LEARNING IN GAP YEAR TRAVEL (GYT)

January 2014

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This thesis is submitted to fulfil the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

The main purposes of this study are 1) to define what gap year travel is, to research 2) what gappers (i.e. gap year participants) learn (i.e. the outcomes of gap year travel learning) and 3) how they learn (i.e. the processes of gap year travel learning). This is in order to investigate the effects of gap year travel experiences on personal development and self-growth.

This study examines the phenomenon of gap year travel and its relationships with the concepts of mobility, identity, youth transition and individual learning using literature from tourism, youth studies and learning theory. It acknowledges the importance of understanding the complexity of the transition from childhood-to-adulthood and from school-to-work in a dynamic and multicultural world, especially for young gappers who choose to embark on gap year travel.

Using a research design based on in-depth semi-structured interviews, data were collected from 27 young gappers of age 17-30 years in the South East of England in Spring 2009. The findings suggest that gap year travel is a form of mobility that helps young people manage the transition from their childhood to their adulthood and ease their transition from school to Higher Education or between employment. Gap year travel does so by allowing the participants space, time and freedom which often contrasts with circumstances for them back home and offering a space where learning is allowed to occur and influence the gappers’ personal and sometimes professional development in some cases.

This study provides three main contributions. First, the study starts by clarifying the definition of gap year travel for the purpose of the research using definitions made by other scholars and the findings of a preliminary study. Using this definition, the study proceeded to research the outcomes and process of gap year travel learning. Second, the main outcomes of gap year travel learning revealed by the research are self understanding, relationship building and life management. It was found that the gappers felt they had become more confident, independent, responsible and open-minded as a result of their trips. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the gappers learned how to manage their time, finances and well-being, as well as learning how to build awareness of and foundations for their relationships with others, i.e. their family, friends and other gappers, as well as but to a lesser extent locals. While
reflecting on their past and present experiences, gappers also spoke about the effect gap year travel had on how they saw their future, e.g. their academic studies, career and lifestyle.

The experiential and transformative dimensions of Gap Year Travel Learning are revealed through the application of Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991) to analyse the gappers' learning. As far as the processes of learning are concerned, the stages and steps suggested by Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1991) are applicable to gap year travel learning, although some important variations do occur. Finally, the third main contribution this study offers in this regard is a model of the gap year travel learning. The model illustrates six main steps of gap year travel learning: 1) experiencing; 2) internal dialoguing (self-reflecting); 3) external dialoguing (discussing with others); 4) abstracting; 5) changing; 6) adapting. These various stages in the process are further organized as two learning cycles of gap year travel: gap year travel learning cycle 1 (experiencing, self-reflecting and discussing with others) and gap year travel learning cycle 2 (abstracting, changing and adapting). A much simplified form of the model of gap year travel learning process is also offered for practitioner use, i.e.: 'action; dialogue; cognition, adjustment'.

In essence, this study asserts that the gap year travel experience and the associated process of gap year travel learning can enhance learning in ways that contribute to the gappers' career, academic and life development during an important transitional stage of their lives. Findings of this study could be useful to gappers themselves, the parents of the gappers, gap year travel companies, educational institutions (high school institutions and higher education institutions), and companies hiring or employing gapers or ex-gappers.
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I confirm that the submitted work is my own work and that I have clearly identified and fully acknowledged all material that is entitled to be attributed to others (whether published or unpublished) using the reference system set out in the programme handbook. I agree that the University may submit my work to means of checking this, such as the plagiarism detection service Turnitin®UK. I confirm that I understand that assessed work that has been shown to have been plagiarised will be penalised.

Novie Johan

January 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey of my doctoral study taught me many important lessons. A sincere thank you to everyone who has touched my life during the course of my PhD.

My two supervisors, Prof. John Tribe and Prof. Eugene Sadler-Smith for their relentless guidance and wisdom from the beginning until the end. My external examiners, Prof. Kevin Hannam and Prof. Sandra Watson; my internal examiners, Prof. Andrew Lockwood and Prof. David Airey; for their inputs and advice. Prof. Peter Jones, Prof. Graham Miller, Prof. Mark Saunders, Dr. Anita Eves, Prof. David Allen and Mrs. Jane Cook for their continuous support along the way. My sincere thanks also go to the research participants who so generously gave their time.

Thank you to all of my friends and colleagues both at Surrey and around the world for your encouragement and friendships. And, thank you to my dearest mom, dad, sister and brother who have always been there for me. Most importantly, to God who always keeps His beautiful promise.

Many thanks for the journey – it enriched my life in a way that I could have never imagined! May happiness always be yours.
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PART I.

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This study looks at *Gap Year Travel (GYT)* from the perspectives of youth transition, mobility, identity, tourism and individual learning. Prior to pursuing an understanding of the ways in which the learning outcomes and processes of GYT develop, a brief introduction to the background and rationale for this study, definitions of GYT and a description of the selected informants for the study are provided in order to provide this thesis with a clear research purpose and framework.

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Gap Year Travel (GYT) is a relatively new segment of the travel and tourism industry as it has only been well-established since the late 1990s. Indeed, GYT has now been considered as an important and widely-recognised phenomenon, receiving publicity and endorsements from both private and public sectors (Simpson, 2004). The current global GYT market involves around 1 to 1.5 million trips per year, and is expected to grow at 8% per annum, which is around twice the rate of global tourism trips (Mintel, 2005). Although GYT trips are classified under budget travel in which ‘gappers’ have low daily spending, the extended length of each trip generally increases the gappers’ total spending. In fact, gappers spend around £5 billion annually (average of £4800/gapper), with the UK as the biggest market, spending approximately £2.5 billion annually (*ibid*). However, in spite of its size and scale, and its importance and popularity, as an academic subject GYT remains limited and is under-researched (Duncan, 2004; Heath, 2007; Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005; O’Reilly, 2006; Simpson, 2004).

To clearly define ‘what GYT is’ and ‘who the gappers are’ for this study is a complex task. Within the literature hitherto there is no agreement on one common, clear and comprehensive definition of GYT that covers and serves all purposes (Mintel, 2005 and Jones, 2004). Defining GYT is challenging mainly due to the fact that GYT covers broad and interconnected factors, and additionally, the characteristics and background of GYT participants themselves can vary substantially. Furthermore, the literature suggests that GYT is likely to be an evolved version of previous long-term budget youth travel dating back to the
Chapter One - Introduction

‘Grand Tour’ in the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} century; making historical context an integral component in understanding GYT. Despite these challenges, having a clear definition and boundaries of GYT is indispensable. Hence, Section 1.2. in this chapter is dedicated to briefly define what GYT is and clarify the criteria used to describe the gappers interviewed.

Many young people choose to engage in GYT between or after their education or employment. This evidence is highlighted in both academic and market research literature (e.g. Duncan, 2004; Heath, 2007; Inkson and Myers, 2003; Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005; O’Reilly, 2006; Simpson, 2004). The increased popularity of GYT among the young gappers may be explained by the propositions that first, young people today tend to look at their life from a more holistic view rather than merely focusing on their study or work and thereby they consider leisure and lifestyle as an equally important part of their life (Shildrick and McDonald, 2007; Stokes and Wyn, 2007). This implies that gappers may consider their trip as important as their education or employment. Secondly, this development may be explained by the assertion that the knowledge gappers gain from their travel experiences is important and could be as valued as the formal education received in school or at university (Pearce and Foster, 2007). The above proposition that many young gappers embark on their trips during a transitional period of their life (i.e. between school and work and thus arguably also between childhood and adulthood) raises an important question on the role of GYT at this transitional age.

Understanding youth transition (i.e. transition from childhood to adulthood, from school to work, between employments, etc.) today has become more important, yet more challenging task than ever. Nowadays youth transitions often involve more complex and sometimes chaotic processes than they did in the past (e.g. Dwyer and Wyn, 2001; Goodwin and O’Connor, 2007; Stokes and Wyn, 2007; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1988). If gappers decide to embark on GYT, GYT becomes an integral process of their transition process. A number of researchers have argued that mobility plays a prominent role in the development of young people (Ateljevic and Hannam, 2008; Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006; Johan, 2009) mainly because it has the potential to transform both the social and educational life of young people through the acquisition of cultural and social capitals (Ateljevic and Hannam, 2008; Maoz, 2008; Myers and Hannam, 2008). Indeed, GYT as a form of mobility provides an opportunity for gappers to experience cross-cultural exchanges, learn and gain from their first-hand experiences, and construct and negotiate their identities which likely benefit their future both personally and professionally (Johan, 2009). Clearly, GYT has the potential to
enhance lifelong learning and support not only youth transition but also personal transformation.

This study combines various concepts relating to youth and travel (transition, mobility and identity) with pertinent learning theories, all of which are concerned, to varying degrees, with significant and far-reaching personal change; these phenomena are explored from the perspective of individual learning. Acknowledging the significant relationship between young people's experiences during GYT and their learning in terms of personal growth and development during their transition period, and considering the importance of these issues, the subject has not been explored in any great depth in the literature. Some recent literatures have noted that the connection between travel and learning is not well researched within tourism studies (e.g. Falk, Ballantyne, Packer and Benckendorff, 2012, and Stone and Petrick, 2013).

Yet, hitherto no research has been attempted to explain GYT from a learning theory perspective as discussed in this study (i.e. from Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory Perspective and Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Perspective). Hence, this research study proposes to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of GYT from the perspective of individual learning theories derived from cognitive, educational and social psychology, thereby addressing a gap in current understanding.

In reviewing various learning theories, insights from four learning theories appear initially to be relevant to the GYT experience: Andragogical Learning Theory (Knowles, 1990); Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984); Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991); and Levels of Learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978; 1996; Bateson, 1972). Andragogical Learning Theory assists in building an understanding of the important role that GYT plays in young people's transition from child to adulthood. Experiential Learning Theory enables us to explore how GYT experience could potentially enhance gappers' knowledge as they reflect on their experiences abroad. Transformative Learning helps to explain the potential that young gappers have in becoming active learners and in being personally transformed by their GYT experience. Finally, Levels of Learning Theory assists in an evaluation of the complexity of learning of the gappers, e.g. superficial ('fixing the action') or deeper ('making significant changes in values and beliefs').

While all four of these theories can be used to gain a better understanding of the learning process of the gappers it was decided as the main study reached the data collection
stage that Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991) are the best suited for explaining how the gappers learn, and hence these were used to analyse the data. The two theories conceptualize learning as a process (i.e. four learning stages of experiential learning and ten learning phases of transformative learning) which resonate with the accounts of the gappers. For these reasons, the use of the two theories in the deductive analysis process and the discussion of findings were considered the most suitable.

Clearly, the literature suggests that learning may occur at various levels and degrees, and that transformation is a plausible outcome of learning from GYT. Indeed, GYT has the potential to facilitate, often in unplanned and incidental ways, not only transitions in particular life stages but also in a more transformational sense, relating to fundamental ways in which a young person views, understands and makes sense of the world, and that ultimately this may result in sometimes profound and lasting personal transformation. For instance, as a result, the returning students who have gained cultural and social capitals through their GYT experience are likely to be more open to new ideas and challenges. Thus, a successful higher education experience is one with the potential to meet these students’ expectations in terms their learning capacity, and challenge them further towards knowledge acquisition and personal transformation.

1.2. DEFINITIONS OF GYT

Upon a review of various definitions and literatures pertaining to GYT and gappers (see Chapter Two), and through confirmation during a preliminary study (see Chapter Four), the following definition of GYT has been chosen as the most appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Definition of GYT:

"an extended period of time (usually one year, but ranges between 3 - 24 months) taken off as a break from an individual's everyday life at home, used to travel and perform various activities while abroad, with anticipation of unusual experiences during the trip and future educational, professional or/and personal benefits upon returning."1

(Source: Researcher)

1 This long-term overseas break usually happens after formal education, normally undertaken by student/recent graduates. Nevertheless, the young career gappers (i.e. gappers who take a break during their working life) are also represented in this definition.
1.3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The assessment of various concepts and theories above highlighted a few gaps within the GYT literature. The striking gap is within tourism, travel and leisure studies in which only very limited GYT research exists. The limited existing literature is mainly combined with or borrowed from backpacking and budget-travel literature, and focuses mainly on the definition, classification, and description of activities relating to GYT (e.g. Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005). Specifically, there are gaps in the area of the potential outcome of GYT for the gappers. A few studies touch upon these areas briefly (e.g. Inkson and Myers, 2003); however these works do not examine them in any great depth. Nevertheless, it could be argued that this topic is particularly important, as GYT represents a popular and important segment of the travel industry, with young people as the main target market. With no established evidence from academic studies, the claimed benefits of GYT which are often presented by GYT companies remain unsubstantiated. Meanwhile, the number of young gappers embarking and planning to embark on GYT continues to grow.

As clearly stated by Hall, Coffey and Williamson (1999: 501), young people lead the future of society: they “are positioned at the leading edge of many aspects of contemporary social change.” Consequently, young people’s transition is important for both themselves – their present and future – and for others surrounding them, including society at large. Arguably, understanding the complexity of youth transition is critical. Furthermore, a few scholars (e.g. Newman and Newman, 1997; Nielsen, 1996) suggest that during the transition period, young people are at a vulnerable stage as transition necessarily involves changes, turbulence and uncertainties as participants move from childhood to adulthood via adolescence. Hence, by undertaking GYT abroad, the gappers’ transition process is made more complex as the context has moved from the ‘familiar at home’ to a ‘completely unfamiliar abroad.’ Positively, despite the challenges the gappers face during their trip, the literature reviewed provides affirmation that the GYT experience offers potential for personal growth and development which provides those who experience it with a direction for change. Nevertheless, the complexity of the participants’ transition and the potential outcome of such transition highlights that researching this area is a worthwhile endeavour.

Specifically, this study is interested in exploring the learning of the young gappers, in terms of both outcome and process. As previously mentioned, despite strong evidence pointing to the association between young people’s travel experiences and the learning
potential embedded within that experience, no dedicated research has been undertaken on this topic which draws on the various authorities in the field of learning theory. In reality, understanding what young people learn and how they learn are of paramount importance and must be adequately theorised. More importantly, gappers' experiential learning within the context of GYT could represent and be applicable to their learning within a wider life context (e.g. any locations/situations other than travel abroad), and that within these experiences the gappers could potentially transform their way of learning and be transformed by critically challenging their current perspectives of life (see: Mezirow, 1991).

Based on this rationale, this research ventures to provide both a theoretical and practical contribution to the literature.

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Aim:

The main aim of the study is to understand the outcomes of GYT and the processes of learning during GYT in order to investigate whether the GYT experience facilitates personal growth and self-development.

Research Questions:

Based on the above aim and based on the assertion that learning occurs during GYT and it facilitates personal growth and self-development, this study proposes three main research questions:

Preliminary Study:

1. What is Gap Year Travel (GYT)?

Main Study:

2. What are the outcomes of GYT Learning (GYTL)?
   (i.e. what the gappers learned)

3. What are the processes of GYT Learning (GYTL)?
   (i.e. how the gappers learned)

The first research question sought clarity of the definition of what GYT is from the perspective of the GYT participants in addition to the definitions provided by the literature. It serves as a concept clarification exercise which was conducted through a preliminary study,
and is consequently used as a foundation for the main study. The second and third research questions form the research inquiries for the main study.

1.5. SAMPLING FOR THIS STUDY

Based on a review of the current literature in this area, the criteria for participant selection was as follows: 1) within the age range of 17-30 years; 2) based in the UK; 3) embarked on any major overseas travel experience in the form of independent or unorganized travel (before, during and after university); 4) within a 3 to 24 months travel period taken within the last 24 months. Based on these criteria, the participants were recruited by e-mail and/or flyers to all Universities, Colleges and Educational Institutions in South East England (i.e. 114 education institutions through their Student Union representatives; see Appendix 3). Flyers were sent to all Students' Union offices in the area requesting for assistance in posting flyers at their educational institutions.

1.6. THESIS FRAMEWORK

In exploring the proposed research agenda, this thesis will guide the reader through five main components: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussions and conclusion, organized as Parts I to V.

This first part – Introduction – provides an overview of the thesis highlighting the background, rationale and research questions of the study along with some introduction to GYT (i.e. definition and population) (Chapter One).

The second part – Literature Review – is composed of two chapters: Chapters Two and Three. The first chapter discusses the phenomenon of Gap Year Travel (GYT). First, it examines the phenomenon from both macro and micro perspectives reviewing its historical background and its definitions and categorizations as well as offering a definition of GYT for this study. Then, it examines the GYT experience in greater depth in order to understand the process that gappers underwent during their trip. While Chapter Two evaluates GYT from the view of tourism studies, the following chapter reviews GYT mainly from the perspectives of relevant theories. Since learning in GYT is the main focus of this study, the chapter starts by exploring the relationships between GYT and the notion of learning. It also examines the potential relevance of four learning theories: Pedagogy and Andragogy (Knowles, 1984; 1990), Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991), Level of Learning Theories (Bateson’s Level of Learning (Bateson, 1984); Single and
Chapter One - Introduction

Double-loop Learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978; 1996) and First and Second Order Change (Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch, 1974) which will then narrowed down further to two learning theories most relevant to this study: Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991). Then, the chapter follows up further linking GYT to the concepts of youth transition, mobility and identity in which a complex view of youth transition today along with the potential of GYT as a form of mobility and a tool for identity construction are discussed. The chapter ends with an integrative model that encompasses these concepts and provides a basis for this study.

Finally, and as a more general point, Saunders and Rojon (2011) outline and discuss what being critical in the literature review means. First, in terms of content, the literature review needs to be comprehensive, yet it should include only those things which are relevant to the purpose of the study. Second, in terms of structure, it should provide an overview on the area of research narrowing down to the specifics. Third, in terms of value assessment, the key is in comparing and contrasting various views with a particular emphasis on theoretical and methodological rigour (see Hodgkinson, Herriott and Anderson, 2001 in Saunders and Rojon, 2011) and a clear differentiation between facts and opinions. To provide a comprehensive, yet relevant, and critical literature, the literature review chapters of this study will follow these suggestions.

The third part – Research Methodology – presents the research design of this study. This chapter (Chapter Four) discusses the most appropriate research philosophy and research approach for this study. Before moving discussing the research design for the main study, it presents the research methodology and findings of the preliminary study on the fundamental parameters of GYT, which provides direction for the remainder of this research. In discussing the research design, the chapter examines the most appropriate time frame, data collection and sampling techniques to be adopted in this study. This is followed by discussions of various data analysis and reporting strategies that are most suitable for the main study. The chapter also takes a closer look at the various data quality issues relevant to this study, before concluding with a summary of research design for the main study.

The fourth part – Findings and Discussion – consists of Chapter Five to Chapter Nine. The first three chapters – Chapter Five to Chapter Seven – present the main findings of the study – on the learning outcomes of GYT (i.e. what gappers learnt?). While Chapter Five reports on the findings of the gappers’ understanding of the self as the results of the trip, by
touching upon discussions on building characters and gaining life skills, Chapter Six reveals that the gappers' experience is also beneficial in building better understanding of their relationships with others. Chapter Seven discusses the extent to which the gappers have started to reflect about their life and plan for their future, in terms of their studies and career, as well as their lifestyle.

Following the discussions on what the gappers learn, Chapter Eight and Nine present the more important findings of the study: on the learning process of GYT (i.e. how the gappers learn?). In Chapter Eight the learning processes of GYT are first examined through the perspectives of Experiential Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory, two theories that proved to be most relevant to GYT experiences as revealed from the gappers' narratives during the data collection. These findings are then synthesized further in Chapter Nine in the form of GYT Learning model that consists of six learning steps. Through these findings and discussions chapters, Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 are addressed and explored.

Finally, the fifth part – Conclusion – revisits the research purpose and restates the key findings, theories and understanding emerging from the study. The three research questions are revisited briefly in this concluding chapter (Chapter Ten), along with a review on the key findings, their contribution to knowledge and practical implications. The chapter is concluded by reflecting on the limitations of the study and the researcher’s reflective account of the research process as well as suggesting directions for future research.
PART II.

LITERATURE REVIEW
CHAPTER TWO

GAP YEAR TRAVEL (GYT)

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the importance of understanding GYT phenomenon. First, its historical background is examined. Then, various definitions and categories of GYT are compared and contrasted highlighting the difficulty in defining GYT. The challenges in defining GYT have called for a definitional exercise on the nature of GYT by the gappers themselves (this was conducted as part of a preliminary study and reported in the later chapter (see Chapter Four)). GYT cannot simply be defined without a discussion on the many factors it encompasses in this chapter each of these factors will be discussed and examined in order to provide some understanding of the process that gappers undergo during their GYT experiences. The GYT experience will be examined from the perspective of a process model which consists of the three major parts: the gappers, their experience and the outcome including benefits to the individual and to others.

2.2. GAP YEAR TRAVEL (GYT)

Gap Year Travel (GYT) is a relatively new segment within the travel and tourism industry as it has only been well established since the late 1990s. Nevertheless, GYT has now become an important phenomenon, receiving attention from the market (e.g. GYT companies) and support in forms of publicity and endorsements from private and public sectors. The global GYT market involves around 1 to 1.5 million trips per year, and is expected to grow at 8% annually, which is around twice the rate of global tourism trips (Mintel, 2005). ‘Gappers’ are estimated to spend around £5 billion annually (average of £4800/gapper), with the UK as the biggest market spending approximately £2.5 billion annually (ibid). Although they have low daily spending, the extended length of each trip generally increases the gappers’ total spending.

