly stacked high-impact practices like undergraduate research abroad, faculty can become aware of social statuses that may shape experiences of vulnerability and gently point these out to students. Faculty can ask students to monitor themselves for moments when their social statuses may make them prone to either vulnerability-as-potential or vulnerability-as-weakness and how such states of mind influence their ability or willingness to respond to the expressed needs of others, as well as how such states of mind affect their learning.

Devote Attention to the Ways Public and Private Spaces Are Framed

The construction of public and private spaces has been traditionally supported by moral, gendered, and hierarchical assumptions (Held, 2006). The public is traditionally the realm of masculine labor while the private sphere is traditionally the realm of feminine labor (reflecting a heteronormative, binary-gendered division). Care Ethics points to the moral significance of private-realm experience: behavior within the private sphere has been mostly under-regulated and under-protected, considered off limits to government intrusion and legal intervention. While this division helps to uphold important values of freedom and autonomy for some, it has also worked to the detriment of those who spend most of their time in private spaces, i.e., women and children, particularly when those spaces are violent or the labor within them is devalued.

Having questioned the rational/emotional split and its impact on learning in the first toolkit item, we want to recognize that other constructed boundaries, such as the split between public spaces and private spaces, require attention when students engage in high-impact practices that take them beyond

the classroom as well. This toolkit item recommends considering how both public and private spaces are structured, in relation to the learning goals of high-impact practices such as research and study abroad.

Students from our Thailand trip reported being affected by the lack of private space and the ever-changing mood of the group. As one student said, "I think there's benefits of us all going through it together, being able to share the frustrations the joys of being there, but I did feel like sometimes all the negativity did bring me down." When studying in a traditional classroom, the influence of a group's mood and dynamics can more easily be left at the door when class is over; this is much less the case in a faculty-led research abroad context. Under typical teaching and learning circumstances, students and faculty can focus on the content of coursework during class time and process their emotional experience of that class time in private. Students and faculty may have few opportunities for private reflection and emotional processing while conducting group research abroad. Having research expectations and course content constantly in mind and being unable to take a break from others on the trip can be emotionally exhausting and may interfere with students' ability to learn.

Aspects of the public/private division can influence what we consider to be "properly academic." Western ethical theories have often focused primarily on what good behavior and right action mean in the public sphere, often considered the realm applicable to "all." Activities of the private sphere—nurturing the needs of dependent others and directing care toward specific people's unique experiences (rather than to all citizens or residents)—have been rendered a more "natural" concern than a moral one, a rendering that Care Ethics challenges. "Dominant moral theories have seen 'public' life as relevant to morality while missing the moral significance of the 'private' domains of family and friendship" (Held, 2006, p. 13). Academic structures often follow suit, modeling norms of fairness and justice as public concerns, equally applicable to all. Professors learn to structure their courses with rules that apply to everyone, so that fair syllabi and "just" approaches are those that treat all students in the same manner. When a student has needs that differ from those of others, adapting to them has been framed as making exceptions for some or, at best, accommodations. Growing awareness about the importance of accessibility for all students is helping to change this, as are pop-culture memes that distinguish between equality (rendered as sameness) and equity (rendered as sensitivity to

difference). Such shifts to equity from equality also call into question the rigid distinctions between public requirements that apply to all, and private norms that apply to individuals' unique needs.

Care Ethics does not call for abolition of the split between public and private spaces, but rather for attention to the moral dimensions of the private sphere, and then for reflection on how these dimensions relate to the public sphere. In Thailand, we started to notice that it was helpful to begin our research meetings with an invitation to share how students were doing, personally. With such an invitation, students would consistently start with more private dimensions of their experience, e.g., *I'm having trouble sleeping, I'm not liking the food, I got to talk to my mom today*. By inviting them to bring more "private" aspects of their lives and identities into the more "public" spaces of our meetings, we tied respect for the things that students uniquely experienced and felt into their learning, thereby breaking down the expectation that their group identities, their different physical and mental abilities, or their past experiences and traumas were irrelevant to their academic learning. In doing so, the notion that the academic realm runs only on the rules applicable to the public realm is deconstructed. Such an invitation may seem awkward or out of place in a teaching context, or may seem irrelevant to learning, but a Care Ethics framework demonstrates that it is not irrelevant to take a moment at the beginning or end of a lecture, meeting, or excursion to check in with students' mental or emotional state.