In the context of rising gap year participation over the last 15 years and despite its increasing popularity and promising future outlook, the number of research papers in the academic literature on GYT is limited to the work of a few scholars (e.g. Birch and Miller,
Two of the most comprehensive studies include government and market research reports by Jones (2004) and Mintel (2005). Jones (2004) provides a review of GYT from an educational perspective on definitional structure, access and participation, GYT providing sector, its accreditation and quality assurance. Nevertheless his study is limited in that the data is mainly sourced from secondary data, whereas the original research represented is based mainly on the perspectives of GYT industry representatives (23 interviews) and only nine gappers were interviewed. The Mintel report (2005) mainly reviews the history and background of GYT, market influences, profile and segmentations as well as company profiles and GYT product distribution from a commercial perspective. The remainder of academic review on GYT covers a specific area of research, for example, the importance of work in GYT (Duncan, 2004), motivation for GYT (Martin, 2010), culture and authentic experience of GYT (Huxley, 2004), etc.

Yet, the literature review process highlights that the study of GYT faces challenges as defining or creating precise boundaries for GYT is a complex task. Literatures hitherto have not yet agreed on one common, clear and comprehensive definition of GYT that covers and serves all purposes. Indeed, Mintel (2005) criticises the fact that the term ‘gap year’ is ill-defined and ambiguous. Jones (2004) also argues that both the term ‘gap year’ and ‘year out’ are problematic because neither represents a tightly-defined phenomenon. Various reasons exist behind these definitional challenges. Firstly, GYT covers a broad area of travel and involves many interconnected factors (see also Section 2.7.). The second reason why creating a comprehensive definition is so challenging is due to the GYT participants themselves. The ‘gappers’ as the subject of the study and the consumers of GYT experience vary in terms of a number of factors, e.g. personal characteristics, choice of activities, destinations, length of trips, mode of travels, decisions to travel alone/or with others, motivations, perceptions of benefits, etc. It is for this reason that creating a definition and specifying the boundaries of GYT is a crucial first step. Finally, the influences on the development of GYT come from both current demographic changes and a long history of long-term budget youth travel evolution. Thus, the notion of GYT cannot be examined separately from these external and
historical issues, and it becomes a necessity to review them to arrive at a clearer starting point for this study. The remainder of this current chapter will address these issues and provide a more concrete definition of GYT and what it involves.

2.3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.3.1. Historical Tradition of Long-term Travel

The recent origin of GYT is closely related to the various historical traditions of long-term travel, dating back to the broader history of tourism. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the aristocratic women and men of the Victorian age travelled to far-away countries during the Grand Tour. They gained experiences through sightseeing, adventure, and education (Adler, 1985), as well as through adaptation to hardships (Cohen, 1973). The 19th century notion of ‘tramping’ was used to describe the journey of young working class male artisans following a specified route to faraway places, driven by the search for training and work experience in order to learn trade skills (Adler, 1985). This tradition ended with World War I in Central Europe, and in the 20th century, unskilled and unorganized migrant workers became the main ‘trampers’. As Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) observe, both the demographics of travellers and the meaning of ‘tramp’ changed as economic conditions improved.

From this point on, what was originally organized and structured travel has taken on a more active recreational role and touristic purpose, described as ‘a form of play’ by Adler (1985), and ‘leisure time discovering’ by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995). The support for youth travel strengthened through the birth of youth organisations such as The YMCA (1844), The YWCA, (1855), The Boy Scouts Association (1908), and The Girl Guides Association (1910). Finally, the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) was formed in 1910 in Germany, creating the foundation on which youth and modern long-term travel is built.

At the end of World War II in Western Europe, the mass young-persons’ tourist industry began (Carr, 1998) and grew in parallel with mainstream tourism due to improved economic conditions and increased prosperity (Aramberri, 2001). While at first young people travelled along with their families, they soon embarked on their own independent travel (Carr, 1998). Hitchhiking was undertaken by students and other middle-class youth throughout the continent. The increased number of affordable transportation through the
introduction of cheap airfares and the railway system, low-priced accommodation options, coupled with availability of shops, nightclubs, and cafes (Baum, 1996; Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995) also served as driving factors.

In the 1960s and 1970s, ‘hippies’ and drifters in Europe consisted of a majority of Europeans and a growing number of Americans, Canadians and Australians (Cohen, 1973). Subsequently, throughout the 1970s and 1980s up until the present day, student travel has become very popular and has taken various forms. Nevertheless, unlike adult tourism, the youth market has been relatively neglected in tourism research (Carr, 1998; Seekings, 1995), mainly due to a misconception in its early stages by organisations and authorities as to the economic value of young tourists (Seekings, 1995). Following this, Cohen’s (1972) work on differentiation between non-institutionalized and institutionalized tourists has initiated the study of backpackers (Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai, 2002).

It is evident that there is a plethora of terms associated with GYT. Although they are similar to each other, each term offers a slightly different connotation. Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) have highlighted the important features of some of these terms and summarized them in an evolutionary framework of the backpacker phenomenon (see Figure 1). For example, the label ‘hitchhiking’ clearly defines the activity/transport mode as a main feature, whereas the terms drifters and wanderers suggest a low-social/spatial organisational feature and long-term budget travellers is defined by its money and extended time feature (ibid). Clearly, the label ‘GYT’ also provides a distinct implication, which will be explored further in this section.

Mintel (2005) acknowledges GYT’s roots in student travel and the ‘hippie trails’ to India, hence, confirming the continuation of the long-term travel tradition. Recognized only as a luxurious activity open to a minority of people in the 1970s and 1980s, the gap year concept developed through the 1990s and has received positive encouragement by some universities and potential employers. By the 1990s GYT did not only represent a ‘year away’ but also took on a strong association with ‘a purposeful activities’ with ‘career development potential’ (Mintel, 2005). In 2001, approximately 50,000 students took a year out and approximately 90,000 in 2005, an increase prompted for a number reasons, e.g. the increased
Figure 1. The Backpacker Phenomenon: An Evolutionary Framework (Source: Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995).
media attention that has surrounded famous gappers such as Prince William and Prince Harry.

2.3.2. The Emergence of GYT

Throughout the history of GYT, many of the terms mentioned above (e.g. hitchhikers) have shared some similarities and differences with GYT, nevertheless the term GYT currently is more closely related to contemporary backpacking (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Mintel 2003a; Mintel 2004a; Mintel, 2006a; Sørensen, 2003), long-term travel (Mintel, 2004a; Mintel, 2004b; Mintel, 2003b; Riley, 1988), independent travel (Mintel, 2002; Mintel, 2005), round the world travel (Mintel, 2006a), overseas travel (Mintel, 2005; Mintel, 2006a; Mintel, 2006b), youth travel (Mintel, 2004c), student travel (Mintel, 2003b), overland expeditions (Mintel, 2001), budget travel (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995), etc. The association between GYT and these terms is mainly because of GYT has more positive connotations than some of the previous labels such as trampers, drifters and wanderers (O’Reilly, 2006).

The more recent addition to backpacking literature which is also applicable to GYT is the notions of lifestyle backpackers by Cohen (2011) and flashpackers by Hannam and Diekmann (2010). The first describes those “who travel as a lifestyle for years on end” with “sustained physical mobility” (Cohen, 2011: 1535); these are different from GYT as a temporary backpacking experience. The latter refers to the fact that backpackers today tend to be highly dependent on communications technology, e.g. the use of mobile phone, table and laptop, marking a difference between the current backpacker and the previous generations of backpackers. In agreement to Hannam and Diekmann (2010), Paris (2012) suggests the emergence of flashpackers as sub-culture in which he argued that they are likely to be the slightly older, more elite version of the backpackers who generally are more affluent and/or technologically savvy in such the availability of their travel expenditure and their technology know how are the two main differences between them than the common backpackers. According to Butler and Hannam (2013: 1), this new knowledge may “remove some of the stereotypical traits appropriated to most independent tourists in general, and backpackers in particular.” Considering that gappers tends to come from more affluent background (see also Section 2.7.1.), it is possible that some of the gappers may be classified as flashpackers.
Indeed, Lyons et al. (2012: 365) also added that the more recent generation of youth, the Net Generation, who are known for their high use of technology and media (see also McMillin, 2007) are also the same generation who embraced GYT “as a desirable and acceptable path for personal and career development”. Needless to say, these facts have a major impact on their GYT, how they travel as well as plan and documented their travel. Furthermore, as Hannam, Butler and Paris (2014) argue, the use of technology may eliminate boundaries between one’s presence and absence while travelling, which may impact gappers’ interactions with others at home, at destinations and worldwide.

Indeed, GYT may share many attributes with backpacking. As Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) suggest, contemporary backpackers are defined by the importance of the following features: tendency for low cost accommodation as well as extended and flexible stay and itineraries including leisure and social time. This example portrays the importance of accommodation, social interaction, arrangements and trip length and activities, which significantly defines the contemporary backpacker labels and confers it to the travellers that are associated with these features. In actual fact, ‘the defining feature’ introduced by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) offers the argument that a type of travel cannot be defined without understanding the types of travellers and other factors surrounded them. The following discussion will contribute to the analysis of the GYT label, its origin and how it affects the currently widespread definitions of GYT.

The origin of the term ‘Gap Year’ itself is quite vague, and “it is unclear when the term ‘gap year’ was first used” (Simpson, 2004: 11). Nevertheless, the term was likely to originate from, and coincide with the fact that if and when students take ‘time out’ from education, they are likely to have to skip ‘a complete year out’ since the student intake is usually done once a year, on an annual basis. Subsequently the unofficial term ‘gap year’ was used and widely accepted by the students themselves, the education and government system, and its circulation was then commercially enhanced through the media and by gap year providers. Simpson (2004) also notes other terms used to describe GYT: ‘year off’, ‘year out’, ‘a career break’ or ‘a period of travel’.

Despite limited literature linking between other types of travel and GYT, GYT is likely to be one of the latest evolutions of independent long-term youth travels. For example, O’Reilly (2006) who examined the growth and transformation of long-haul, long-term
independent travel, acknowledged that GYT is indeed a more recent version of these types of travel that occurred throughout recent history. However, a significant leap has occurred, as implied by Simpson’s (2004: 19) statement: “Where the gap year may once have been for rebels and ‘dropouts’ it is now the preserve of hopeful professionals and future kings”, suggesting that GYT has a much more positive and privileged meaning attached to it compared with previous labels.

2.3.3 Recent Travel Associations to GYT

The study of backpackers is the most widely available related research which is the most directly and recently associated with GYT, and where subjects come from a similar market. The term of ‘Gap Year Travel’ is well known and now extensively used, mainly in Australia, Southeast Asia, and New Zealand; not only by the general public, but also amongst the backpackers themselves (McCulloch, 1992; Murphy, 2001). On the other hand, the term GYT is now more prominent in the UK than previously (Mintel, 2005; Simpson, 2004; 2005).

Although to a certain degree backpacker is still a ‘recognizable stereotype’, creating a clear distinction between backpacking and other types of travels remains difficult (O’Reilly, 2006: 999). An overview of various literature on backpacking suggests some similarities in the definition of this term with GYT, as summarized by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995: 830-831), backpacker is “a young, budget-minded tourist, with a preference for inexpensive accommodation, and emphasis on meeting other people (both locals and outsiders), independently organized and flexible itinerary, longer rather than brief vacations, and an emphasis on informal and participatory recreation activities.” Indeed, these descriptions of backpackers are easily transferable on to gappers and their trips. Therefore, it is not surprising that the term ‘backpacking’ is often interchangeable with the designation of ‘gap year’.

How can GYT or gappers be differentiated from other types of travellers? Although GYT in essence might be the most recent term used in place of a non-institutionalized type of travel, GYT is arguably different in that participants have a clear sense of purpose, and involving a clear break from everyday existence within a contained time line. Indeed, Jones (2004: 22) suggests that GYT is “best categorised in the first instance by the nature of the break taken from an educational, training or employment trajectory.” Furthermore, he defines
it based on 'period of time' and 'the purpose' of the travel. Thus, in this case, GYT is
different to other similar travel activities referred to in the literature as GYT offers more
learning and transformational benefits during the travel period. Nevertheless, in order to
make this claim verifiable, empirical research into the purpose of the travel in relation to
educational, training or employment path of participants is necessary.

One possible alternative to the potentially vague and ambiguous term of ‘Gap Year’
may be found in Inkson and Myers (2003: 171), which noted “the big OE” (Overseas
Experience) as “a period of travel, exploration and personal development”. Arguably, the
term Overseas Experience is an equivalent to ‘Gap Year’, in which the main difference is that
Overseas Experience is widely used in New Zealand and Australia, while ‘Gap Year’ is more
widely used in the UK (Noy, 2004). Besides Overseas Experience, the term ‘working abroad’
is equally prominent among New Zealanders and Australians. Nevertheless, it will not be
discussed in depth in this study, as the term ‘working abroad’ focuses merely on one activity
of GYT, which limits its usefulness.

2.3.4. GYT and Volunteer Tourism

One other area of research worth mentioning in this review of the GYT literature is
volunteer tourism as these two areas intersect and overlap. Volunteer tourism (also known as
‘voluntourism’) has existed for decades, yet it is currently “one of the fastest growing
alternative tourism market in the world” (Conran, 2011: 1454) receiving interests by a
number of stake holders (i.e. consumers, governments, destinations and providers)
(Alexander, 2012). Literature also documented that while volunteer tourism is available for
all ages (Bailey and Russell, 2012); it has recently become one of the most recent popular
forms of travel for young people with a number of researchers studying this area (Lyons et
al., 2012). Furthermore, Wearing and McGehee (2013) documented that like GYT, Volunteer
Tourism also started as a British/European phenomenon which later expanded internationally.
In retrospect, it appears that GYT and volunteer tourism may share developmental
background.

Volunteer tourism research continues to grow significantly with recent studies to
include volunteer motivations, value gains from the trip, impacts on the tourist (e.g. Pan,
2012; Alexander, 2012; Lo and Lee, 2011; Bailey and Russell, 2012) as well as other various
areas such as host-guest relationships (Wearing and McGehee, 2013), some of these topics which may be relevant to GYT research. Nevertheless, the research in the area remains lacking and the universal definition of volunteer tourism is still fairly limited (i.e. it is generally not very specific and only suggests that it includes aspects of tourism and volunteering) (Andereck, McGehee, Lee and Clemmons, 2012). Agreeing on this, Bailey and Russell (2012) and Wearing (2001) argue that volunteer tourism could include all types of short and long-term experiences which vary largely from teaching to restoration and conservations but the focus remains on tourism and volunteering related activities (see also Travel Activities under Section 2.7.2).

Lyons et al. (2012) highlight a number of similarities between GYT and volunteer tourism. First, Generation Y, which is also referred as Net Generation (see also Section 2.3.2. on Flashpackers) who is the current pre-university or career-gappers age group have high desires for both GYT as a mean to gain new experiences as currency exchange for their economic capital as well as volunteering opportunity as a mean to give back to community. Second, both GYT and Volunteer Tourism is often sought after for they offer some benefits such as cultural exchange if done abroad (i.e. international volunteer tourism) (see also Brown, 2005), which allows the participants to work closely together with others and the environment (Wearing, 2001) hence may evoke some sense of intimacy that bring people closer together from sharing the same experience (Conran, 2011).

Third, volunteer tourism, like GYT, can offer an opportunity for young people to take time out that is often deemed to be useful by the society. For instance, Sin (2009) argues that volunteer tourism could be seen as service-learning which involves educational experience relating to others. This brings us to the last but important point that both GYT and Volunteer Tourism may provide the opportunity for change and learning. While travel and learning remains to be an area of research that has been neglected and under-researched (Falk, Ballatyne, Packer and Benckendorff, 2012), along with Johan’s (2009) assertion that GYT has the potential for learning and transformation, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) also suggest that volunteer tourism also has the potential for transformation for its participants (see further discussion in Chapter Three) which could lead to a better self-reflection and development (see Wearing and McGehee, 2013).
Clearly, GYT and volunteer tourism share some territories both in practice and research. Like GYT and other de-commodified tourism such as backpacking, volunteer tourism offers one of the most progressive areas of research in tourism industry (Wearing and McGehee, 2013). Perhaps, this is the reason for the recent emergence of “volunteer tourism as an alternative gap year” for young people (Lyons et al., 2012: 361). In this study, volunteer activities are regarded as a part of GYT activities (see Section 2.7.2.). It is important to have a clear differentiation between the two: volunteer tourism and volunteer activities as part of GYT in this study. GYT encompasses a range of potential activities with volunteering as one of the activities (see also Jones (2004)), whereas in volunteer tourism volunteering is mandatory component of the tourism undertaken (Andereck et al., 2012; Bailey and Russell, 2012 and Wearing, 2001). As Bailey and Russell (2012) argue, it is important to be clear about these arrangements as they may influence the outcomes of experiences; with no clear differentiation between the two the perceptions of the outcomes of experiences could also become unclear.

2.3.5. The Emerging Themes of Leisure, Work, Education and Transition

Several transformations are noticeable during the development of GYT, e.g. the continuously changing characteristics of the travel participants, destinations, activities, mode and schedule of travel, etc., referred to as ‘defining features’ by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995). Despite the changes that occur along the way, similar patterns are repeated and remained throughout history.

First, since the Grand Tour period in the 17th and 18th centuries, the affluent (white, middle class and above) and well-educated with means and funding have become the trendsetters. The trend is then followed by others, signifying mass tourism and often being finished off at the other continuum of the social class, until the new trendsetter arrives with a new innovation – a new idea of destination; activity and travel style (see: Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). Nevertheless, long-term travel has always been associated with youth, travelling to faraway places. This denotes long-haul and long-term travel, in which some are more organised (i.e. following certain routes) than others (i.e. independent). As mentioned earlier, one of the recent examples of the gap year trendsetter is Prince William who took his
GYT following the completion of his studies at Eton (Simpson, 2005). Nevertheless, GYT today has become more common for the public than it has been before.

Second, but most importantly are the emerging themes of leisure, work, education and transition during the development of these various forms of travel. The idea of combining leisure and work/education with adventurous experiences has been interwoven into the fabric of long-term travel throughout the history. For example, the Grand Tour was undertaken with the purpose of rehabilitation after illness, respite from domestic difficulties, finishing for women or as an opportunity to experience the exotically foreign with or without the safety net of companions or chaperones (see: Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; White and White, 2004).

Similarly, another pattern that has also been echoed through the history of GYT is the purpose and outcome of travel in relation to education, work and transition. In the case of the Grand Tour, for instance, it was often regarded as the finishing of the formal education (Hibbert, 1969; Swinglehurst, 1974), whereas quest for vocational experience was the central feature of travel by trampers in the 19th century (Adler, 1985). In the 1960s, the places and routes visited during the Grand Tour were revisited once again by the youth in their 'new' grand tour, participants of which had similar motivations to the original Grand Tourists, according to Pearce (1988). Pearce (1998) also argues that the inspiration to blend recreation, with work, personal development and adventure within new territories is here to stay.

In the same vein, the literature also recognizes the theme of individual transition and inward changes. As a result of the Grand Tour, one's 'sophistication, worldliness and social awareness' are enhanced (Hibbert, 1969; Swinglehurst, 1974). Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995: 821) highlight the transition theme around the Grand Tour, suggesting that the tour served "as a ritual effecting the separation of young men from home and family". In fact, these researchers document the role of travel as a rite of passage and as a preliminary transition and suggest that "travel [has] become part of the education process and forms the preliminary stage in which individuals learn and master the ability which will be required from them to become adults" (ibid: 827).

Several scholars have found that young travellers embarking on long-term budget travel often acknowledge that at the beginning of their journey, they are at a 'life juncture'
situation (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Cohen, 1973; Graburn, 1983; Maoz, 2006b; Riley, 1988; Sørensen, 2003). For example, Riley (1988) documents that many backpackers had recently graduated, married or divorced, or were between jobs, suggests that they were at a crossroads in life at the point of embarking on their journey.

Furthermore, the literature provides evidence that travel presents a way of postponing the assumption of adult responsibilities (Riley, 1988), assists participants in finding a new meaning or direction in life, marks a break and a change in habitual patterns of daily living (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Elsrud, 2001), acts as a space for reflection (Muller and O’Cass, 2001) and a way of avoiding mundane living (Cohen, 1973). It appears that travel facilitates a transition, by providing an interval from social pressures and new or different responsibilities and roles (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). Indeed, a more recent study of Israeli backpackers’ journeys by Shulman, Blatt and Walsh (2006) concludes that journeys often serve as an experimental search for a mature self-identity and as a rite of passage during the transition to adulthood.

The above review confirms the need for an overview of travel, not only as a vocational, educational and transitional instrument, but also as both a process and an outcome involving personal transition and transformation. Furthermore, the review also calls for examination of these themes from a more holistic point of view. Due to the interrelationships among these themes, analysing them collectively rather than separately could be more beneficial in providing a comprehensive overview of GYT.

2.4. DEFINITIONS OF GYT

No agreement has been found on a common definition of GYT (Jones, 2004). It is also true that the number of studies offering any definition at all is very limited. The two most widely used and readily available definitions of GYT are by Jones (2004) and Mintel (2005), however other scholars have inferred, but not clearly defined GYT or categorised gappers as discussed below.

2.4.1. Jones' Definition (2004)

The definition of GYT produced by Jones (2004: 8) suggests GYT as “any period of time between three and 24 months which an individual takes ‘out’ of formal education,
training or the workplace, and where the time out sits in the context of a longer career trajectory." He highlights 'time out' as an important criterion of GYT, which suggests that it is a period taken out from regular activities (i.e. in this case out of formal education, training or the workplace). He further clarifies that his description of 'time out' is an assigned time period between 3-24 months, and a deeper underlying context that it is for the purpose of a longer career trajectory.

Moreover, Jones (2004) suggests that in attempt to create a clearer picture, definitions of GYT need to be based on two important aspects. Firstly, the gappers' life event or developmental stages, and secondly a model typology for the kinds of activities which are undertaken during the gap year. Hence, once again the literature indicates that understanding the gappers as the subject of the study is of a paramount important in identifying and defining GYT.

2.4.2. Mintel's Definition (2005)

The consulting firm Mintel (2005: 5) offers the following definition as a point of reference: “travel undertaken by people who have decided to delay further education or employment in order to travel”. It is interesting that Mintel (2005) and Jones (2004) offer very similar definitions, yet they approach the phenomenon of GYT from rather different perspectives. Mintel (2005) uses the terms 'break' and 'delay' which are similar to Jones' (2004) concept of 'time out', suggesting 'a temporary stop' from a normal routine. In its characterisation of various groups of gappers, Mintel (2005) utilises the words 'between', 'retired from', 'prior to' which denote a transition period in the gappers' lives. Likewise, the clause 'during their working life' in the definition of career gappers could very well suggest a situation where an individual is between jobs. In both cases, both definitions highlight the life stages of the gappers.

From Mintel's (2005) point of view, 'travel' was the main motivation for embarking on GYT, whereas Jones' (2004) suggests that travel actually acts as a secondary motivation, and suggests that travelling actually is a means to another purpose, i.e. better career prospects upon returning to the home country. Jones' (2004) definition comes from a more social and political perspective, while Mintel's (2005) definition comes from a market research context, where gappers are treated as consumers. From a learning perspective, and for the purpose of
Chapter Two – Gap Year Travel (GYT)

this study, a combination of the two, i.e. the notion of travel as a purpose (i.e. an end of a process) and a means (i.e. a learning and transition process) serves a bigger purpose and will assist in understanding the gappers’ experiences in terms of the learning process.

2.4.3. Simpson’s Definition (2005)

Other definitions, besides those of Jones (2004) and Mintel (2005) are scarce. For example, in the case of Simpson (2005: 448), although no definition was provided, she did outline the traditional gap year as “a break from formal education or employment in order to find time to engage in ‘extra ordinary’ experiences”. Yet, she also added that this description is gradually changing as it has now become an integral component of formal education/employment.

The terms ‘extraordinary’ and ‘experiences’ are of importance in this definition, suggesting that the expectations and perceptions by individuals of the outcome of GYT are beyond the usual outcome of other kind of travels and that understanding what happened during these experiences may reveal ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’. What ‘extra-ordinary’ means is likely to be different for each gapper. From this perspective it should not be taken that a wide definition is necessarily required, but that there should be an attempt to understand the gappers’ expectations and perceptions of outcomes prior to their GYT experiences, as well as understanding the gappers’ learning and transformation processes during GYT.

Simpson (2005: 10) does not provide a rigorous categorisation of ‘gappers’, however, she does note that although in general “taking a ‘gap year’ predominantly occurs between school and university”, gap year “is increasingly being applied to a ‘break’ taken at other stages in the life course.” Simpson (2005) does not elaborate in depth the definition and categorization of GYT. Yet, her work provides a contribution by exploring the nature of the geography of GYT, and suggests the importance of understanding the way self-knowledge is produced during GYT. Hence, along with the work by Jones (2004) and Mintel (2005), Simpson’s work will be foundational to this research.

2.4.4. Heath’s Definition (2007)

Similar to Simpson (2005), Heath (2007) does not offer a direct definition of GYT. Nevertheless, an understanding of her view of GYT can be inferred from her explanations:
“Taking a year out – or, more precisely, 15 months – between the completion of A-levels or equivalent and the commencement of higher education is an increasingly common practice among standard-age British university entrants” (Heath, 2007: 89). (Note: Heath’s calculation of 15 months includes a full year of academic year (12 months) and three months summer vacation prior to the start of next academic year). This statement once again highlights the importance of the trip duration and (of who) the gappers (are). Interestingly, ‘the standard-age’ along with the ‘British phenomenon’ was indicated, signifying de novo who the gappers are in terms of age and origin/location. Heath also states: “The term ‘gap year’ is now widely used to refer to a diverse range of activities, involving various combinations of paid and unpaid work, leisure and travel” (ibid). In this statement, the significance of activities is greatly emphasized. It can be concluded that Heath’s equivalent of a GYT definition is based on an understanding of the gappers as individuals and the activities they experience, indicating that there are other factors ‘above and beyond’ those which any definition of GYT can absorb and present.

2.5. CATEGORIZATION OF GYT

2.5.1. Career/Education Categorization

Jones (2004) broadly distinguishes between gap year participants who take a break 1) after school (Group A); 2) during higher education (Groups B, C, and D); 3) during employment (Group E); 4) training (Group F); and 5) those who are in a complex combination of all of these (Group G) (see Table 1). The fact that this definition is based on the life events of gappers, clearly suggests that GYT may correspond to particular life transitions.

Furthermore, Mintel (2005) suggests three main categories of gappers based on the career/educational background of the gappers. (1) Pre-university gappers are the “consumers (who) are travelling between the completion of their secondary education and the commencement of university (or other forms of higher education)”; (2) Career gappers are “consumers who are taking a break during their working life... usually this is between jobs, but it could also be a break during an existing job”; (3) Pre-retirement gappers are “consumers who have retired from their formal careers (usually earlier than their mandatory
retirement age), and are travelling prior to commencing post-retirement activities which may involve establishing a small business, working for a charity, etc." (ibid: 5).

Both Mintel (2005) and Jones (2004) have overlooked a group of gappers, i.e. those doing GYT who are in transition between education and jobs. Nevertheless, this period is also important and represents distinct transitional phases in which individuals are likely to travel and that the characteristics in these two groups are likely to be distinct to others. Therefore, these categories are added and highlighted in Table 1. In recent years, the number of individuals who are studying and working at the same time has increased, and the gappers from this group deserve further scrutiny. Jones (2004) has assigned the label of ‘Group G - Complex Gap Year’ in which these three additional groups could be included. However, these additional groups have high level of importance hence should not be underestimated, and therefore, three additional separate groups should be created (Group 3a, 3b and 6).

2.5.2. Age-Based Categorization

As discussed above, long-term travel has generally been associated with younger travellers; yet identifying their age bracket is no easier than defining the term GYT. Originally, youth tourists were defined as those aged between 15 and 20 years (World Tourism Organisation, 1990). More recently a cut-off age of 26 years is used (World Tourism Organisation, 1991), suggesting that those who are above this age are likely to be in employment and experiencing different financial and other constraints than those aged less than 26 years. In Jones’ (2004) view, the age bracket of 15-25 years is the most useful basis for classifying gappers according to ‘life event’, i.e. the timing and relationship of their gap year to education, training or employment. While in the past the use of age bracket is practical, it may no longer be the case today (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995).

The term ‘youth’ has shifted due to changes in post-industrial society, such as changing lifestyles and increasing longevity (Mintel, 2005). The study by Mintel (2005) reported that the term youth has been extended from those in their early 20s to those in their mid-30s, and so is the expansion of mature students within the education system. On the other hand, it is often argued that teenagers mature more quickly and show eagerness to embark on holidays independent of their families at the earliest available opportunity. In this
In addition to the tourism literature, a theoretical framework of Levinson's (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McKee, 1978) model of life course could assist with a categorization based on age. Life course according to Levinson et al. (1978) and Levinson (1996) consists of four ‘overlapping’ eras: childhood and adolescence (0-22 years); early adulthood (17-45); middle adulthood (40-65); and late adulthood (over 60). This broad categorization is unlikely to be detailed enough for the purpose of this study. They also suggest ten developmental periods over one’s life course: early adult transition (17-22 years); entering the adult world (22-28), the age thirty transition (28-33); settling down and becoming one’s own person (33-40); the mid-life transition (40-45); entering middle adulthood (45-50); the age fifty transition (50-55); culmination of middle adulthood (55-60); the late adult transition (60-65), and the entry life structure for late adulthood (65 plus). Several studies (e.g. studies which examine tourist role preference, needs, social class, gender and life stage such as Gibson, 1989; Gibson, 1994; Yiannakis, Gibson and Murdy, 2000) have proved the usefulness of applying the categorizations by Levinson et al. (1978) in the context of an individual’s life course. In this study, a ten-level framework could be potentially useful in providing explanation for the gappers’ life transition (also see Chapter Three).

Literature in tourist motivation and behaviour sets out that ‘subjective age’ rather than chronological age could be more useful (Mintel, 2005; Muller and O’Cass, 2001). Aramberri (1991) in Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995: 827) added that “age in itself does not tell much about the nature of this type of tourism and that the age limit chosen”. According to Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995), there are other distinguishing factors, other than age, such as the psychological and sociological characteristics, and social and economical status of the individuals. Likewise, in spite of the model’s effectiveness, Gibson and Yiannakis (2002) argue for the examination of the individual through three perspectives at once: the sociocultural world; the self; and the individual’s participation in one’s external world, in order to achieve full comprehension of one’s life structure. Essentially, to comprehend the actual character of an individual’s life structure, one also needs to identify the influences
around the individual, e.g. their occupation, marital status, family life, interpersonal relations, psychological needs, etc. (Gibson and Yiannakis, 2002).

Following the classification for the gappers in terms of age category discussed above, a loose and more flexible age bracketing will be used for this study, by incorporating an understanding of the life stages from Levinson's (1996) model into the working category to ensure that narrow age-based and career/education categorization have not become limitations to this study. Furthermore, caution will be exercised because in reality these categories are likely to overlap beyond the assigned age category (see Table I). Finally, a thorough examination of the gappers' backgrounds and their relationships to the external environment should also be conducted prior, during and subsequent to their trip in order to take contextual factors into account.

2.5.3. Categorization of GYT for this study

Similarly, the discussion on various categories of gappers leads to a more defined set of categories that will be used for this study (Table I). The working categories will consist of seven groups of gappers: 1) Between School and University/Higher Education; 2) During University/Higher Education; 3) Between Education (School or University/Higher Education) and In Employment (Jobs or Training); 4) During or between Employment; 5) Studying and Working at the same time; 6) Complex Transition Period (e.g. neither unemployed/not registered as a student); and 7) In Retirement. For the reasons alluded to above, this classification is the most appropriate for this study i.e. due to the fact that the learning and transformation processes of individuals are likely based on the transition of life stages, and thus could assist in capturing the subtleties of these transition periods.

As the lives of young people today are more complex than they have been in the past (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998), their age-based and career/education categorization do not necessarily proceed in parallel. For example, at the age 17 or 30 years, one could be studying and/or working. As the purpose of this research is closely related to the young people's transition, this study will focus on the first six groups of gappers within the young age group between 17 to 30 years. The last group - 'in retirement' gappers - will not be used as the subject of the study for two reasons: firstly, that youth represents the largest segment of the GYT market and holds the greatest potential for growth (Mintel, 2003a; Mintel, 2003b;
Table 1. Categorization of the Gap Year Travel (GYT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education/Career Based Categorization</th>
<th>Potential Working Categorization for the Purposes of the Research</th>
<th>Age/Life-Based Categorization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Take a Break after School or JE</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Early adult transition (17-22 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1 Planned Post-School at 16</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Entering the adult world (22-28 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 Planned Post-School at 18</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. The age thirty transition (28-33 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 Default Post-School at 18</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Settling down and becoming one’s own person (33-40 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. During Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>5. The mid-life transition (40-45 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1 Undergraduate Break in Study</td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Entering middle adulthood (45-50 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2 Postgraduate Break In Study</td>
<td></td>
<td>7. The age fifty transition (50-55 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Immediate Post-University</td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Culmination of middle adulthood (55-60 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1 Break in Postgraduate Study</td>
<td></td>
<td>9. The late adult transition (60-65 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2 Postgraduate Combined with Course</td>
<td></td>
<td>10. The entry life structure for late adulthood (65 years plus)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>III. Employment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E Employment Break</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Immediate Post-Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Complex Combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Complex Gap Year</td>
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<td>IV. Training</td>
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<td>G Complex Gap Year</td>
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Note: Employment includes jobs and training.
Mintel, 2004b; Mintel 2006b); secondly, Hall et al. (1999) suggest transition between youth and adulthood, especially the teenage and early adult years as an important part of one’s development process. For these two reasons, youth transition is a crucial part of one’s life path. Research into this segment of the market, therefore holds much potential not only for developing better theories of GYT, but also contributing to the development of future generations. In addition to the education and/to work transitions based categorization, understanding age/life stages categorization as provided by Levinson’s (1996) model (see Table 1) is also important as it provides us with perspectives of the gappers’ life transitions (see also Chapter Three).

O’Reilly (2006: 999) points out the additional difficulty in defining GYT and related ideas: “it is as much about self-definition as it is about conformity to a set of descriptions.” Thus, the author proposes that a GYT definition is more than merely a definitional exercise, it is likely to require a clear understanding of who the gappers are and how their GYT experience is constructed, in order to enable an understanding of the gappers in their social context. Asking the young travellers themselves to provide a self-definition of ‘gappers’ and ‘GYT’ will be potentially useful, and will be the purpose of the preliminary study in this thesis (see Section 4.4.).

2.6. DEFINITION AND CATEGORIZATION OF GYT FOR THIS STUDY

Based on the background literature and the results of the preliminary study discussed in Section 4.4., the following summary definition is considered to be the most appropriate for the purpose of this study:

“an extended period of time (usually one year, but ranges between 3 – 24 months) taken off as a break from an individual’s everyday life at home, used to travel and perform various activities while abroad, with anticipation of unusual experiences during the trip and future educational, professional or/and personal benefits upon returning.”

Note: This long-term overseas break usually happens from/after formal education, which is normally undertaken by student/recent graduates. Nevertheless, the young career gappers are also represented in this definition.
Chapter Two - Gap Year Travel (GYT)

The decision to use this definition is based on the fact that it addresses the important elements of GYT as highlighted in the literature, and these are also confirmed by the interviewees in the preliminary study (see Section 4.4.). Principally it attends to the actual term of ‘gap’ which indicates a break or time off. It signifies an extended period of travel which accommodates trips of any duration that are not too short to be described as a regular holiday, but also not too long to be described as a long-term way of life (e.g. immigration) (Lyons, 2007). The definition also makes clear distinctions between usual place of residence (home) and place of travel (abroad), the gappers’ way of life while at home (everyday life) and abroad (extraordinary experiences). Limitations exist within this working definition. Although the opportunity to ‘experience the unusual’ is emphasized within this definition, the answer to what (kind) of experience is unusual are not sufficiently addressed.

Indeed, a few parts of the definitions may require further justification. Firstly, there is no definite agreement in the length of time describing GYT within the literature; nevertheless the duration of trips between 3-24 months is considered for this study. Secondly, the anticipation of ‘unusual experiences’ during the trip has not been discussed in depth by any scholar (e.g. the term is mentioned briefly by Simpson (2005); what the experience partially entails is discussed by Jones, 2004), yet the data in the preliminary study suggest that the gappers embark on GYT for reasons to experience, explore and enjoy life experiences other than those usually experienced. To shed light on this further, some explorations on what GYT experience are necessary in order to provide a clear definition of GYT. Thirdly, the future educational, professional and/or personal benefits upon returning are also still lacking empirical justifications, with a few exceptions (e.g. Inkson and Myers, 2003; Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005). This could be addressed in the main study as in one way or another it also incorporates the outcome and process of GYT learning.

While there remain some difficulties and limitations in creating definitions of GYT, this definition will assist this study in achieving the purpose of this research. The above definition will also be used as a basis for recruiting interviewees for the main study of this thesis, and as a framework for understanding the experience of the young gappers interviewed. Furthermore, in order to address limitations of the definitions as pointed out by the participants in the preliminary study, a more comprehensive review of the GYT experience
will be explored below in order to provide a more complete picture by exploring the gapper, the experience and the outcome of GYT.

2.7. UNDERSTANDING GYT EXPERIENCE

In their study, Inkson and Myers (2003) highlight the importance of gender, age, education, occupation, motivation, social support, and planning of overseas experience, which offers a potential theoretical underpinning and empirical foundation for this study. Similarly, they underline the significance of trip duration, location, types of trips and personal relationships during the trip. Finally, and importantly, they address the issue of ‘returning’ from the trip and the kind of competencies acquired during Overseas Experience (OE). The present study acknowledges and takes into consideration the framework suggested by Inkson and Myers (2003), but also takes into account other findings from the literature. In understanding the GYT experience, who the gappers are, their experiences and the outcomes will be drawn from various literatures.

2.7.1. The Gappers

With regard to the characteristics of OE participants, Inkson and Myers (2003) discuss gender, age, education, and occupation, but nevertheless, other additional factors identified in the literature search will be included in order to create a more holistic portrait of the gappers, including: country of origin (also illustrating its geographical distance); economic and cultural contexts; ethnicity; social class/family background; disabilities; and funding arrangements (Mintel, 2005). In the remainder of this chapter, the demographic background and personality, motivation and dispositions of the gappers will be touched upon, whereas learning ability and previous experiences will be explored in the subsequent chapter (Chapter Three) due to their close link to the concept of youth transition and learning.

Demographic Background. Due to the popularity of GYT as “a peculiarly British phenomenon” (Simpson, 2004: 10) and the UK-based focus of much of the GYT literature, the demographic data found in the literature are likely to corroborate this tendency although the literature also clearly indicates that the GYT phenomenon has also spread around the world (e.g. Blackburn et al. (2005); Lyons et al. (2012)).
Jones' (2004) study provides the most comprehensive review of GYT available in the literature which illustrates a series of characteristics of gappers, which have tendency to represent a particular social group. Gappers tend to be predominantly white with relatively affluent 'middle-class' backgrounds, are private and grammar school educated, especially from southern English HE institutions in the UK which are over represented, whereas both those of ethnic minorities or with disabilities are under-represented (ibid). Consistent with Jones' (2004) result, Maoz (2006a) documents that that the market for this type of travel (i.e. backpackers who are fairly similar to those who embark upon GYT) tends to be middle to upper class Westerners. With regard to gender and in the case of the British market, women are more highly represented compared to men (Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2006b), suggesting that there are more females travelling in comparison to men.

In demographic terms, the Lonely Planet Survey (Mintel, 2006b) found that the segment incorporating individuals aged 25-34 years was the largest for both Australia and the US. This is in the contrast to the UK, where almost half of their survey respondents were aged 18-24 years. There are most probably a number of explanations for this feature of the UK Market: the relative strength of the British Pound to destination countries with less strong currencies; the popularity of gap years in the UK, as well as the introduction at an early age to foreign travel, and the numerous flight, ferry and rail connections available from the UK to Europe.

In terms of the gappers’ economic background (i.e. that most gappers come from relatively affluent ‘middle-class’ backgrounds as suggested by Jones (2004) above), finance does not necessarily become the determinant of their involvement in GYT. Lack of finance is one reason, but not the only reason for gappers to not embark on a trip. In reality, the perception that parents usually fund GYT is not quite true, as Mintel (2005:12) reports that “most participants, even those from affluent backgrounds, appear to make some contribution, through working, saving or borrowing money”. Evidence suggests six main sources of funding for GYT: parental contributions; personal savings; loans; sponsorship; paid work and subsistence expenses. Indeed, gappers have a few possible funding sources available to them, which could be established prior to and/or earned during their trip.

Reasons other than funding for the under-representation of certain groups in GYT are according to Jones (2004) lack of knowledge about GYT opportunities and lack of planning
and good career advice and support, along with societal prejudice (e.g. towards race and disability). It could be argued, however, that the issues of lack of knowledge of GYT and lack of support for GYT will diminish in the near future, with an increased number of government and education support in this area, along with media exposure and the increased number of gap year providers. Jones (2004) argues that the familiarity of GYT will escalate rapidly, resulting in a major increase in the number of gappers and a more diverse market at the same time. For example, although in the past Europeans and Americans accounted for the majority of this type of traveller (Noy, 2004; Westerhausen, 2002); more recent literature has already noted the increased number of participants from Eastern cultures (Mintel, 2006b; Teo and Leong, 2006).

Mintel (2005) suggests that education has major impact in the tourism industry, especially when youth is the consumer. Indeed, the majority of the gappers have 'student' as their occupation. There have been two other important changes in education. The first, the expectation for a high level of education has increased. Thus, young people are likely to stay in school/university for a longer time, meaning that the number of mature students will increase. In addition, these mature students are likely to work, at least part time in order to support themselves. Although this may mean that students’ lives will be busier than ever, they are likely to have more disposable income for travelling. Indeed, Mintel (2004b) suggests that even where funding is limited, leisure is still considered a priority. Generally, GYT is likely to continue to flourish in spite of the various social and market changes noted above. It is acknowledged that the student market continues to undergo a major restructuring process, which will influence student decisions about whether or not to embark on GYT. For example, the current rise in university fees in the UK education (from £3,290 a year to up to £9,000 in 2012) has forced students to cancel their GYT plans in order not to defer their university admission for the final year of lower tuition. Nevertheless, following this year students who could not afford the higher tuition may be forced to take time out, possibly working, in order to afford going to university.