However, meaningful boundaries between public and private spaces can be equally important, particularly given the risk of overwhelm we observed during our student research abroad program. When public and private spaces are already blurred, such as during research abroad, faculty might try to establish a version of the public/private distinction that protects students' needs for privacy and provides a space for restoration and recuperation. The ability to achieve physical, social, or emotional distance from one another in the public space of the classroom can be a greater challenge when rooms, meals, bathrooms, transportation, and learning are all shared, so faculty should aim to provide students with other forms of "distance" from one another and the course. One way we did this in Thailand was to require students to complete individual journals or blogs, with the course learning outcomes to guide their writing. Students were prompted to reflect both on what they learned and on what they experienced in a private space they intentionally created—by finding

a place outside, curling up under their covers, or putting on headphones. For students who were getting overwhelmed by the amount of "social" time the trip involved, this helped give them a little space, while prompting them to think through various aspects (personal and emotional ones included) of what they were learning. Prompted to attend to the pedagogical significance of the excursions, meals, and meetings, they were simultaneously encouraged to tie their own experiences, struggles, and "ah ha" moments into their academic learning.

Valuable insights, the ability to reconcile difficult experiences, and the potential to view things differently often come from the moments when one has even a modified version of alone time—"just" thinking or staring off into space. These perhaps come more easily in the rare moments when one gets time to be physically alone on a faculty-led research abroad trip but can also happen when one simply gets some mental "space." And, of course, all versions of such "space" are immensely valuable for faculty too! Faculty-led trips require faculty to be "on" practically all the time. We are meeting new people, seeing new things, tasting new foods, just as the students are, but we are also tasked with helping others reflect upon the meanings of those experiences in terms of the course we are teaching. In a typical university classroom faculty have a clearer beginning and end point to such "thinking on one's feet" experiences. In a faculty-led study abroad experience, when every moment is a teaching moment, when the typically private spheres of meals and rest become more public with one's students, a private journaling or reflection time can be critical for faculty as well.

In sum, this toolkit item recommends incorporating moments of structured sharing and reflection, where students are prompted to discuss how their reactions affect their understanding of the work they are doing in the high-impact practice. Faculty guiding students in these experiences are encouraged to take a few moments to check in regularly with students, to make personal connections, to invite students to share their states of mind, and to develop a context of caring. In contexts where public and private spaces are already blurred and students and faculty may not have private space, such as study abroad, faculty can create opportunities for private reflection or other ways to create physical, emotional, or social separation from the group and course material.

Cultivate Care as a Feminist and Anti-Racist Practice

Faculty can facilitate the advantages, and mitigate the risks, of stacked high-impact practices like undergraduate research abroad by cultivating care as a practice. An important insight of Care Ethics is that care need not be conceived as a mere feeling that one either possesses or does not, rather it is a practice or skill that requires cultivation and development over time. Care thus can be assessed and shaped into activities that are not only pedagogically liberating for students, but also that can subvert hierarchies and power imbalances that serve as the bedrock for inequities and exclusionary patterns. In this toolkit item we recommend thinking of care along the following lines: first, as a practice that is contingent upon sociocultural conditions that have developed over time; and second, as a practice best implemented through feminist, anti-racist lenses.

First, when we begin to recognize that care arises under a multitude of conditions—some oppressive, some liberating—one can begin to see care as something that is developed and learned, often through socialization. Care ethicists astutely refer to caring as care work or caring labor, not only to help emphasize the active engagement that care requires, but also to unearth and highlight who has been socialized to engage in it. In patriarchal societies, caring labor has been associated with, and performed by, women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color); thus, this labor has been performed disproportionately by BIWOC (Black, Indigenous, Women of Color). When women have been rendered "natural" caregivers, and when care is understood as coming "naturally," it is tempting to assume it requires no effort, skill, or practice. We tend not to think of things that come naturally as requiring work or labor and often construct them as opposites—nature vs. nurture—but Care Ethics rightly questions this assumption.

Understanding care as a responsive practice, rather than as a mere feeling one possesses, can also help reveal the ways in which caring practices can problematically undermine the autonomy of the cared-for and reinforce oppressive structures. For these reasons, our second recommendation is that care be viewed as a practice to be applied with feminist, anti-racist lenses. As these lenses foreground social statuses, hierarchies, and power, they contain pedagogically critical tools to monitor the risks of unjustified and harmful paternalism. If caring practices are developed independently of the cared-for, without a relationship between the two (whether individuals or groups),