According to Inkson and Myers (2003), in this youth market those who are not students are normally found to be in administrative roles rather than in managerial roles as they are still in an early stage of their careers. Nevertheless, their study focused on the younger market, in which 90% of the participants were of age 29 years or younger on
departure. Therefore, this limitation needs to be taken into consideration. In terms of family
life, the youth market today is likely to marry and have kids later than it used to, thus assume
adult responsibility such as marriage, and full-time steady employment much later on.
Literature suggests that these adult responsibilities are not resumed before the age of 30 years
in the many Western societies (Arnett, 2000; Shulman et al., 2006).

Motivational and Personality Factors. While in the past, young tourists were
considered to share similar characteristics to their older counterparts, and were even simpler,
and less demanding, the distinct identity, special interests and different needs of young
tourists becomes more prominent today (Carr, 1998). ‘Young tourists’ itself as a group
should not be viewed as a homogeneous population, as individuals within have the variety of
disparate needs, wants and motivations and the behavioural patterns of the various sub­
groups within the young tourist group should also be recognized (Carr, 1998; Cohen, 1972,
Vogt, 1976). This heterogeneity is likely to result in an increased level of complexity in order
to understand these young tourists.

The study of the tourists’ motivations is well-established; yet, the study of gappers’
motivations, and also their behavioural patterns, are described but not extensively researched.
Mintel (2005: 37) briefly touches upon the most common motivational factors cited in the
literature as the desire “to take a break from formal education or work, gain a broader
perspective on life, experience different people, culture and places, gain personal life skills,
enhance CV in relation to gaining university entry or employment, earn money, make a
contribution to society, and help people, meet a challenge and religious motivations.”
Although certain factors are more significant than others in different individuals, “the desire
for a break” from education, training or employment appears to be main motivation for many
participants (ibid).

Mintel (2004b) found that many students aim to travel extensively during their gap
year to gain knowledge of other cultures and have as much fun and different experiences as
possible before they begin further education or enter the workforce. Inkson and Myers (2003)
acknowledge the three motivations for Overseas Experience (OE) suggested by Barry (1998)
as: general exploration, specific career goals, and escape from an undesirable work and
personal situation, yet their results suggest a much more complex picture. Inkson and Myers’
(2003) findings suggest that the reasons for gappers to take OE include: social attraction,
exploration, escape, predisposition, need for a break or change, timing, specific overseas opportunity (work/education), impulse, general career development, and earning money. Furthermore, these reasons also have various sub-categories and sub-themes within them. At the end of their study, they conclude that the motivation to OE was “based primarily on approaching a positive rather than on rejecting a negative”, and furthermore, OE was “based on a wider set of ‘whole-life factors’” rather than merely based on career or education context as generally assumed (Inkson and Myers, 2003: 174). The ISTC-ATLAS Survey conducted for Mintel (2006b) suggests that youth travellers also have several basic intrinsic motivations: exploration, excitement, increasing knowledge and relaxation. Mintel (2006b) recorded that youths are generally looking for balanced lifestyles (work and leisure balance), time to reflect on their existence, relax and unwind, and suggest that subjects rarely have one motive for heading abroad in the relatively long trips they take. As the trips themselves are often multi-destination, it could be argued that different parts of the journey might therefore entail different activities and motivations. Likewise, the same trip to the same destination might represent different motivations for different people.

It could be inferred from the above list that the motivations of young gappers are not only sourced from within but also strongly affected by other factors (e.g. circumstances and the influence of school, universities, friends and family) outside of the travellers’ own internal motivations. Nevertheless, the andragogical learning theorist Knowles (1984) suggests that after a certain age, internal motivations become more important than the external ones (see Section 3.2.3.). If this is so, the gappers' intrinsic motivation is likely to have a profound impact, because what the gappers search for internally is likely to be what they achieve at the end of the journey. In this sense, motivations are likely to impact on GYT experiences (Pearce and Lee, 2005), which in turn will have an impact on the outcome of these trips (Mintel, 2004b).

In terms of personality traits, the ‘big five’ personality factors by McCrae and Costa (1990) have been empirically tested to correlate across dimensional boundaries, and are suggested by McCrae and Costa (1990) as a unified framework for personality trait research. The ‘big five’ factors are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Openness stands for openness for experience which may include one's willingness to experience new things in life, try out new activities, and
appreciation for spontaneity, novelty and adventure. Conscientiousness refers to certain qualities such as competence, orderliness, sense of responsibility, achievement, and self-discipline. Extraversion involves qualities of positive emotions towards others, higher activity levels along with warmth and assertiveness. Agreeableness refers to qualities such as compassion, cooperation, modesty, trust, sincerity and sympathy towards others. Finally, neuroticism tends towards emotional behaviour and or feelings of anger, anxiety and sensitivity to stress, depression, vulnerability, moodiness, self-consciousness and self-indulgence, and sensitivity to stress. Clearly, the presence of these traits may have an impact on the gappers' learning during their GYT (e.g. openness and extraversion may have an impact on how they choose their GYT activities and accommodations). Nevertheless, the main focus of this study is to understand gappers' learning during their transition period between childhood and adulthood or between educations and employments. Indeed, while to review the motivations for GYT and personality factors of the gappers is not the intention of this study, it is acknowledged that it is necessary to be aware of these factors.

Discovering individuals' real motivations for GYT is a complex task. A few contemporary backpackers elaborate on this; for example Elsrud (2001) as cited in Cohen (2003: 101) stated that: 'You don’t know why you travel until you return home.' Interestingly, this pronouncement implies that there is a relationship between motivation and outcome where GYT is concerned. The gappers' personality is not the focus of this study, even though it could be argued that it is imperative for researchers to acknowledge the impact the gappers' personality might have on how they experience their GYT.

In addition to the demographic background, motivational and personality factors, it could be argued that other factors, such as one's previous experience (including professional/work, travel, social/peer relationships and life history), are also influential. While some factors are easier to identify than others, acknowledging the unique roles of these factors in influencing how gappers experience their GYT serves as a starting point of this study.

2.7.2. The Experience

Firmly integrated within the definition of GYT are the importance of both the experience itself (as described in the term 'extraordinary' or unusual experience) and the
importance of outcome (as described in the term ‘career trajectory’). Adding the complexity in defining GYT, the seven factors derived from the literature shown in Figure 2 are also determinants in defining the GYT experience and determining the outcome. Each of these seven factors is important in itself, yet they are interrelated in creating a complete GYT experience. Indeed, a proper combination of all of these factors will produce a fuller and more meaningful GYT experience, as it provides opportunity for the ‘fateful moments’ – the major turning point for transformation to happen (Giddens, 1991).

**Figure 2.** Travel Factors Impacting GYT Experience (Source: Researcher)

**Travel Duration.** The use of the term ‘Gap Year’ is both the cause and the effect of the use of the term itself. The gappers use the term because if the high proportions of gappers, who are students, are to take a year out they need to take a complete year out (i.e. taking one academic calendar year). Conversely, the gappers usually take a year out, due to the widespread circulation of the term ‘Gap Year’ (Jones, 2004). Furthermore, it could be argued that the reason behind the general criterion of the one-year trip (Riley, 1988) might be because airline tickets are valid for long distance, multiple long-distance destinations or around the world trips. Sørenson (2003: 862) implicitly confirms this assumption: “almost all travellers have a fixed return date, which [is] typically defined by their flight ticket,” which
indicates that usually these trips last within the validity of the ticket (i.e. for about a year or less).

Scholars have yet to agree on the benchmark of trip duration. For Jones (2004), although gappers usually take a one year trip, their travels can range from 3 to 24 months, with a minimum of three months being sufficient for GYT labelling. In fact, three months is a proper cut off, suggests Jones (2004) who uses the over three months category to clearly separate long-term from short-term travellers. While stating that most gappers’ trip duration is bound by the validity of their flight ticket (see above), Sørenson (2003) suggests that the usual length of a backpacking journey is between two-and-a-half and 18 months and that only very few journeys last longer. Sørenson (2003: 852) has a similar opinion about the one year rule, in which, “not many [trips] exceed 12 months, and that an interval of four to eight months accounts for most journeys”. Unlike Jones (2004) and Sørenson (2003), Heath (2007) argues for a precise duration of 15 months to define GYT (i.e. a full year of academic year (12 months) and three months summer vacation prior to the start of next academic year). On the upper limit, Teo and Leong (2006) suggest that a trip closer to two years could be classified as travelling as a way of living or might be blurred with the process of immigration. They recognise that there is a need for new ways of conceptualising and describing the whole phenomenon of GYT because of the recent evolution of this type of travel.

The importance of trip duration is not centred on the actual length of time itself (in quantity term), but in the context that time (in quality term) allows an extraordinary experience to happen (i.e. what could actually happen in that time period). Giddens’ (1991) work on backpackers called the experience that happened during the trip a ‘fateful moment’: a moment constructed as formative or transformative in the stories the youths tell of their self and their identity. Undeniably the importance of the travel duration consists of a series of these ‘fateful moments’ in combination with other travel factors. Clearly, the appropriate length of time necessary for each individual to learn varies for many reasons, such as the various extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

**Mode of Travel.** Cohen (1979: 180) highlights the importance of travel mode and suggests that “different kinds of people may desire different modes of tourist experiences”. Baum (1996) documents that technology advancement in the form of transportations has reduced the 40 months average length of the Grand Tour into four months in the 1830s.
Today, global transport makes it possible to be in different continents within hours. Indeed, the gappers today are spoilt by the choice of travel mode available to them.

Mintel (2005) outlines the types of transport available to the gappers at various destinations, with the main categories of: student and budget air travel; rail travel; bus travel; and self-drive. Air travel remains the most popular and most cost effective method for travelling around the world, followed by rail travel. Although rail travel is usually not as affordable as low-cost air travel, the attraction of rail travel is in the fact that it provides an opportunity for the gappers to see and experience more (ibid). In addition, it could be argued that land (or sea) travel, which usually results in increased duration of travel, gives an opportunity to be alone; thus providing an opportunity for reflection during the journey. A rail pass is usually the most popular type of ticket as it offers flexibility and value for money, with Europe as the most famous rail connection, followed by North America, Australia, Asia and Japan (Mintel, 2005). In the US, Canada and Australia the gappers usually choose bus travel, and purchase bus pass, as an extensive rail network is not yet available (ibid). Finally, one of the increasingly popular forms of transport is self-drive, especially in Australia and New Zealand, which is exercised through buying and selling a car for the duration of the entire trip, rather than renting (ibid). Butler and Hannam (2013:11) also suggest that travel mode preferences may also differ among types of independent travellers; for instance, “personal modes of transport are often imperative tools for flashpackers, yet rarely for backpackers.”

Travel Accommodation. The different types of accommodation used by travellers in Europe includes hotels, staying at friends and relatives, youth hostels, independent guesthouses, bed and breakfast, camping, self-catering, other and campervan (Mintel, 2004c). However, the gappers are likely to prefer budget accommodation especially due to the length of their trip (Mintel, 2004ac) with the most popular accommodation for the youth market being friends and family, followed by backpacker hostels, hotels and youth or independent hostels (Mintel, 2004c). The need for budget accommodation is met by the availability of choices in the sector (Mintel 2004c), e.g. through Hostelling International - one major hostelling association – which is affiliated with approximately 4,000 youth hostels and 35 million hostel beds in more than 80 countries (Hecht and Martin, 2006). The number of
independent hostels also continues to increase in response to the growing need for budget accommodation, and the student and GYT market (Mintel, 2005).

The decisions to stay at hostels according to Hecht and Martin (2006) are generally based on the criteria for location, cleanliness, price, number of beds in rooms/hostel, dorm mix, safety/security at the hostel, overnight access, availability of restaurant/bar and communal kitchen, quality of staff, recommendation of hostel, access to information/information services, extras and miscellaneous facilities. A study by Mintel (2005) which looks exclusively at the GYT market suggests that youth hostels remain the most popular, mainly for two reasons: low price and opportunities for customers to meet other travellers. Obenour, Patterson, Pedersen and Pearson (2006) have also identified hostels as important places for social interaction amongst travellers; some participants in their study reported that unlike other types of accommodation where guests do not normally interact with others, hostels provide opportunities for travellers to meet people who share similar ways of thinking, even though they come from different backgrounds. Common areas and shared activities in the hostel, e.g. cooking in the kitchen, encourage interaction with others. Other useful points to note from Obenour et al.’s (2006) study are that the fact whether one travels alone or with companions is a determining factor in the facilitation of their social interaction in the hostel, and that many participants of the study would recommend a hostel to others based on the social interactions experienced in that hostel. Clearly accommodation is one important component of the gappers’ travel experience, hence, needs to be understood more closely in relation to this study.

Travel Destinations. The choice of destinations vary among gappers for various reasons, e.g. security issues, languages, visa requirements, cost of living, job opportunities and the popularity of the destination at that particular time (Mintel, 2005). A destination’s popularity also depends on the country of origin of the gappers with a strong attraction to destinations with the furthest geographical distance from the country of original, e.g. the British, Europeans and Americans often prefer Australia and New Zealand, Australians and Americans often favour Europe. Furthermore, Simpson (2004) argues that location selection is likely to reflect the gappers’ attempts to escape from ‘normality’ (i.e. they long to experience something unusual and dissimilar to their own daily life e.g. in the context of people, culture and environment), whether this attempt is made consciously or not.
Certain destinations have particular connotations associated with them, for example, Asia is characterised by its low cost and opportunity for cultural experience; Africa for volunteer work, Japan and Korea for English-language teaching; and finally, South America and the South Pacific are the destinations that are becoming fashionable (Simpson, 2004). Benson and O'Reilly (2009) also explain that the market usually flows from the more affluent destinations to less affluent ones where individuals seek an exchange between cost of living and lifestyle. This list of rationales for choosing destinations implies that travel destinations do not only represent place, but also people (e.g. the type of host/culture) and time (e.g. the perception on how trendy the destination is at that time), which in turn implies the importance of social setting of the GYT experience.

According to Hall et al. (1999), locality is central to identity, i.e. separating identity construction from the physical locality in which it occurs is difficult. The gappers’ choices of destinations could also have effects on their identities; at the beginning of the trip, they choose a place because of who they are (i.e. the gappers’ identity can be partially understood from their origin/background), and at the end of the trip, they become someone new because of the destination they chose. Corrigan (1993: 4) suggests that youths often unconsciously look for “places of action and incident” or at least “the place where there is the most chance that something will happen.” Does the gappers’ choice of destinations represent their unconscious innate need to search for a life-changing experience? The fact that GYT trips are often multi-destinational (Noy, 2004) may further complicate any attempts to answer this question. In this way, understanding the gappers’ choice of various destinations can become the key to understanding them and their GYT experience.

**Travel Arrangements.** Although in the past backpacking has been associated with lack of a fixed itinerary (Teo and Leong, 2006) and the notion of ‘drifting’ (Hyde and Lawson, 2003; Riley, 1988), GYT arrangements today offer a wide spectrum of planning approaches: from the laissez-faire version of arrangement to the schematic and fixed timetables which allow only minor changes (Hyde and Lawson, 2003; Westerhausen, 2002) and the midpoint, whereby some gappers plan their travel routes and timetables to some degree, without adhering to them too rigidly (Hottola, 2005). Jones (2004) claims that the main distinction between structured and unstructured approaches to GYT usually refers to the
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high involvement of providing organisation to the former, while the latter often involves the gappers organising the trip themselves.

The term ‘unstructured travel’ used by Jones (2004) is acknowledged by Mintel (2005) as independent travel and is refers to what Vogt (1976) calls non-institutionalised travel. Mintel (2005) also notes that independent travel has increased over the last 10-15 years due to the availability of various transport and accommodation, and is enhanced further by the advancement of technology (ibid), which implies that the gappers have substantial opportunities to create the GYT experience independently. Indeed, the numbers of gappers travelling independently is far above the structured, organised gappers (Jones, 2004) at around 90% of the market representing gappers who are slightly older (e.g. not taking GYT immediately after completing A-levels/high school, have worked before, are in higher education, have travelled before, etc.) are likely to be more experienced at travelling and are able to plan and organize the trip by themselves (Mintel, 2005). Only approximately 10% of gap year trips are structured, where there is input from parents who require reassurance from the GYT companies over their children’s safety and well-being (Mintel, 2005). Jones (2004) underlines that in practice there is no clear cut difference between the two; Encouragingly, there is evidence that many gappers are capable of achieving a certain degree of structure through self-planning and directed-activity with little involvement from providers (ibid). This presents hope for the gappers who would prefer structured GYT activities (due to their perceived value) but cannot afford the prices charged by GYT providers.

The key to a successful gap year, according to Jones (2004) is advance planning and structured activities. This has been reiterated by the UK government who state: “a gap year experience, so long as it is well structured, will be warmly welcomed [i.e. considered to add more value]” (The United Kingdom Parliament, 2000: column 1574). The importance of structure is reiterated once again by Baroness Andrews: “In respect to young people, I would argue that a structured gap year has the power to change lives” (The United Kingdom Parliament, 2000: column 1581). Unfortunately, most gappers are not aware of the importance of planning their trip in advance in order to gain optimum benefits from their GYT (Jones, 2004).

Travel Activities. The discussion of travel activities is, without a doubt, closely linked with the discussion of the travel arrangements discussed above. In the case of travel
activities, the continuum ranges from the gappers who ‘do nothing at all’ (e.g. stay in front of the TV’) to the gappers who engage in various activities, including unusual, extreme and dangerous activities such as bungee jumping and ‘swimming with the sharks’ (Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005). According to Mintel (2005) the independent travel activities engaged in vary largely by individual and types of structured activities include work placements (i.e. working holiday visas and programmes on camp counsellors, boarding schools, teaching placements, employment in the caring professions, outdoor placements, and environmental projects), volunteering (e.g. animal care, archaeological digs, community action, conservation, dance projects, ecotourism, environmental or humanitarian work, journalism, medical or veterinary work, helping in orphanages or teaching), expeditions (i.e. conservation, environmental and scientific projects, community projects and adventurous activities, e.g. trekking, white-water rafting, scuba diving), and courses (e.g. sports, foreign languages and TEFL International and cooking). Jones (2004), who originally considered the possibility of a classification of gap years based on activities, later rejected this approach because of the sheer number and diversity of possible activities and combinations of these. Nevertheless, Jones (2004) highlights six main types of activities: organised travel, learning, paid work, voluntary work, independent travel and leisure activities, to provide a useful generalisation. In practice individual participants often may undertake a mix of activities during a gap year, and choose these activities according to their individual preferences. While there may be an indication that some activities prevail for the youth (e.g. younger gappers are likely to be more interested in sporting activities and recreation compared to gappers who are older (Furtwangler,1991), provides a reminder, however, the gappers’ activities are not entirely dissimilar from what can be found within other tourist segments (Sørensen, 2003). For instance, as previously discussed in Section 2.3.4., volunteer activities as part of GYT is one the most recent trends in GYT (see also Lyons et al, 2012).

The potential benefits of GYT are significant (Jones, 2004). Mintel (2004b: 37) adds that “young people who invest the most time and energy into their experiences by undertaking more activities, gain the most from them”. Although there is evidence that a significant proportion of gap year participants are ‘inactive’ for all or part of their gap year (Jones, 2004), there was hope that although many participants start their gap year being involved in few or no activities, they become more actively involved in activities at a later
stage (Jones, 2004). Even though these activities often are unstructured and planned ‘at the last minute’, these activities are still preferable to no activities as long as the activities initiated are useful activities. Jones (2004) reiterates that it is the way in which gappers utilise their time during their gap year through various activities in the context of a departure and re-entry into education, training or work which defines the experience. His view is that unplanned time-out of education, work or training doing nothing does not constitute a gap year. Once again, the importance of quality and quantity of the experience emerges. In addition, it has emerged from this discussion that a new aspect of the ‘constructive year’ rather than merely ‘Gap Year’ could be used, giving more meaning to understanding what actually happened during the gap year.

**Travel Companions.** Evidence suggests that social interaction and meeting others is an integral part of the backpacking experience (Loker-Murphy, 1996; Loker-Murphy et al., 1995; Murphy, 2001). The literature echoes the important role of social interaction, which implies the potential differences between travelling solo or with friends or a partner. Hence, the presence or absence of companions during travel constructs the experience itself, and it can alter the experience greatly. The majority of travel literature which involves transformational experiences recognises the benefits of solitary travel. Danziger in Dann (1999) argues that travelling solo has some advantages and provides examples that demonstrate solitude during travels enhances one’s ability to ‘live with oneself’ and also that travelling solo signals one’s approachability to others. In that sense, travelling solo does not only provide time and space for self-reflection, but also opens up opportunities for subjects to meet others along the way. Theroux in Dann (1999: 181) states that “if I am alone, I see more clearly”, suggesting an enhanced ability of self-reflection. Furthermore, a journey “enables one to be alone while in the company of others” (White and White, 2004: 207). Although a gapper travels alone, being lonely is merely an option, as throughout the journey one is almost constantly in the presence of others for potential social interactions. In an interview with a young traveller, Obenour et al. (2006: 38) found an example of the advantage of travelling alone versus travelling with partner: “If you’re travelling by yourself, definitely,...because you get to meet a lot of people. Travelling in a pair, it’s a different story, because contact with other people is minimal.” Although it sounds contradictory, the
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literature connotes that social interactions during travels are, perhaps even more accessible to those who travel alone than they are to those who travel with others.

One critique mentioned in the literature on young travellers travelling overseas is that although gappers desire more interaction with hosts at destinations, these interactions are still fairly limited; in fact, some literature suggested that during their travel there are tendency for excessive interactions with fellow travellers (e.g. Richards and Wilson, 2004; Young, Stevenson, and Wearing, 2010). Despite the compelling arguments behind these criticisms that the gappers are not likely to learn much about the destinations in terms of its inhabitants and culture, the opposite may also be true, that the gappers are also likely to learn from their interactions with other gappers. They may not learn as much in regards to the destinations they visited from these interactions with exceptions of small practical information exchanges (e.g. where to go and what to do in a destination if other gappers have visited the destination). However, it could be argued that they learn more about themselves in the company of other travellers. Indeed, literature confirms that one can only learn about oneself and that one’s self-identity is found through social interactions (Marshall, 1998). For this reason, it could also be debated that learning may occur in various ways, e.g. through self-reflection, interactions with others, and by obtaining practical knowledge. As Simpson (2004: 21) argues: “the gap year takes young people on journeys of both the self and of the geographical.” Hence, it is possible that a combination of various sources and ways of learning available during the trip is likely to enhance one’s ability to achieve one’s goals (see also Chapter Three).

The combinations of the above travel factors will be used during the interviews to elicit gappers’ stories and guide the interviews in order to arrive at a thorough understanding of the gappers’ trips (see Appendix 1).

2.7.3. The Outcome

This section will address the commonly asked questions ‘why go on GYT’ or ‘what is in GYT for me?’ According to Simpson (2004), much of the advertising and publicity centres around the ‘promised’ or ‘projected’ benefits of GYT, but for which no supporting evidence is offered. Furthermore, Lyons et al. (2012: 361) argue that “government and industry alike promote gap year travel uncritically.” Without appropriate evidence to justify the validity of
these claims of benefits, they could be misleading, and only serve to support commercial activity in the GYT market. If this is true, the gappers are led to believe that they will get the return on their investment without empirical evidence, and hence may be misled. A few scholars have reviewed and documented the benefits of travel (e.g. Scarinci and Pearce, 2012; Stone and Petrick, 2013; Tsaur, Yen and Chen, 2010; see also 3.2.2. Critical Appraisal of Travel and Learning Research), nevertheless, it could be argued that both the literature and commercial research hitherto has only offered fairly limited supportive evidence/insights into what the actual benefits of GYT are.

Although within the wider tourism literature, the benefits of travel have been discussed in relation to other forms of travel (e.g. studying abroad, volunteering, etc.), similar research within the domain of GYT is fairly limited (Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005). The reason that it has not been researched in depth, according to Jones (2004) is that it is difficult to measure these benefits. Nevertheless, the magnitude of this market cannot be denied, compounded by the fact that the biggest proportion of this market is youth i.e. current and future generations of travellers. For these reasons, this project aims to investigate the benefits of GYT further and specifically in relation to experiential and transformative learning, and personal growth and development.

The Benefits of GYT. The benefits of GYT can be viewed from many perspectives, and arguably may produce ‘ripple’ effects. This is due to the fact that gappers live within a community context, making gappers’ interactions with others crucial. Indeed, any advancement that gappers reap from the trip cannot be explained in the context of the individual benefits only, but also need to include the assessment of ripple effects of these benefits to a wider society context (Levinson, 1978). Indeed, the report of Mintel (2005) acknowledges three forms of benefits of gap years: benefits to the individual participant; benefits to employers; and benefits to wider society. These benefits, mainly benefits to participant (individual benefits) and benefits to others are acknowledged in this study, and will be discussed in further detail below.

The impacts and effects of gappers’ experiences can also be examined from the geographical and timing perspectives. Certainly, the gapper is the first person to reap the benefits, which take effect from the beginning of their trip until they return home to readjust to their home environment. Directly after this, the benefits are towards others upon their
return, starting from the closest society (e.g. friends and family) moving towards the widest society (e.g. work and study place, local community, businesses, regional and national economies). The flow of benefits also reach others outside the home community into different geographical locations through daily interactions during the trip: host population and nation visited by the gappers, as well as other gappers. Due to the number of destinations visited and in some cases activities completed by gappers, and as a result of the extreme mobility of gappers, these impacts may even be wider. Thus, one could argue that the impacts from gappers’ experience are beyond their local area.

However, Maoz (2006a) argues that young tourists are often accused of causing negative changes into the host societies of countries they visit. For example, travellers often gather in large numbers in small indigenous populations for months at a time, primarily concerned with relaxation and having a good time in their own company rather than with the native people, abusing hospitality and introducing influences which affect the character of those communities (ibid). Backpackers tend to engage in a free and permissive style of behaviour, to experiment with drugs, sexual freedom and various lifestyles. In conclusion, they are more interested in their own group than in ‘authentic’ experiences (Cohen, 1989; Cohen, 2003; Duffy, 2002; McGregor, 2000; Wilson, 1997). However, a more positive view suggests that the images that guests hold of their hosts may be modified after a stay in their country (Ganguli, 1975; Pearce, 1982). This suggests that the length of time of travel, especially the length of time spent in a specific destination have impacts on both the gapper’s view, as well as on their ability to interact with others.

Individual Benefits. Mintel (2005: 8) put forward that the individual benefits of GYT include “improved educational performance, formation and development of career choices, improved ‘employability’ and career opportunities, non-academic skills and qualifications, life skills, and developing social values.” In a similar vein, Jones (2004) notes some evidence supporting the enhancement of educational performance at university, which is gained through self-discipline. In addition, gappers are likely to obtain a broader perspective and knowledge from life experience, along with a greater motivation to achieve their goals (ibid). Jones’ (2004) review broadly divides benefits to participants into six categories: 1) improved educational performance; 2) formation and development of career choice; 3) improved ‘employability’ and career opportunities; 4) non-academic skills and qualifications; 5) life
skills; 6) developing social values. Furthermore, the study of OE by Inkson and Myers (2003) reveals self-confidence and broader life skills, both generic and career-related as their major findings. Their study contributes to the literature whereby they question whether these positive changes happened only to the OE participants, or to others who did not necessarily go for the experience (ibid). Stone and Petrick (2013) reviewed a large number of studies noting the learning outcomes of travel, but none of the studies specifically researched the benefits of GYT, suggesting lack of research in the area of GYT (see also section 3.2.2. Critical Appraisal of Travel and Learning Research).

A contradictory view on the value of GYT has also been identified, suggesting a number of potential drawbacks to taking a gap year. For example, that GYT and similar travel is often associated with drug, sex, danger, and risk-taking, illicit and immoral behaviour (Scheyvens, 2002; Uriely and Belhassen, 2006). However, the aforementioned found no evidence to suggest that these negatives outweigh the cumulative benefits. Indeed, Inkson and Myers (2003) document that in general, participants make very few negative comments, and even where there are concerns of this nature, the gappers tend take them as part of a ‘learning experience’. Undeniably, the degree and types of benefits gained by gappers are largely dependent on the kind of activities, arrangements, and individual experiences of the gappers themselves (Jones, 2004). Indeed, the various travel factors discussed earlier in Section 2.7.2. are likely to have an influence on any realisation of potential benefits.

This study aims to understand learning that occurs during GYT in order to investigate whether the GYT experience facilitates personal growth and self-development. To achieve this aim, this study needs to examine the benefits of GYT to the individual gappers themselves (i.e. what do the gappers learn from their trip?). Hence, the second research question of this study is “What are the outcomes of GYT Learning?”

**Benefits to Others.** The significance of GYT benefits to others is not a subject examined in this study, yet the importance and magnitude of the impact of the gappers’ experiences on wider society is an important factor which needs to be taken into consideration in understanding overall GYT learning outcomes. Furthermore, individual benefits and benefits to others are likely to be mutually influential. For example, in the last decade, a shift in focus has emerged in which an individual’s accumulated experience over a
lifetime is considered to enhance an organisation's strength (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Baruch, 2004; Hall, 1996). Learning and community involvement (MacInnes, 2005), personal growth, friendships, political involvement, creative activity and spiritual development (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000), and travel and adventure (Inkson and Myers, 2003; Richardson and Mallon, 2005) are important personal goals which also affect professional lives. Indeed, according to Beatty and Torbert (2003), the development of professional and personal lives can be nurtured through leisure pursuits. In the case of OE, for example, it is considered as an experiential package that weaves together travel, cultural exploration, leisure and work (Inkson and Myers, 2003). Indeed, Boon (2006) suggests that it is through tourism that a complex balance of leisure, travel and work is achievable. Without undermining the importance of the benefits of taking GYT to others, the main focus of this study remains to analyse and predict the individual benefit of GYT to participants, and the process of learning and transformation that happens during GYT.

2.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter began by discussing the difficulties in defining GYT. Although GYT is a relatively new phenomenon, its historical background extends back to the the Grand Tour in the 17th century and through a rapidly evolving process towards more recent approaches to long-term travel. Today GYT is closely associated with contemporary travel terms, e.g. backpackers, flashpackers, working abroad, and overseas experience as well as volunteer tourism, with a great deal of overlap between these terms, which all involve overseas travel, budget travel, youth travel, etc. to various degrees.

The definitions and categorizations from a number of prominent GYT scholars were discussed, compared and contrasted in conjunction with an examination of the findings of the preliminary study in Chapter Four, which acted as a definitional exercise by the travellers. Based on the available definitions and categorization of GYT within the literature, and with the confirmation received from the preliminary study in Section 4.4., a definition and categorization of GYT for this study was established, and will be used for the main study.

Furthermore, from this self-defining exercise, it became clear that defining GYT is particularly complex, and is a continuously changing phenomenon; moreover its denotation cannot be separated from the various negative and positive connotations associated with this
form of travel. Hence, it could be argued that a closer look at who the 'gappers' are, looking at the overall GYT experience and its outcomes, as suggested by the participants during the preliminary study, will provide a clear picture of what GYT is for the purposes of this study.

The personal characteristics and background of the gappers, along with their travel motivations and expectations have impact on the experience itself, and therefore it is important to be able to examine these factors objectively. The actual experience itself constitutes both the intrinsic relationship of the gappers with themselves and the extrinsic relationships formed through social encounters during their trip. It is also argued that a number of travel factors define the GYT experience. Seven travel factors: travel duration, travel mode, travel accommodation, travel destinations, travel arrangements, travel activities and travel companions are explored further in this chapter, drawing on various scholarly sources for support. Each factor has the capacity to influence the gapper's experience differently; hence combinations of these factors create a unique and meaningful GYT experience for each individual.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of GYT, three elements: the gappers themselves, the main experience and the situation once the gappers return home must be examined. It has been argued here that both the gapper's identity and their experiences which occur during the trip are jointly responsible for the outcome of the gap year experience. The literature reviewed in this section reveals that positive individual and societal benefits are plausible outcomes of the GYT experience as the gappers potentially benefit from learning that occurs during GYT. It is equally important to examine what the gappers learn and how they learn in order to arrive at a more thorough understanding of GYT Learning. The second research question: what are the outcomes of GYT Learning (GYTL) (i.e. what the gappers learn?) provides an important basis for answering the third research question: what are the processes of GYT Learning (GYTL) (i.e. how do the gappers learn?). Further discussions of the learning process which takes place during GYT continue in next chapter (Chapter Three).
CHAPTER THREE

RELATED CONCEPTS AND THEORIES:

LEARNING, TRANSITION, MOBILITY AND IDENTITY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a review of concepts and theories relevant to learning, transition, mobility and identity in GYT. To start with, the chapter will review the definition of learning and how it differs from similar concepts, e.g. education and four learning theories (Andragogical Learning Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Transformative Learning and Levels of Learning) will be discussed along with a critical discussion of their relevance to GYT. The various learning theories will be compared and contrasted in order to evaluate their usefulness in understanding the gappers’ learning and justifications for the choice of experiential learning theory and transformative learning in this study will be offered. Next, this chapter conceptualises GYT as transitional behaviour by reviewing and exploring its relationship with the phenomenon of youth transition, mobility and identity. The notion of transition will be reviewed and then a more complex view of youth transition will be set out than has traditionally been the case via simple linear models of the process. Then, the chapter discusses the potential of GYT as a form of mobility, followed by its impact on the identity construction of the young gappers during the trip. This is followed by the presentation of an integrative model that links relevant concepts and theories in the chapter. The concept of GYT as a ‘transition behaviour’ and its relationship with the phenomenon of youth transition and mobility (the latter will be presented as encompassing cultural exchange, identity construction and learning) will be explored.

3.2. UNDERSTANDING LEARNING

3.2.1. Definition of Learning

3.2.1.1. Defining Learning from a Generic Perspective

This section will review and discuss various learning theories which are potentially relevant to GYT. The four learning theories considered in this chapter each have potential relevance to GYT, nevertheless each theory provides slightly different definitions of learning
Chapter Three – Related Concepts and Theories

and offers differing perspectives (see also Table 4). It is necessary to first clarify what ‘learning’ from a generic perspective means before the various perspectives are compared and contrasted. Indeed, Sadler-Smith (2006: 4) also argues that while the definition of learning is abundant within the literature, a definition of learning from a general perspective will also be beneficial:

“Learning is a longer-term change in the knowledge possessed by an individual, their type and level of skill, or their assumptions, attitudes or values, which may lead to them having increased potential to grow, develop and perform in more satisfying and effective ways.”

The above definition offers an understanding that learning potentially: 1) involves changes in knowledge, skills, assumptions, attitudes and values; 2) has a longer-term impact; and 3) helps the learner towards personal growth and self-development. Nevertheless, Sadler-Smith (2006: 4) suggests that learning could be hard to define, and its interpretation depends largely on from which perspectives it is being viewed (ibid) and the context, and that not all learning has this potential (see also Section 3.2.1.2.). Thus, understanding what learning is in the context of GYT is critical, especially since this study covers a variety of theoretical perspectives on learning. For this reason, a brief review of each definition of learning will be examined with regards to its relevance to GYT (see Table 4) along with further explanations of the four learning theories originally reviewed for this study (Section 3.2.3. to 3.2.6.).

The term ‘learning’ is often associated with education; in fact the literature of learning and education is closely interlinked since learning is often discussed within a teaching and education context. Nevertheless, by definition learning is different from education. Education is “the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university” (Oxford Dictionary, 2012); whereas learning is “the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught” (Oxford Dictionary, 2012). Although there are variations on how the two differ, the main distinctions between the two are that first, education mainly refers to formal education, whereby learning has a more informal meaning which can occur anywhere other than necessarily in the classroom. Second, it is also implied that learning is what the individual does, while education is the system in which learning occurs. It is essential to clarify this basic distinction between learning and education for the purposes of this study.
3.2.1.2. Defining Learning from Various Learning Theories' Perspectives

As summarised in Table 4, the definitions of learning put forward in the four key learning theories enabled the consideration of views on learning from various theoretical perspectives (adult learning/education, organisational behaviour, cybernetics and epistemology). Knowles (1990) describes learning as the process of gaining knowledge or skills (for discussions on Pedagogy and Andragogy, see also Section 3.2.3.). Similarly, Kolb (1984) suggests that one gains knowledge through learning. Although both scholars focus on the gaining of knowledge and skills, the difference between the two differing conceptualisations of the same phenomenon may lie in the fact that Kolb (1984) focuses more on the process of transformation of the experience, which involves reflection in addition, rather than only on gaining knowledge/skills.

From Mezirow's (1991: 12) perspective, learning is "a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action." Mezirow's (1991) definition of learning involves some elements of 'change', which requires some alteration and adjustment, rather than simply 'acquisition'. Furthermore, while Knowles (1990) and Kolb (1984) focus on the 'knowledge or skills', the latter concentrates more on 'meaning', which involves deeper issues such as attitudes, values and beliefs.

Finally, from a different perspective Argyris and Schöns (1996) suggest that learning involves the process of detecting and correcting error. The way one detects and corrects error determines the kind of learning that occurs. As Argyris and Schöns (1996) pointed out, in single-loop learning one detects and corrects errors and make 'changes to their action' to arrive at a different outcome, whereas in double-loop learning one 'changes the governing values/beliefs that guides the action' and hence the outcome (e.g. "learn to change the field of constancy itself", see: Argyris and Schöns, 1974: 19). Clearly, learning from this perspective recognizes the potential of the learner to change at a deeper level which involves modification of values and beliefs. Hence, from the discussion above it could be inferred that one could learn in different ways, i.e. one could learn to know (e.g. gaining knowledge), to do (e.g. gaining skills/expertise), and to be (e.g. changing the way the world is perceived).

While Mezirow (1991: 12) defines learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action", he defines transformative learning to involve reflectively
Chapter Three – Related Concepts and Theories

“transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes or transforming our meaning perspectives (set of related meaning schemes)” (Mezirow 1991: 223). It could be inferred that although both learning and transformative learning within Mezirow’s (1991) view involve change, it is also possible to argue that transformative learning involves a deeper level of change in ‘beliefs, attitudes, opinions and emotional reactions’ and is likely to result in transforming meaning perspectives which affects one’s ‘guidance system’ on how to act in life). In other words, transformative learning could bring about changes in the way one looks at the world, and in the way of one’s being. The changes that are brought about by transformative learning show optimum level of learning.

Furthermore, the concept of Single and Double-Loop Learning by Argyris and Schön (1974) (see also Section 3.2.6.) also concurs with the notion of deeper level change (e.g. changes in values and beliefs), where double-loop learning is a higher level of learning. Transformative learning which involves the process of higher level of learning (i.e. double-loop learning) could ultimately be the highest level of learning to be achieved from GYT. Whilst theoretical integration at the literature review stage is not the aim of this thesis reviewing all of these learning theories nonetheless is essential in developing an understanding of learning that may occur in GYT.

3.2.1.3. Defining Learning for This Study

While the definitions of learning from both generic and theory-specific views have been examined, as discussed previously, what learning means is highly dependent on the context studied. The learning context in this study is the context of GYT learning from the perspective of individual gappers. It is recognized that what learning and transformation (i.e. transformative learning) means for each gapper is likely to vary. As the definition of learning discussed in this study will be pertaining to learning during GYT, the definition will be termed as ‘GYT learning’, where learning is defined as:

“a process of acquiring new knowledge, skills and/or expertise, and/or changing one’s assumptions, actions, attitudes, values and beliefs through critical reflection and correcting error/previous assumptions of one’s previous experiences with the future potential for long-term personal growth and self-development.”

(Source: Researcher)
While the definition of learning largely varies within the literature, the above definition is to be used for the present study as it incorporates all the necessary elements to investigate learning that may occur in GYT. Furthermore, it is recognised that the meaning of learning may vary for each gapper, therefore, it is important that the data should be analysed based on both the definition above as well as paying heed to the context of each individual gapper (e.g. their background such as age, social, education, etc.) and their own interpretations of their GYT experiences. It is also important to note here that in the literature pertaining to the concept of transition, the term ‘change’ is often equated to the term ‘learning’ (e.g. Adams, Hayes and Hopson, 1976; Fisher and Cooper, 1990). This is acknowledged in this study whereby a change refers to learning (i.e. when changes occur, the gappers are likely to have learned from their experience).

Furthermore, understanding the nature of learning during GYT is also an important factor to a thorough comprehension of the gappers’ learning experience. As GYT learning occurs during the trip (i.e. outside of the classroom), and the framework in which it occurs is unplanned, learning that occurs during GYT is predominantly informal, incidental and unintentional (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). While by definition learning has the potentials of long-term personal growth and self-development, since the gapper’s learning occurs in a non-institutional context, it is likely to be experiential and self-directed and hence its outcome is not predictable.

Finally, Holton (2000) argues that learning could provide positive, neutral, or negative results. Neutral learning is a knowledge-transfer process resulting in the ability to solve everyday problems. Positive learning brings about more constructive results beyond neutral learning, which could encourage individuals to grow and develop themselves towards their best potential for the benefits of themselves and the society at large. On the other hand, negative learning could occur if learning is forced as it could be beneficial for the reinforcer, but could be detrimental to the learners. This study recognises these various potential outcomes of learning. For instance, although positive learning is most preferable, the process itself could involve movement from negative or neutral learning to neutral or positive learning. Even so, this study focuses on the potential outcome of GYT as a positive learning experience which benefits the gappers and society as a whole, as an understanding of this is as one of the ultimate practical purpose of this study.
3.2.2. Critical Appraisal of Travel and Learning Research

A literature search and review on the subject of travel and learning has revealed very few recent works in the area. A brief critical appraisal of this work follows.