caregiving can run counter to many of the goals of high-impact practices. If care is construed as a top-down task, "administered" or "distributed" by the caregiver rather than as something that develops relationally, in response to the self-professed needs of others, students are not likely to achieve the successes that study abroad or undergraduate research are designed to yield. Care, in the model we endorse, is not merely a feeling and "expressing an intention to care is simply not enough" (Raghuram, 2021, p. 189). It is critical that the practice of care be responsive to the expressed needs of those cared for. As discussed in the section on vulnerability, paternalistic forms of caring come in the form of assuming what the other needs rather than asking them what they need; it comes in the form of proclaiming that the caregiver knows best without consulting the recipient of the care, without listening to the stated needs of others and acting based on those expressed needs. Ethics of Care theorists also point to the histories of unjustly paternalistic forms of "caring" based on racist and sexist assumptions about who knows best. These patterns and policies have been buttressed by the assumption that a dominant group has the authority to determine what those with less power need. An Ethics of Care based in feminist, anti-racist commitments adopts a healthy skepticism of paternalistic caring by taking a critical look at social status, power differentials, and the intentions of the giver of care, as well as the consequences for the recipient of care.

Recognizing both that care develops under sociocultural conditions and using a feminist, anti-racist lens also helps highlight patterns of self-sacrifice that characterize the plight of oppressed groups. Such conditions are present in any teaching and learning context but might be a significant risk for students engaged in study abroad or undergraduate research, particularly when students are part of oppressed groups. Women and gender non-conforming folx, and people of color, for instance, have been socialized to attend to the needs of others (whether dependent or dominant others) in ways that are unreciprocated, can be disempowering, and can lead to the exclusion of their own needs (Bartky, 1990, p. 111). Without feminist, anti-racist lenses, the elevation of all forms of "care" runs the risk of further entrenching patterns that are oppressive.

Both faculty and students can and should reflect on the sources of their caring practices—the extent to which it is tied to their social status and the extent to which their caring is effective, helpful, and requested. When the ethics of care is construed as a theory in which feminist, anti-racist perspectives are optional, caring practices may further entrench gendered and raced patterns of

unjustified paternalism from members of dominant groups and self-sacrifice for members of oppressed groups.

In light of these risks, this toolkit item recommends prompting study abroad students, and the faculty who lead them, to reflect on the privileges of travel, the history and risks of White savior motivations and complexes, and their own roles and responsibilities in learning in unfamiliar contexts. Students, for instance, can be prompted to reflect on where their caring emotions might have come from, when they are lacking, and whether their cultural foundation supports or counters what they are feeling. Such reflection could include how their feelings gel with or go against the messages that their society conveys versus what the study abroad society and culture convey about different ways of being. Doing so helps avoid the construal of care as an emotion that is unpredictable and as something over which we have little control. Instead, students are prompted to think about the contexts in which care is present or absent, and to ask how it might be better developed.

Likewise, faculty leaders must ask ourselves (better still to ask a colleague who can give honest feedback) similar questions, with an emphasis on whether we have checked in with students about what they feel they need, rather than assuming we know what they need. While we may be the experts on the content of the class, the study abroad location, or the research project, teaching includes not only the dissemination of information but also the cultivation of an atmosphere that allows that information to be absorbed, analyzed, implemented, and shared. When faculty are unaware of our implicit biases, unjustified forms of paternalism may seep into our expressions of care for students, thus thwarting students' abilities to feel heard and understood. Cultivating care as a practice that includes checking in on our students' emotional well-being and attending to our own social statuses, will ultimately result in deep learning for both faculty and students.

Conclusion

Since academic structures and expectations are not typically centered on emotions, feelings of vulnerability and dependency, or attentiveness to the private sphere, asking students to attend to the issues we have discussed here might seem tangential to academic learning—falling short of expected rigor, or too "touchy-feely." It might seem especially irrelevant to the learning benefits that come from study abroad and undergraduate research. Yet, as discussed in

each of the toolkit elements above, this construal of academic structures is not only limiting but can prevent students from achieving the touted benefits of faculty-led student research abroad. It is important to keep in mind that just as good argumentative and analytical skills—the work attributed to reasoning—do not emerge overnight, neither does the care work that both students and faculty engage in. Most of us—students and faculty alike—have not had much "schooling" in asking questions about our emotions' origins, their connections to our experiences and cultures, or how they deepen and influence our learning, so it can be helpful to remind ourselves that comfort levels with doing so will take time and practice.

We contend that practices informed by the Ethics of Care can help prime students to reach the potential high-impact practices have to offer, and to mitigate the risks that come with such experiences, especially in stacked formats. We recommend faculty embrace: treating emotions as pedagogical sources for learning; acknowledging dependencies within the classroom and within the larger society; identifying both helpful and harmful vulnerabilities; devoting attention to how public and private spaces are framed; and cultivating care as a feminist and anti-racist practice Embracing these practices will allow faculty to think through how they approach high-impact practices such as research abroad, and how they interact with their students so that they can facilitate the lofty goal of deep teaching and learning—creating better humans.

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