The conceptual paper on ‘Travel and Learning’ by Falk, Ballantyne, Packer and Benckendorff (2012) acknowledged that the importance of learning in travel experience is under-researched. They offered several principles in understanding learning in travel contexts: 1) learning is a life-long and life-wide process, 2) learning is both a process and a product, 3) the outcomes of learning are highly individual, 4) learning is a process of constructing meaning, 5) learning is dependent on context, 6) learning is a cumulative process, and that 7) learning can be fun (Ballantyne et al., 2012: 913-915). While these key principles were put together on the basis of a literature review, their key principles are not robust until they have been tested empirically. Furthermore, the paper also puts forward a theoretical framework using the concepts of ‘phronesis, techne and episteme’ from Aristotle’s philosophical writings (Ballantyne, et al., 2012: 908). While Aristotle is one of the greatest philosophers, the linking of these three concepts to the concept of learning remain untested, based on examples but not on empirical evidence. Moreover, further critical questions need to be put forward – are these three original concepts by Aristotle the only ones that relate to learning, or there are more to be included? If so, what are they, and why might they be included? The work of Falk et al. (2012) seems to overlook incorporating relevant and important theories of learning from psychology and organisational behaviour preferring to rely instead on philosophical theory.

Coghlan and Gooch (2011) attempted to apply a learning theory to the industry practice by offering an innovative use of transformative learning theory which they adapt to the volunteer tourism context. They propose five core elements of transformative learning applicable to volunteer tourism: 1) the pre-requisites and context for transformative learning to occur, 2) disorienting dilemmas, and the emergence of confusing emotions, 3) the importance of dialogue and reflection, 4) self-actualisation as an outcome of volunteer tourism and 5) re-integration into society. They argued that there are similarities between volunteer tourist experience and transformative learning steps and based on these, they offered further suggestions from Sipos, Battisti and Grimm (2008) based on ‘engagement (head), enactment (hands) and enablement (heart)’. A limitation of their work is that the
proposed links between transformative learning and volunteer tourism remain conceptual paper as their assertions are not supported by their own primary data.

The work of Stone and Petrick (2013) provides a thorough literature review on the educational benefits of travel experiences and answer a question of ‘how is travel educational?’ They reviewed 15 notable studies in the area and summarized the key findings of these studies along with the noted learning outcomes as well their limitations (see also Section 2.7.3. for further discussions on outcome of GYT experience). They highlighted the potential usefulness of experiential learning and transformative learning theories but these recommendations remained a part of literature review without evidence of any empirical support. Their study also discussed the various literatures of education and travel from studying abroad to independent travel, both in terms of adults’ and childrens’ learning. Their paper concluded that this area of research is still mainly dominated by study abroad and limited to three main categories of knowledge/skills, development and life choices (as suggested by Sutton, Miller and Rubin, 2007 in Stone and Petrick, 2013), furthermore how and how much they learn still needs to be research scientifically. This study also highlights a restricted range of benefits identified in the current literature which this study aims to validate and extend further.

The work of Scarinci and Pearce (2012) offers a rigorous empirical study which identified relationships between travel experiences and generic skills based on a large data set of 684 students. Their list of skills developments include effective communication, being open-minded, self-confidence, decision-making, general knowledge, understanding and awareness, feeling comfortable around all types of people, adaptability, tolerance, independence, forward thinking, management or financial resource, self-motivation, self-evaluation, dealing with pressures, emotions and stress, interpersonal understanding, responsibility, patience, observing caution and vigilance, and making and maintaining relationships (Scarinci and Pearce, 2012: 383-384). Nevertheless, the problematic feature of their paper is that these skills which formed the basis of the study are essentially un-theorised. This shortcoming underlines the importance of research in this area being based on a robust conceptual and theoretical base; the domains of psychology and organizational behaviour are potential sources of such concepts, models and theories.

Tsaur, Yen and Chen (2010) researched independent tourists’ knowledge and skills. Based on literature review and 21 in-depth interviews of experienced travellers, they built
their questionnaire which developed, tested and validated an inventory of independent traveller skills. This research is a significant empirical advancement adding to our knowledge of the skills needed for an independent traveller. The results suggest 12 factors in the first exploratory factor analysis: 1) emerging handling, 2) knowledge in airport or in-flight, 3) how to shop in the tourist spot, 4) preparation for items on return trip, 5) room reservation issues, 6) backup of contact information, 7) trip planning techniques, 8) document handling, 9) mobility, 10) understanding the sources of information, 11) adaptation to local environment and 12) handling document loss, and 3 factors in the second exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis: 1) onsite travel capability, 2) pre-trip preparation and 3) emergency response. Tsaur et al.'s work (2010) is an important inductive piece of work however in common with other research in this filed, there is a lack of deductive theory-driven empirical work.

In addressing the importance of travel and learning as an emerging, yet under-researched area as well as in reducing the shortcomings in future research, one of the aims of this research is to address the need for theory-driven empirical work in relation to the processes of learning which occur during travel. The following sections of this chapter outline in detail some potential candidate theories for such research and evaluate them.

3.2.3. Pedagogy and Andragogy

3.2.3.1. Pedagogy

It was often assumed in the past that adults and children learned the same way. However, theorising and research in the 1970's by the American adult education researcher Malcolm Knowles made a clear distinction between pedagogy and andragogy. The word ‘pedagogy’ from its Greek root means ‘leading children’, which over the years slowly evolved into a term which referred to the ‘art and science of teaching’. As Knowles in his milestone work The Adult Learner: a neglected species documented, pedagogy is a set of beliefs, or an ideology, based on assumptions about teaching and learning that evolved between the seventh and twelfth centuries in the schools of Europe (Knowles, 1990). The pedagogical model assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if it has been learned. It is teacher-directed education, leaving to the learner only the submissive role of the following a teacher's instructions. Clearly, this is not the case of GYTL due to its nature of
informal and experiential learning; in fact, GYT Experience is situated within the transition period in which learning as a child is replaced with learning as an adult as discussed below.

3.2.3.2. Andragogy

Originally, the term of andragogy was used in 1833 by a German educator, Alexander Kapp, and was later developed by an American educator Malcolm Knowles into a theory of adult education. The introduction of the concept of andragogy into learning theory by Knowles in 1970s emphasized differences between the ‘art and science’ of teaching children and that of adult learning (note the use of the terms ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ in their respective contexts here). Andragogy, which means ‘leading men [i.e. adults]’ in Greek, is defined as “the art and science of helping adult learns” (Knowles, 1984: 12), and is based on five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners. The original four assumptions were around the notions of self-concept, experience, readiness to learn and orientation to learning, and later on the fifth assumption was added, motivation to learn (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-concept</td>
<td>As a person matures his/her self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>As a person matures s/he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to learn</td>
<td>As a person matures his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation to learning</td>
<td>As a person matures his/her time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations to learn</td>
<td>As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.3.3. Comparison of Pedagogy and Andragogy

The significant difference between pedagogy and andragogy, according to Jarvis (1985) is that pedagogy signifies ‘education from above’ while andragogy is the ‘education of equals’. Jarvis further made a comparison between the assumptions of pedagogy and of andragogy as depicted in the Table 3.
Table 3. Comparison of Pedagogy and Andragogy (Source: Jarvis, 1985: 278)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
<th>Andragogy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learner</td>
<td>Dependent (on what, when and how as decided by the teacher).</td>
<td>Moves towards independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-directing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learner’s experience</td>
<td>Of little worth.</td>
<td>A rich resource for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to learn</td>
<td>People learn what society expects them to.</td>
<td>People learn what they need to know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation to learning</td>
<td>Acquisition of subject matter.</td>
<td>Learning experiences should be based around experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowles (1990) subsequently offered an additional assumption to those he outlined earlier in 1984, that of 'the need to know', giving a total of six assumptions rather than the original five.

a) *The need to know*: in pedagogy the assumption is that learners only need to know what they need to learn, and not how what they learn is applied in life. In andragogy on the other hand, adults must know why they need to learn something before they learn it. This suggests that understanding the reasons why they need to learn is important to adults.

b) *The learner’s self-concept*: learners are dependent on teachers in pedagogy, whereas in adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, and for their own life in andragogy.

c) *The role of experience*: in pedagogy, learners by definition (because they are younger) do not have as much experience and therefore depend on the resources provided by teachers, whereas in andragogy, adults have some quantity and quality of experiences accumulated in their lives as a resource for their learning.

d) *Readiness to learn*: in pedagogy learners are ready to learn whenever they are asked to by the teacher, whereas in andragogy adults’ readiness to learn is based on when they need to develop new knowledge and skills in order to cope with their real-life situations.

e) *Orientation to learning*: in contrast to the subject-centred orientation to learning which often is found in school learning, adults are life-centred, task-centred or problem-centred in their orientation of learning (Knowles, 1990).

f) *Motivation to learn*: in traditional pedagogical assumptions, children are often assumed to be motivated to learn by external motivators, whereas the principles of andragogy assert that adults are motivated mainly by internal motivators, although they are also responsive to external motivators. The balance between the motivations is different.
3.2.3.4. Relevance of Pedagogy and Andragogy to GYT

As the attitudes of society towards young people and the attitude of the young people in society have changed, increased self-direction in education is likely to permeate down to younger and younger age groups (e.g. Bagnall, 2005; Stokes and Wyn, 2007; Kovatcheva, 1998). Thus, it could be argued that self-direction is no longer reserved for adults learning, but will be an integral part of the educational process for all including those of the young people. Indeed, this self-directed and self-determined learning could be encouraged and practiced from the early age. In the case of GYT, young adults are given (or taking) the opportunity for living experiences outside of the classroom to be engaged in life and learning more about the world for themselves.

GYT often signifies the gapper’s first major transition period between school and work, and at the same time between childhood and adulthood. As part of this transition period, GYT takes place ‘somewhere else’ which is very different, mainly in terms of cultural place, from their home. During this potentially vulnerable period in becoming more mature and making the transition to adulthood, gappers may be experiencing an identity construction process which happens to take place abroad. Thus, the kind of learning that takes place is also likely to differ it could be considered that it represents an ‘active transition behaviour’ (Johan, 2009).

During the transition of young gappers from childhood to adulthood, their way of learning is likely to also alter accordingly. In a pedagogical approach to learning, the full responsibility about what, how, when, where and why to learn is taken by the teacher rather than the individual (Knowles, 1990). Yet, as they develop their learning ability, these decisions become more in the hand of the gappers themselves. According to the concept of Andragogy, young people’s decisions on their travel, and the responsibility and outcome of their travel are now largely up to them. This is even more so for the gappers who choose to undertake individual travel and when they embark into unstructured trip – without the assistance of GYT organisations. The skills and knowledge learnt could be richer and more profound if the gapper travels individually as they need to cope with each situation encountered. In any case, what they learn is likely be different from those travelling in organized group.

The concept of Andragogy and its five assumptions (i.e. self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and motivation to learn assumptions; Knowles,
1990) is applicable to youth transition from childhood to adulthood, and one of the main arguments of this study is that the concept of Andragogy may be used to understand GYT as a learning experience. As young adults, gappers are likely to be more self-directed, an implication of this is that the outcome of learning is personal and depends on the individual gapper (i.e. a self-concept assumption – see: Knowles, 1990). The latter also suggests that gappers are also responsible for their own decisions and the outcome of their learning. Gappers bring with themselves the quantity and quality of their previous personal experience (there is an experience assumption), and also their internal motivations to travel and learn (a motivation to learn assumption) that become the resources for learning that can be called for during their trip. Similarly, their previous learning experience (in terms of levels of learning they are at) (see: Bateson, 1972) may also determine what and how they learn. Their personal reasons for travel will also act as an internal reminder that will help to cope with various situations they face during their trip. For these, understanding their reasons for travelling may be an aid in discerning what, why and how they learn. In addition, by having a thorough review of the profiles of the gappers, the researchers may have a better grasp on how the gappers perceived themselves and the world (see: Mezirow, 1991) which will help in interpreting the changes that may occur during/as a result of the trip.

According to Andragogy’s ‘readiness to learn’ assumption (see: Knowles, 1990), as gappers mature they become more ready and interested in learning in matters that are related to their social roles (e.g. occupation, family roles, etc.). An implication of this is that the process of identity construction could be a central issue in young gappers’ learning. Thus, it is important to understand their learning in relation to their identity as an individual, and also in their identity as part of society. Furthermore, as self-directed learners they also learn what they need to learn, not what the society tells them. Perhaps this is more so in the context of travel because it involves exposure to different national cultures, hence more than one society, which may mean that there are more possibilities for change in experimenting a new temporary identity. Indeed, what could be termed ‘identity work’ could be seen as an important part of learning during GYT and the extent to which gappers consciously engage in such identity work (‘finding themselves’) is an open question and one which this research hopes to shed some light on.

Andragogy’s ‘orientation to learning’ assumption (Knowles, 1990) suggests that gappers will focus their learning on the skills that are immediately applicable in the problems they face in their current life situation. This means that they are learning not only from the
situations faced during the trip, but also learning in order to cope with that situation; ‘they learn as they go’ during and from their trip (see: Kolb, 1984). Thus, understanding what happened and how they cope and learn during their trip is helpful in discerning why they learn these new ‘coping’ skills, which in turn assists in understanding their personal situation at home – prior to their travel. This is critical, as it explains ‘the framework’ (i.e. the lenses) through which the gappers view the world, and thus how they learn to handle the current situation. In this sense, it could be argued that both what one learns and how they perceive their learning are closely related to current life situations. Even though what they learn during their trip may not directly solve a current life situation they may be facing at home, it may prepare the individual to manage the situation in the future. Finally, the need to know assumption suggests that gappers as adult learners must know why they need to learn something before they learn it, which suggests that understanding the reasons why they need to learn is important (similar to motivation to learn assumption) as it holds keys to understanding many other aspects of their learning.

Andragogy provides a context of GYTL because during GYT gappers are the active learners who choose their own learning (e.g. what they want to learn and when to learn it) and as they become adults they learn according to what they need to learn rather than being told on what they need to learn. GYT may be the first time the gappers have an opportunity to be an autonomous adult learner (i.e. without the company or supervision of teachers or parents). Furthermore, Andragogy is essentially a transition model which contextualises learning in terms of the passage from childhood to adulthood. Understanding the transition that young gappers go through is important, as it provides an explanation of how their learning has changed: they could become able to learn more independently than they used to. As these changes take place, the young gappers learn from the movement from the old patterns of learning to new patterns of learning, which along the way creates many opportunities for trial and error learning to take place. When young people decide to embark on GYT during this significant transition period, the challenges and opportunities that occur during this transition period multiply. Indeed, travel as ‘learning-in-mobility’ introduces new dimensions of learning: experiential learning, as these experiences take place outside of the classroom, and possibly transformative learning, as these experiences may transform their life in unpredictable ways.
3.2.4. Experiential Learning Theory

3.2.4.1. Experiential Learning Theory Process

Experiential Learning Theory was introduced by Kolb (1984) through his highly influential book entitled *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Kolb was inspired by the work of Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, Jean Piaget and others.

Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory is acknowledged to be one of the most influential models of the adult learning process (Sadler-Smith, 2006). Kolb suggests four stages of an experiential learning cycle (see Figure 3):

a) **Concrete Experience (CE)** – the actual experience of the learner

b) **Reflective Observation (RO)** – observing and reflecting upon the actual experience

c) **Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)** – making abstract concepts from the reflection/observation

d) **Active Experimentation (AE)** – actively using the new abstract concepts to guide future experimentation

In simple terms, an actual experience is followed by reflection and then understanding or making sense of that experience prior to undertaking a new experience. In this process, Kolb argues that “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984: 38).

Kolb’s (1984) work is also based on Jung’s (1923) suggestion that each individual has their own preferred ways of sensing (feeling or thinking) and transforming (watching or doing) their experiences and adapting in the world. Thus, based on people’s preferences for each of the stages, Kolb (1984) further suggests four learning styles: diverging (CE/RO), assimilating (AC/RO), converging (AC/AE), and accommodating (CE/AE). A diverging learning style is based on one’s ability and preference for ‘watching’ and ‘feeling’, whereas an accommodating style is based on ‘doing’ and ‘feeling’. A converging learning style is based on ‘doing’ and ‘thinking’, whereas an assimilating style is based on one’s ability and preference for ‘watching’ and ‘thinking’.
Figure 3. Experiential Learning Theory Process (Source: Kolb, 1984)

It is also suggested by Kolb (1984) that individuals have a tendency to prefer one learning style to others, hence, they perform and achieve tasks in different and more effective ways using that learning style compared to other learning styles. An individual’s preference for a learning style may change depending on the given situation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that not everyone has the ability to do this with ease. Experiential Learning Theory’s learning styles can be assessed using the Learning Styles Inventory (Kolb, 1984) and understanding learning styles can lead to a better appreciation of what and how people learn.

Honey and Mumford (1982) further develop a learning styles cycle based on Kolb’s (1984) model, and their model is highly similar to the four stages and four styles suggested by Kolb (1984). Honey and Mumford’s (1982) four stages and their corresponding typology of learners are: 1) having an experience (Activist style); 2) reviewing the experience (Reflector style); 3) concluding from the experience (Theorist style); and 4) planning the next steps (Pragmatist style). Although it is important to acknowledge that each individual has a preference for how they learn, a thorough review and understanding of individual learning styles are not central to this study.

3.2.4.2. Critiques of Experiential Learning Theory

The idea of Experiential Learning Theory has had major impact on learning theory, research and practice. Nevertheless, a number of criticisms from various perspectives have been made of Kolb’s (1984) model. From a psychological and philosophical perspective,
Heron (1992) points out the limitations of Kolb’s (1984) theory as being too narrow and underdeveloped, incoherent and too restricted, and its philosophical justification as invalid. He comments that Kolb (1984) addresses the above limitations by using means such as intuition and imagination, yet it was done in an unsatisfactory or even incomplete way (Heron, 1992).

From a lifelong education perspective, Miettinen (2000) in Beard, Wilson and Irvine (2002: 37) point out Kolb’s (1984) study is limited:

“Kolb’s learning cycle does not illustrate the fact that empirical (i.e. experiential) thinking based on action has limitations: it may result in false conclusion, it may not help us understand and explain change and new experiences, and it may cause mental laziness and dogmatic thinking.”

Miettinen (2002: 37) adds that “Kolb’s experience and reflection occur in isolation and that there is the necessity for the individual to interact with other humans and the environment in order to enhance the reasoning and conclusions drawn”. Finally, Miettinen (2002) argues the inadequate interpretation of Dewey’s ideas in the work of Kolb (1984).


Kolb’s (1984) Learning Style Inventory (LSI) also received criticism due to low reliability and validity by Coffield, Moseley, Hall and Ecclestone (2004). Coffield et al. (2004) suggested that the notion of a learning cycle may be flawed because the implications for teaching have been drawn logically from the theory rather than from research findings. Furthermore, there has not been any evidence that academic performance was improved through implementing teaching approaches based on Experiential Learning Theory. In fact, Coffield et al. (2004) argue that findings so far are contradictory and inconclusive. However, although Kolb’s (1984) is one of the few learning style models which is based on an explicit theory, problems about reliability, validity and the learning cycle continue to be problematic within Experiential Learning Theory. Nonetheless from a pedagogical perspective, Atherton (2002) points out the merits of Kolb’s (1984) work as to provide one of the most useful descriptive models of the adult learning process available, and that the work provides full value to each stage of the process in teaching and tutoring activities which makes it the most direct application of the model. Whilst acknowledging these criticisms, Experiential Learning...
Theory is considered to be a potentially useful theory for application on GYT but should be complemented by other theories.

3.2.4.3. Relevance of Experiential Learning Theory to GYT

Kolb (1984) offers a four-stage-model of the learning process. One of the distinctive features of Experiential Learning Theory is the importance of ‘experience’ in both the process and outcome of learning. Furthermore, experiential learning theory also highlights the importance of ‘reflection’ on that experience, in which new knowledge is formed. In GYT, it is assumed experience is the main feature, which is sought after by the gappers. This experience often occurs in cultural settings, as well as under social and economic conditions which are very different from those experienced in participants’ daily lives. Thus, from an Experiential Learning Theory perspective the GYT experience can be seen to provide a rich mixture of experiences within which reflection and personal change may occur.

Indeed, Experiential Learning Theory provides a theoretical lens for the study of these experiences. The GYT experience can be regarded as an experiential learning process because the learning experience occurs in cultural, social, and economic settings that are very different from the participants’ usual setting. Experiential learning is likely to be a result of the depth of the gappers’ immersion in an unfamiliar setting. Kolb’s four-stage experiential learning cycle (CE, RO, AC and AE) could serve as a useful model in understanding the role of GYT in the gappers’ learning from experience. During and following the actual GYT experience, the gappers are likely to observe and reflect upon the things that happen to them, and then they make sense of their observations and reflection in the form of a more general and abstract understanding. This new understanding may be used to influence subsequent behaviours and actions.

Evaluating one’s own experiential learning during travel could be challenging for many reasons. First of all, because the learning process is internal, sometimes in abstract form, and often occurs unconsciously, it is difficult to observe and reflect upon this process. Second, the actual experiences of the gappers are highly personal and subjective, and arguably can only be understood and explained by the individuals themselves. Hence, any examination of their learning is one which focuses upon their subjective experiences (the phenomenon as they experience it) and hence is by definition subjective. This requires the individual to have the ability and willingness to share, understand, observe and reflect on these experiences honestly and openly. Third, timing is an important factor in understanding
and interpreting the gappers' experiential learning. As the cycle includes not only the actual experience, but also the observation, reflection and follow-up thoughts and actions on the experience, capturing the whole learning process could be a hard task. Each individual is learning at their own pace and timing, for example one person may take much longer to reflect on certain experiences, while others may need less time for reflection. It is also likely to be true that as circumstances change, various results of new reflection may occur and more recent experiences happen and influence the reflection of the original experience. Thus, allowing time for gappers to properly reflect on their experience is crucial, while on the other hand, allowing too much time to pass by may mean that memories fade or become distorted and there is a loss of the depth and richness of the individual's reflection on the actual experience. These issues are important from the point of view of the timing of the research, i.e. this research will recruit gappers who have travelled in the last 24 months (see also Research Methodology Chapter - Chapter Four).

In addition to the four stages outlined above, Kolb (1984) further suggests that each individual has different learning styles (diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating) based on Jung's (1923) suggestion that each individual has their own preferred ways of sensing (by feeling or thinking) and transforming (by watching or doing) their experiences and adapting in the world. Although this present study will not focus on individual learning styles, it is useful to recognize that each gapper will have the tendency to adopt certain learning styles more than others. In fact, recognizing that style can play a role in assisting the understanding of gappers' experiences and how they learn. It is also important to notice that there is a possibility for a gapper to move from one learning style to the other as they develop (mature) or have to deal with different situations. Essentially, the switch between learning styles may reveal a lot about what and how the gappers learn. Indeed greater learning style versatility may be one outcome of GYT and a very valuable skill for gappers as they enter the job market.

3.2.5. Transformative Learning Theory

3.2.5.1. Transformative Learning Theory Process

The theory of Transformative Learning was originally developed by the adult education theorist and researcher Jack Mezirow in 1978, who suggested that an individual can be transformed through a process of critical reflection. This learning theory is based on
his earlier perspective of transformative theory. Reviewing Mezirow’s (1991) definitions of both learning and transformative theory could assist in understanding transformative learning. According to Mezirow (1991: 167), perspective transformation is

"the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings."

Furthermore, Mezirow (1991: 12) defines learning as "a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action". It can be inferred from the two definitions above that learning is a ‘meaning making process’ using past experience for future development or improvement. Perspective transformation emphasises one’s ability to challenge and change one’s perspective of the world.

No absolute definition of transformative learning has formally been offered in the literature. Nevertheless, the main key elements of the transformative learning process are cited throughout the literature, as changes in ‘frames of reference’, including ‘critical reflection’, experiencing a ‘disorienting dilemma’ and changing ‘meaning structures and schemes’ (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow (1997: 5) defines frames of reference as “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings”. Mezirow (1997: 10) further suggests that “learners need practice in recognizing frames of reference and using their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective”. It is implied that frames of reference are ‘windows or glasses’ through which a person views their life experiences. That individual is only able to see the world from the angle of this window or glasses until they are aware of the limitation of only looking from that angle and become willing to change their perspective. Mezirow (1991) stated that these assumptions are the basis for understanding experience, but it could also be argued that these assumptions are formed through previous experience, and also could form future experience. Thus, understanding frames of reference is very important, as it affects past, present and future experience, which in turns also affects many other aspect of one’s life, such as one’s expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings. Another key assertion by Mezirow (1991) is that it is possible to learn to change perspectives (‘redefine problems from a different perspective’) through awareness (‘in recognizing’), practice
Chapter Three – Related Concepts and Theories

('learners need practice'), and imagination ('using their imagination'). It could be that each of these three elements: awareness, practice, and imagination are of equal importance to learners, as they enhance one another (i.e. they are mutually reinforcing). Furthermore, although awareness is likely to come first, followed by imagination and practice, the sequences of these elements may not be in order, yet the simultaneity of these components could be important.

Furthermore, Mezirow (1991) emphasizes the importance of critical reflection in the learning process by stating: “Perhaps even more central to adult learning than elaborating established meaning schemes is the process of reflecting back on prior learning to determine whether what we have learned is justified under present circumstances” (Mezirow, 1990: 5). It is interesting to note that Mezirow (1991) does not suggest reflecting on past experience, but on the learning that happened in the past. This highlights the importance of the learning process and the critical thoughts behind it rather than merely the outcome of the learning itself. This brings about the insights that knowing how to learn, and knowing what to learn are important. Furthermore, learning to know how to learn and what to learn are the most important of all. Mezirow (1997: 10) also refers to “justified under present circumstances” which suggests an individual’s ability to compare their past situation to the present situation. If we relate to his notion to 'redefine problems from a different perspective' earlier in the discussion of frames of reference one’s ability to compare two situations may impact upon their ability to create a new frame of reference. Indeed, reflection (i.e. looking to the past) is no longer enough unless it is done critically.

Mezirow (1991) also suggests that not all perspective transformation leads to transformative learning. Transformative learning occurs much less frequently than perspective transformation does. If so, how do perspective transformations differ from transformative learning? Mezirow (1991) proposes that a disorienting dilemma usually acts as a catalyst for triggering transformative learning. Transformative learning usually results from a disorienting dilemma. Disorienting dilemmas are situations which no longer fit to one's preconceived notions of how the world works, and can take form of a life crisis or major life transition, whether it is a single event or a series of events that occur over a much longer period as in "an accretion of transformation in points of view" (Mezirow, 1997: 7). A life crisis or major life transition may trigger transformative learning; nevertheless, it is unlikely that the dilemma itself causes the transformative learning. This issue has not been confirmed nor discussed in the literature.
Meaning structures are frames of reference that are based on a person's cultural and contextual experiences, and which influence how one behaves and interprets events; whereas, meaning schemes are ways people make sense of experiences, deconstruct them, and act upon them in a rational way (Mezirow, 1991). In this sense meaning structures are 'the big pictures', whereas meaning schemes are 'the smaller pictures' that make up the big pictures. Hence, meaning structures are made up of meaning schemes. Using this approach, it could be argued that changes in meaning schemes are likely to occur more often than changes in meaning structures. Meaning schemes may change as a person adds to or integrates ideas within an existing scheme and in fact, this transformation of meaning schemes could occur routinely through learning. Nevertheless, changing meaning structure could be more difficult and happen more rarely than changing meaning schemes, as it means changing the way one perceives the world in general, not on individual experiences.

Additionally, Mezirow (1991) discusses and portrays transformative learning in further depth in the ten phases of Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning as: 1) a disorienting dilemma; 2) self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame; 3) a critical assessment of assumptions; 4) recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change; 5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; 6) planning of a course of action; 7) acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; 8) provisionally trying out new roles; 9) building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and 10) a reintegration of new assumptions into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

The ten phases above portray the potential depth that transformative learning could have in one's life - it may change one's life completely. The individual is likely to view the world differently, in a way that he/she has never seen it before. Identifying and understanding the four key elements of transformative learning – 'frames of reference', 'critical reflection', 'disorienting dilemma' and 'meaning structures and schemes' – will be a useful starting point in understanding how transformative learning happens through the application of Mezirow's (1991) ten phases. Further challenges may include understanding why not all learning is transformative, and why transformative learning happens to certain individuals, but not necessarily to others.
3.2.5.2. Critiques of Transformative Learning Theory

Although Mezirow's (1991) work has been foundational in the field of transformative learning, over the years a variety of critical responses have emerged (e.g. Cranton, 1994; O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor, 2002; Taylor, 1997). Mezirow's (1991) theory and ideas have been expanded upon by several theorists in order to address his emphasis on the rational and linear aspects of transformation (Grabove, 1997). Baumgartner (2001: 18) argues that transformative learning "is a complex process involving thoughts and feelings", and compares Dirkx (1998) extra-rational emphasis in which transformation involves learning which is not constrained by rational and cognitive learning. Grabove (1997) further emphasizes the potential for integration of self and other, renewal and rebirth as themes indicative of the non-rational dimensions of transformative learning. Grabove (1997: 95) suggests the transformative learner "moves in and out of the cognitive and the intuitive, of the rational and the imaginative, of the subjective and the objective, of the personal and the social."

Indeed, transformative learning is described through meaning structures, common themes and different kind of learning. Thus, "transformative learning involves reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes"; it is "a process of getting beyond gaining factual knowledge alone, and involves questioning assumptions, beliefs and values, and considering multiple points of view, while always seeking to verify reasoning" (Mezirow, 1991: 167). There remains great debate over what "transformative" means, and whether the process is best understood intellectually, emotionally, spiritually or politically. Nevertheless, the significance of Mezirow's (1991) contribution to understanding individual learning and how one could engage in transformative learning are central to this study.

3.2.5.3. Relevance of Transformative Learning Theory to GYT

In time of crisis where an individual is not able to resolve existing problems in the same way that problems were solved in the past, the urge for self-assessment and critical reflection become more significant; this may call for a new interpretation of the situation. When a new interpretation is made, a new understanding of the meaning is made. In this sense, transformative learning involves: becoming more reflective and critical; being more open to the perspectives of others; and being less defensive and more accepting of new ideas. Desforges (2000) and Riley (1988) document that many young travellers are at a certain stage
of ‘transition in their life’ in the beginning of their extended journey, and that the trip is often a catalyst in bringing about radical transformation.

In experiential learning, Kolb’s (1984) model is useful in understanding the process and steps of learning that may occur when gappers learn. Yet, how does the learning actually occur at the individual level? Although the answer to this question may not be within the scope of the Experiential Learning Theory model, Kolb (1984: 38) suggests that “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” This implies that the key to understanding how the gappers create new knowledge is in the transformation of experience. However, how does transformation happen to the individual (i.e. how does transformative learning occur) not merely to the creation of knowledge as a result of the experience (i.e. experiential learning)? According to Mezirow (1991: 223), “not all learning is transformative. We can learn simply by adding knowledge to our meaning scheme or learning new meaning schemes with which to make interpretations about our experience.” Hence, while Experiential Learning Theory provides the basis for how experiential learning happens, the Transformative Learning concept (Mezirow, 1996) may provide a better basis for answering the more fundamental question of how GYT may have a transformative effect to individuals: “Transformative learning involves reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes or transforming our meaning perspectives (set of related meaning schemes)” (Mezirow, 1991: 223).

From Mezirow’s (1991) definition of perspective transformation, it can be implied that transformation springs from critical awareness of the limitations of our perception, understanding and feeling about the world, and that once we have this awareness, more options and choices become available to us. It could also be inferred from his definition about how critical awareness may come about: by including, discriminating, and integrating the new experiences into our old understanding (see: Mezirow, 1991: 167). Therefore, it is important to understand their old perception of the world, how their critical awareness comes about from and during their trip, and how they arrive at new perceptions of the world and about themselves.

Understanding several key elements of transformative learning, e.g. ‘frames of reference’, ‘critical reflections’ ‘disorienting dilemma’ and ‘meaning structures and schemes’ (Mezirow, 1996), could be essential in understanding how internal processes of learning occur. For example, the gappers perceive their GYT experiences through their personal
frames of reference (analogous to the glasses through which they look at their life experiences). This explains why the same experience can have different meanings for different gappers. In fact, Mezirow (1997) highlights the importance of learners in recognizing their frames of reference, as it is only then they are able to solve problems by looking at them from different angles and perspectives (through different glasses). So, gappers’ learning may involve recognizing one’s own frame of reference, and then having a willingness to actively experiment with new frames of reference.

Similar to Kolb (1984), Mezirow (1990) emphasizes the importance of reflection in the adult learning process. However, if Kolb (1984) suggests that one reflects on the past experience, Mezirow (1991) suggests that one reflects on the learning that happened in the past. Although the difference between the two may be subtle, by reflecting on both their experience and their learning, gappers are likely to understand themselves better. Mezirow (1990: 5) also points out that reflection is not enough unless it is done critically. Thus, gappers need to engage in critical reflection, which may include questioning their prior assumptions.

Mezirow (1991) suggests that a disorienting dilemma often acts as a catalyst for transformative learning to occur. He also suggests that this disorienting dilemma can take a form of a life crisis or major life transition (i.e. ‘a single event or a series of events’ (Mezirow, 1997: 7)). In the narrative of many travellers, including gappers, it is documented that they are often at a life juncture, or in certain stage of ‘transition in their life’ at the beginning of their trip (see: Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000). Therefore, disorienting dilemma may be a key element to consider in order to understand the gappers’ learning experience.

A meaning structure is a frame of reference based on a person’s cultural and contextual context, whereas meaning schemes are a way of making sense in a rational way (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, meaning structures (i.e. the ‘big picture’) made up of some meaning schemes (i.e. the ‘smaller picture’) and change of meaning schemes may occur more than changes in meaning structures. However, they both work in a system, and thus it is important to understand both the meaning structure and the meaning scheme of the gappers in order to understand the scope of their leaning at micro- and macro-levels. This means that the rational decisions made by the gappers (meaning schemes) are influenced by their cultural and other individual context (meaning structures). Thus the gappers’ background (e.g. their
cultural, social and economic context) may impact on their decisions (e.g. why they make certain spontaneous decisions, etc.) before and during their trip.

Mezirow's (1996) ten phases of transformative learning could also be applied to the GYT experience. From Phase One, it may be inferred that 'a mistake' or 'a wrong/uncomfortable situation' often acts as a catalyst, which becomes a turning point for learning. Furthermore, it is suggested by Mezirow (1996) that critical examinations of one’s thoughts and feelings, and sharing them with others are important (Phase Two, Three and Four). Only by being aware, understanding and sharing one’s thoughts and feelings, can one become open to new possibilities and alternatives in which new options become available, if one desires to opt for one (Phase Five). Then one could plan to correct ‘mistakes’ by doing things differently; in order to do this one needs to ‘learn new knowledge and skills’ and put them into practice (Phase Six to Nine). Finally, when learning has fully taken place, the new values and beliefs become integrated into one’s life (Phase Ten). This may provide an answer to the question about the meaning transformation and how it happens when applied to certain gappers during their GYT experience. Nevertheless, whether this applies to all gappers, and whether a disorienting dilemma, which is a negative starting point, is always a factor is open to question and one on which this present research may shed some light.

If analysed in detail Mezirow’s (1991) phases of transformation (Phases Five and Eight) consider identity construction (e.g. roles) to be an important part of the transformation. It could be argued that exploring and trying out new roles is easier to do in a new environment, free from any influence of old assumptions. This may mean that there is less resistance to transformative learning, and thus opportunity for an individual to move from one role to the other. This could explain: (a) why the potential for transformative learning is higher during the travel period where the environment is different (e.g. new culture in overseas travel, etc.) such as in GYT experience; (b) that transformative learning is unlikely to happen in one’s usual environment as the resistance for change is higher (e.g. cultural expectations, norms, etc.). Nevertheless, whether transformative learning happens or not may also depend on the personal characteristics of the gappers themselves (e.g. personality characteristics such as their openness to experience).

It is also important to note from the phases in Mezirow’s (1991) model, that in transformative learning one does not only need to be aware of the experience, but also to be aware of their reflections (i.e. feelings and thoughts). More importantly, one does not only
learn from experience and reflection, one also needs to learn new knowledge and skills in order to overcome the same situation if it occurs again. This means that an individual does not only learn to change the outcome of their behaviour, but s/he also learns to understand where their learning (i.e. their original assumptions) went wrong. Thus, this also suggests that a higher level of learning has occurred, as the learner does not only change the outcome, but also questions their underlying values and beliefs (see also Section 3.2.6., e.g. Bateson, 1984).

Mezirow’s (1991) transformative learning process may be thought of in terms of a “stepladder”, thus perhaps is more comprehensive and far reaching than the four steps suggested by Kolb (1984) in his Experiential Learning Theory. Despite sharing some similarities in which they focus on the learning process in a form of a cycle; Mezirow (1991) and Kolb (1984) come from different perspectives (experiential learning vs. transformative learning perspectives). Although Transformative Learning is arguably more complex than Experiential Learning Theory, it could be argued that the two models may complement each other, whereby they examine the same issue (the gappers’ learning experience) but from different perspectives: from the experiential perspective (i.e. suggesting that experience is important element of learning) and the transformative perspective (i.e. suggesting that transformation is a possible outcome of learning). Therefore, this study will use both models in examining the gappers’ learning experience.

3.2.6. Levels of Learning Theories

A number of levels of learning theories were notable within the literature and the following three theories are appraised for their applicability for this research.

3.2.6.1. Single and Double-Loop Learning

This is primarily a theory of organisational learning and since their original work in 1974, Argyris and Schön made a profound impact in the area of professional effectiveness and organizational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974; 1978). Nevertheless, their work is cognitive and is to some extent applicable to the individual learning, as it is based on the premises that each individual has mental maps which guide them on how to act, including how they plan, implement and review their actions. A model was offered to describe a process of three elements: governing variables (i.e. goals/beliefs/policies/norms), action
strategies (i.e. action) and consequences (i.e. outcome) (Argyris and Schön, 1978), as described in Figure 4.

![Diagram of Single and Double-Loop Learning](image)

**Figure 4.** Single and Double-Loop Learning (Source: Argyris and Schön, 1978)

Argyris and Schön (1978) suggest that learning, in an organisational context, involves the detection and correction of error. They use the terms single-loop and double-loop learning in describing how these errors can be corrected. If an error is detected in the outcome of an action, there is a need to correct the problem. In correcting problem, one may need to return to earlier steps in the process: the action or the governing variables. The term of single-loop learning is used when the action is corrected to produce different outcomes. In this situation, the correction is rather mechanical, and does not require much further thinking or scrutiny. In some cases, this is enough to correct the problem. However, other cases may call for a deeper reflection of the problem where correction (e.g. minor and major adaptation and modifications) may be needed in reviewing the governing variables that direct the action. This is described as double-loop learning. Argyris and Schön (1974: 19) pointed out the difference between single and double-loop learning: "In single-loop learning, we learn to maintain the field of constancy by learning to design actions that satisfy existing governing values. In double-loop learning, we learn to change the field of constancy itself."

3.2.6.2. First and Second Order of Change

Other scholars also provide similar version of process to Single and Double-Loop Learning. For example, Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) suggested First and Second Order Change to be a resemblance to Single and Double-Loop Learning. First Order Change takes place when the principal norms remain the same despite of the changes made. Second Order Change happens when the changes made also challenges the principal norms. When the principals are questioned, and thus improved in both Double-Loop Learning and Second Order Change, the results are likely to be more effective as it creates new guiding principles.
in making informed decisions in the future rather than only fixing error in the current situation (Argyris, 1974).

3.2.6.3. Bateson’s Levels of Learning

Bateson suggests five levels of learning (Level 0, I, II, III and IV), which he refers to as to as ‘ladder’ of learning (Bateson, 1972). Learning at Level 0 is characterised by right or wrong responses, where there is no space for correcting errors. Learning at Level I is similar to level 0 but with possibility to correct errors with a set of alternatives. At Level II, the set of alternatives occurs at Level I can be corrected by reviewing the sequence of the learning process. At Level III, the learning that occurs at Level II can be enhanced by creating a ‘system’ of these sets of alternatives. Bateson does not discuss much of learning at Level IV other than stating that it would be a change in Learning III and that its occurrence is unlikely in any adult living organism on this earth (Bateson, 1972). Thus, it could be argued that higher levels of learning becomes available to an individual as one becomes more aware of how they learn and are willing to improve themselves and how they learn. Indeed, Tosey (2006: 2) acknowledged that Bateson’s contribution has changed the context of learning, in which an individual ‘not only learns, but simultaneously learns how to learn’.

3.2.6.4. Relevance of Levels of Learning Theory to GYT

Transition situations have been found to often surround travellers prior to their trip (e.g. Desforges, 2000). It may explain situations in which gappers were not able to solve easily and that even their best actions may have resulted in negative outcomes, whereby gappers may have an opportunity to step back from these situations and look at them more objectively. By taking themselves out of the usual context, it may be easier for them to reflect on the context (i.e. the situation), to review their actions, as well as the bigger views, e.g. their view of life. Their reflection may be heightened by exposures to other cultures, and challenges that occur along the road. Thus, it could be suggested that GYT could offer an opportunity for gappers to experience double-loop learning, as long as the gappers themselves are ready to embark to this learning experience. When the gappers question and challenge the habitual norms, they are likely to open up to second order change. Furthermore, whether or not gappers experience double-loop learning/second order change may be observed through the gappers’ levels of learning. Indeed, understanding how gappers learn could be an important key that may lead to an answer whether GYT could be
transformational. More importantly, these reviews suggest that learning may come at various levels, lower and higher level of changes.

The single and double-loop learning concept believe that each individual has mental maps which guide them on how to act, including how they plan, implement and review their actions. In the context of gappers, single-loop learning happens if the gappers only correct the problem to get the correct outcome (i.e. getting the desired result at a given point of time). Double-loop learning happens when the correction of the outcome makes them question their deeper value and beliefs that the action and thus outcome based on. This kind of learning will require a profound critical reflection from the gappers which may requires identity work. Such case a major change could be considered as transformative learning, as discussed in Mezirow’s phases above. Although it could not be inferred that double-loop learning is more transformational than single-loop learning, it could be argued that the potential for transformative learning is higher in double-loop learning. Similarly, First and Second Order Change suggested that gappers who experience Second Order Change are likely to experience more transformative learning as they questioned the principals of their actions.

In Bateson’s five levels of learning, the improvements at each level are in terms of the learner’s increased ability in creating more options and choices from and to correct their situation. This suggests that even though two gappers may face similar situations, their learning may be different as they may see the situation differently. In the words of Mezirow, this could mean ‘changes in the frames of reference, meaning structures, and meaning schemes’. From the perspectives of Argyris and Schön (1974), a different loop of learning (single or double) could have occurred. Thus, it could be implied that in the case of gappers, their learning are based on their ability to see the situation differently from the way they use to see them, in order to solve the problems at hand. From the Pedagogy vs. Andragogy point of view, if learning happens as the gappers become motivated to solve the problems at hand, the gappers have moved towards more adult-learning orientation. Indeed, Tosey (2006: 2) acknowledged that Bateson contributed the view that one ‘not only learns, but simultaneously learns how to learn’. Furthermore, it could be argued further that besides learning how to learn, one needs to learn to their current level of learning. This is important because, only by being aware of one’s current level of learning, one could progress to the next level of learning. While the work of Bateson (1984), Argyris and Schön (1978), and Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) is not directly related to the gappers’ learning experience; their
work have provided insights on how gappers could learn a new way of learning and this can be done through correcting their previous ways of learning.

### 3.2.7. Justification for Selection of Experiential Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory

Upon detail reviews of the four learning theories relevant to GYT and their potential to explain the learning that may occur during GYT, two learning theories: experiential learning and transformative learning theories are considered the most relevant to this study (see Table 4). An important note needs to be made here that the reviews and discussions of the two other theories (i.e. pedagogy and andragogy and levels of learning theories) also provided some insights about the contexts of GYT Learning therefore shape a more informed overview of GYT Learning potentials. A brief summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four learning theories below explains justifications on the selection of experiential learning and transformative learning theories.

The main contribution of Andragogy and Pedagogy concept is that it explains that gappers' learning characteristics (i.e. assumptions) are likely to be based on adult learning model that is different from children learning model as they move toward adulthood. However, while it discusses these important characteristics the concept does not provide an actual illustration how this learning occurs, hence it is more a conceptual framework than a theory.

The level of learning theory highlights that GYTL may occur not only differently for each gapper, but there may also be different levels of learning occurring. The theory also provides a conceptual map on the occurrence of different levels of learning (e.g. Single and Double-Loop Learning in Argyris and Schön, 1978; see Figure 4) but it does not illustrate step-by-step process from individual learning process. It is concerned with problem solving and individual cognition hence it is rather too specific. It also looks at learning mainly from organisational perspective, and therefore while it will be useful for GYT its usefulness may be more relevant at a later stage once the basic template of how GYTL process from individual learning perspectives has been established.

The main weakness of both andragogy and pedagogy and levels of learning theories are that they do not provide clear indications on how the learning process occurs, hence they have limits in their usefulness in addressing the third research question (i.e. what are the
processes of GYT Learning: how the gappers learn). These are the strengths of the experiential learning and transformative learning theory as discussed below.

Experiential learning theory is viewed positively for this study for two reasons. First, it clarified a learning process which is easy to understand and can be applied to the learning processes of the gappers which is essentially an experience not a problem to be solved (see single and double-loop learning in Section 3.2.6.1.). Second, this learning process has been widely used in higher education, and in some cases in tourism education as well (e.g. Martin and Woodside, 2007; Razzaq, Mohamad, Kader, Mustafad, Ab.Hadi, Hamzah and Khalifah, 2013; Ruhanen, Robinson, Breakey, 2013) hence is relevant to the field and context.

The value of transformative learning theory is that it adds intuitive and emotional elements into the learning process since learning is not only cognitive and rational and certainly is not emotion-free. It also defines clear learning steps that have been successfully used to explain the changes that occur as a result of learning in other contexts (e.g. learning from crises and used clinically in psychotherapy). As discussed in the literature, changes and potentially ones that lead to transformation, may also occur during travel (e.g. Coghlan and Gooch, 2011; Johan, 2009) and as suggested by Stone and Petrick (2013) this new understanding has just been realised as being neglected in tourism research. The only concern needs to be raised is that the learning process suggested by transformative learning theory may include too many steps that may not necessarily relevant to all gappers in all contexts, therefore the appropriateness of these steps may need to be carefully examined and validated empirically.

In essence, experiential learning and transformative learning theories are chosen for two main reasons. First, these two theories provide guidance on how the learning processes arising out of the gappers experiences may occur. Second, they point out that the process of learning itself may be experiential, transformational or both and could contain various steps that may vary for different gappers hence providing a comprehensive framework for analysis but which can also accommodate individual differences in the learning process. Based on these, the two theories provide explanations on how the gappers learn which assist in answering the third research question, mainly in its deductive application (see also Section 1.1. and Section 4.5.4.2.2.). In support to these choices and justifications, a more recent
Table 4. Table of Learning Theories in Relation to Gap Year Travel (GYT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories</th>
<th>Original Context</th>
<th>Summary and Definition of Learning</th>
<th>Context in relation to GYT</th>
<th>Relevance to GYTL</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Andragogical Learning Theory | Adult Education  | • Moving away from pedagogical approach of learning (lead by teacher) towards andragogical approach of learning (self-directed and self-motivated).  
• Five assumptions of Andragogical Learning Theory consist of self-concept, an experience, a motivation to learn, readiness to learn and orientation to learning assumptions.  
Definition of Learning: “the process of gaining knowledge and/or expertise” (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998: 17). | Andragogical Learning Theory helps to explain the important role that GYT plays in young people’s transition from child to adulthood but with an educational focus. | Medium             | Knowles (1990; 1998)   |
| Experiential Learning Theory | Organisational Behaviour | • Four-stage Experiential Learning Theory cycle consists of Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation based in Dewey, Lewin, Piaget and Jung.  
Definition of Learning: “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984: 41). | Experiential Learning Theory helps to explain the process of how GYT experience could potentially create knowledge through the process of reflection on their overseas’ experiences. | Medium             | Kolb (1984)            |
| Transformative Learning   | Adult Learning   | • Transformative Learning Theory offers several key elements of transformative learning: frames of reference, critical reflections, disorienting dilemma and meaning structures and schemes.  
• Transformative Learning involves reflectively transforming the beliefs, attitudes, opinions and emotional reactions that constitute our meaning schemes or transforming our meaning perspectives (set of related meaning schemes)” (Mezirow, 1991: 223).  
Definition of Learning: “the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1991: 12). | Transformative Learning Theory helps to explain how young gappers could potentially become active learners, who are able to define meaning and gain new perspectives on their own and perhaps be personally transformed. | High               | Mezirow (1991)         |
| Level of Learning Theory  | Organisational Behaviour and Cybernetics/Epistemology | • Single/Double-loop Learning differentiates between the superficial and deeper level of learning that could induce transformation (similar to First/Second Order Change).  
• Bateson’s Level of Learning suggests that the improvements of one’s ability at each level create more options and choices for actions.  
Definition of Learning: “a process of detecting and correcting error” (Argyris, 1977: 116). | Levels of Learning Theory helps to explain that learning can occur on various levels, e.g. superficial (‘fixing the action’) or deeper (‘making significant changes in values and beliefs’). One way of conceptualising GYT learning after on the basis of the empirical work may be as ‘levels’ of learning. The main application of this has been in management and organization studied in relation to collective learning. | High               | Bateson (1972) Argyris and Schön (1978, 1996) Argyris (1977) |
review of literature on the educational benefits of travel experience by Stone and Petrick (2013:732) argue that “the principles of experiential learning and transformative learning may provide a viable connection between travel and education.”

3.3. UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION

3.3.1. The Concept of Transition

Transition could be defined as “any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman, 1995: 27). Adams et al. (1976: 24) state that “... a transition is a discontinuity in a person’s life space of which he is aware and which requires new behavioural responses... transitions may be macro, micro, predictable or unpredictable, entered into voluntarily or involuntarily”. Santiago (2004) argues that while the terms ‘change’ and ‘transition’ are often used interchangeably, not all change should be considered as transitional; it remains a change if there is no deeper meaning being attached to the change. The ‘concept’ of transition originally came from psychology literature in the area of counselling for crisis, stress, trauma, loss and depression (Adams et al., 1976). Yet over time this concept has permeated to other areas of research as well, with the most frequent work on transitions being done in the area of transition from childhood/adolescence to adulthood/parenthood/elder years, between school to work or between educational institutions or employment organisations, leaving the home environment for other cities, countries or culture. Nevertheless, the focus of this study remains to be mainly in the area of the transition between childhood to adulthood and between school and higher education, and in some cases between different employments which the young gappers may also experience.

A number of models and theories of transitions were developed suggesting a closer look at the changes that occur throughout one’s life stages and review how individuals respond to them is necessary (Hopson and Adams, 1976). Transition generally occurs when there are major changes occurring in one’s life (i.e. not all changes could be classified as transition) as such that it requires the individual to make major changes to his/her life. Furthermore, it is also argued that while a transition time may be a difficult period as it could be highly disruptive to one’s life and relationships, at the same time it also provides the opportunity for personal growth and development (Adams et al., 1976; Williams, 1999).
“Personal growth”, according to Adams (1976: 66), “means the development of increased adaptability and a stronger sense of self.” While a negative outcome is possible, the long-term possibility for positive outcomes is likely (Adams, 1976).

The Process of Transition

Williams (1999) presents a number of important issues surrounding personal transitions. First, he argues that each individual has a different level of tolerance and vulnerability in regards to transition (e.g. due to economic security, emotional security, health, prior transition skills, working environment, other transition supports). Second, each transition will last differently for each individual/occurrence. Third, changes causing/resulting transitions require both “situational and intrapersonal learning and unlearning” and involve both “behavioural and cognitive restructuring” which “occur at different phases of the cycle” (ibid: 4). Fourth, the outcomes of transitions may differ largely for each individual and for each situation. Fifth, the impact of transitions could permeate not only into one’s specific role (e.g. one’s role as a student) but to all aspects of one’s life. Sixth,
an individual's transitions are likely to influence the lives of others and may even cause transitions for those around him/her. Finally, Mezirow (1991) also points out that how individuals reconstruct their cognitive mind (i.e. cognitive restructuring) in adapting to a new circumstances remains to be most questioned within the literature and argues that the final phase of successful transition results in a person's life transformation (see also Section 3.2.5. on Transformative Learning).

One renowned scholar in the area of personal transition is John Fisher (2005), with his model of personal transition curve (Figure 5) that suggests the various stages of emotion that are experienced by an individual as they go through a transition process. The various emotions or stages involved in the process include anxiety, happiness, fear, threat, guilt, depression, gradual acceptance, moving forward, disillusionment, hostility, denial, anger and complacency.

According to Fisher (2005), one starts to feel anxious as changes occur within the environment creating a feeling of uncertainty and of being out of control. When one shares one's feelings with others, one feels some sense of relief and happiness that others have recognized this feeling and may have experienced the same; this understanding brings hope that situations could be resolved. Fear and threat may play a major role as one's core belief is open to question (i.e. there is a need to see things differently, act differently, and believe differently, etc.). A phase of resistance to change (e.g. denial that change is occurring) may occur at this stage as one's old system of seeing, thinking and doing is being challenged which may be accompanied by a feeling of guilt. This guilty feeling is caused by the fact that one is experiencing a shift in sense of self, where the solution to problem that previously worked no longer works one could no longer identify oneself with her/his previous identity. Disillusionment may occur as one finds major incompatibilities between one's personal values and those around. This potential new understanding of one's identity can also cause depression if one recognizes major differences in past and present identities and there is no clear understanding about who one should proceed to be; this is often signified by a lack of motivation and confusion. The feeling of anger could ensue as the one feels that she/he is not able to control the situation. If one is unable to accept changes, hostility could occur as one operates in the same old way that proved to be ineffective and unsuccessful. If one is able to gradually accept these changes, one is able to manage one's thoughts and actions, making
sense of things and reasons and hence being able to feel more confident to move forwards with one's plan. Here is a presence of a strong sense of one's identity in which one once again feels comfortable in experimenting with the environment. Fisher (2005) argues that the movement between one stage to another is not always clear or easily recognisable, and this movement is not always clear and linear. Fisher (2005) also argues that one's ability to go through this transition process depends largely on one's self perception, locus of control, past experiences and ability to use these factors in anticipating the future.

A similar transition curve model is presented in the work of Adams et al. (1976) which offers 7 stages of the transition process: 1) Immobilisation; 2) Minimisation; 3) Depression; 4) Acceptance of reality – letting go; 5) Testing; 6) Search for meaning; and 7) Internalisation. The first stage of immobilisation is often experienced through the sense of being overwhelmed, shocked and unable due to unfamiliarity within the environment and the negative expectations that exist. The second stage of minimisation often involves denial and tries to trivialize any changes which occur. The third stage occurs when one is facing the fact that change is imminent and that one is learning to cope. The fourth stage occurs when one starts to accept the reality and let go of the past and embrace the new. The fifth stage occurs when one experiments with one's new way (of behaving, of thinking, etc.). The sixth stages involve a cognitive process in making sense and finding deeper meaning within the changes that occur in one's life. Finally, the seventh stage is one's process in integrating between meaning and behaviours.

A cross over between the field of transition studies and learning theories has existed since the earlier work of Adams et al. (1976), who state that “the theory of and research of Kolb (1974), which has its core a model for adult learning contributes an important potential link for understanding how one actually moves to a new life style. Kolb’s theory proposes a descriptive model of adult learning as a process for translating experience into concepts that in turn are used as guides for choosing new experiences. We think Kolb’s theory has high potential for uncovering and explaining the ways that individuals develop and change“ (Adams et al., 1976: 32).

A number scholar (e.g. Adams et al., 1976; Fisher, 1990; Cooper, 1990) also discuss the various ways that transitions could be managed, and how professionals could assist an individual during transitions. For example, the four ways suggested by Adams et al. (1976)
are: 1) to teach the individual to self-manage, by creating a proper work setting, support system, self-awareness, exercise, nutrition and through letting go; 2) to do a personal re-evaluation and practice goal-setting; 3) to work through the transition in a team; and 4) to go through a training program in order to cope. Fisher (1990) and Cooper (1990) also provide a few suggestions for strategies in managing transitions; these include: identifying problems; enhancing commitment; being courageous about changes; regaining control; managing lifestyle and having a ‘constructive self-talk’.

Finally, the transition of young people in particular could be regarded as problematic due to the level of vulnerability involved. To address these issues, according to Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998), their transitions could be helped through the following stages: 1) relationship building; 2) assessment; 3) goal setting; 4) interventions; and 5) termination and follow-up; these five stages have been proven to be an effective guide for professionals in helping students’ transitions.

3.3.2. The Role of GYT in Youth Transition

Many students encounter challenges and difficulties in the transition to university or work due to geographical, social and other displacements and these may result in significant numbers not completing their studies or who are unable to adjust well to working life (Kelly, Kendrick, Newgent, and Lucas, 2007; Scanlon, Rowling and Weber, 2007; Shanahan, 2000). According to Pearce and Foster (2007: 1286), “the experience and knowledge gained through travel represent a kind of parallel to formal education in school or at university”. This is one of the arguments used to explain the GYT experiences which many young people choose to engage in between education and employment. By deferring their entry into work, young people allow themselves a space to reconfigure their career and life choices. Students experiencing the initial transition to university may experience feelings of loss of continuity as they leave behind familiarity (Scanlon et al., 2007). Travelling is an increasingly important part of ‘growing up’ for young adults, and GYT may allow space for identity construction and personal transformation to happen.

The priorities of young people today have changed with “personal relationships, wellbeing, lifestyle and leisure [taking] a central focus in their lives” and influencing their study and work choices (Stokes and Wyn, 2007: 501). Indeed, leisure has become a priority
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for young people, thus making GYT a more acceptable and common option than it has been in the past. Furthermore, it has been noted that GYT may play an important role in influencing the outcome of studies or a career for example by confirming the gappers’ intention to pursue their study or refocusing the gappers on their choice of career through their GYT activities such as volunteering (Inkson and Myers, 2003). Another reason why this research focuses on the role of GYT in youth transition is in the proposition that the life transitions of young people are important both for themselves and wider society. Indeed, as stated by Hall et al. (1999: 501), young people “are positioned at the leading edge of many aspects of contemporary social change.”

The lives of young people are going through major reconstruction with new agendas, experiences and priorities (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998). The traditional view of transitions suggests that this process consists of four simple linear thresholds that define the progress from childhood into adulthood: (a) completing education; (b) entry into employment; (c) leaving home; and (d) forming a couple (Bagnall, 2005), but this pattern is slowly disappearing. Compared to the transition process of young people in the previous generations which was fairly linear, straightforward, standardized, and was much shorter, the youth transition process today is regarded as being prolonged, complicated, unpredictable (open-ended and fluid), diverse, individualized, insecure, fragmented, risky and includes many steps (see: Ainley and Bailey, 1997; Goodwin and O’Connor, 2007; Inui 2003; MacDonald, Mason, Shildreck, Webster, Johnston and Ridley, 2001). This linearity of the traditional transition model is outdated and limiting, and also does not account for the complexity of the young people’s lives (Stokes and Wyn, 2007), and is based on an assumption that waged labour is the ultimate goal (see: Cohen and Ainley, 2000). In the past, to achieve ‘successful’ youth transition (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 2007) meant the need for individuals to achieve particular milestones at certain age (Stokes and Wyn, 2007). The danger in uncritically accepting this linearity is that it may miss the significance of the construction of identity, which is arguably one of the most important aspects of transition (Vaughan, Roberts and Gardiner, 2006).

As new patterns of transition have emerged (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001), school-to-work transitions have become both ‘de-standardized’ and ‘individualized’ as young people negotiate a much wider choice of routes into adulthood (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998).
Today, young people have more power to choose, and there is no clear rule of process or outcome. Transition can also be seen as a process of identity development and construction, cultural exchange and learning, rather than a narrow focus on outcome. Indeed, the transition from childhood to adulthood could be seen as a complicated phase, as it involves difficult changes (such as adolescence) with many turbulent situations, which in turn also introduces individuals to many potential directions for change (Newman and Newman, 1997; Nielsen, 1996). Thus, it is undeniably true that youth transition today is a complex process.

Along with a broadening and more holistic conceptualisation of transition, which include other aspects, e.g. leisure, health and sexuality, rather than merely focusing on the move from school to work, family and housing transitions (Shildrick and McDonald, 2007), GYT has largely become an important part of the youth transition process for current generations. Transition can also be seen as a process of identity development and construction, cultural exchange and learning, rather than a narrow focus on outcomes. In this context, Evans and Heinz (1995: 10) suggest that young people need to develop more ‘active transition behaviours’ which enable them to negotiate their way successfully through these challenges. GYT is one such active transition behaviour. When young people respond to and negotiate new social realities, they also are shaping distinctive new patterns of living – they “interpret, tackle and hence transform” their worlds (Leccardi and Ruspini, 2006: 3).

3.4. UNDERSTANDING MOBILITY

3.4.1. The Concept of Mobility

The Mobilities Paradigm is an emergent paradigm within the social sciences (Clavé, 2012), and considered as the most recent development and a new agenda within the literature (Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Hannam et al., 2006; Urry, 2000; 2007). The topics within the mobilities paradigm include migration, return migration, transnationalism, diasporas, and other obligatory as well as voluntary forms of travel (Hall, 2005; Hannam et al., 2006), along with tourism as part of temporal mobility (e.g. Duncan, 2012; Hall, 2005).

The literature argues that issues of mobility are now ‘centre-stage’ (Hannam et al.) and is at the core of Western modernity (Cresswell, 2006; Jensen, 2011). While mobility itself is not a new concept (Cresswell, 2010; Duncan, 2012), the new and sharp turn of mobility replaces the old perception of old and stable society (Hannam et al., 2006),
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transforming the way we look at society and develop social sciences (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). The world today is no longer the same as it was, where there is higher sense of risk and uncertainty and a lesser sense of security. This is mainly due to dramatic changes marked by increasing speed of penetration of technological development, globalisation, cultural and social diversity. These changes bring about mobilities turn which suggests that today’s lifestyle has become a more mobile lifestyle (Duncan, 2012) and hence society becomes a hyper-mobile society (Clavé, 2012).

But, what exactly is mobility? Mobility encompasses “the large scale movement of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and travel of material things in everyday life” (Ateljevic and Hannam, 2008: 253). Jensen (2011: 256) suggests that mobility “denotes the actual and potential movement and flows of people, goods, ideas, images and information from place to place, entangled in networks and in tensions between fixity and motion, territorialisation and de-territorialisation and over which (im)mobility for whom and when.”

A few scholars (e.g. Adey, 2006; Duncan, 2012) provide a warning on what mobility really means; they argue that if everything is mobile and mobility is everything, then mobility has little meaning. This argument does not mean that mobility means nothing, according to Adey (2006), yet he reminds us that if the boundaries and relationships between what is mobile and immobile are not clear then its meaning is limited. Furthermore, Adey (2006) argues that perhaps the key here is in understanding the actual processes and the results of these processes; he also argues that the power of mobility comes from an understanding of its relationship with other things (i.e. the flow, the connections and the linking between mobility and other concepts surrounding it). Indeed, Adey (2006: 91) states: “if we are to take ‘mobility turn’ seriously, academic scholarship should not fail to realise the relations and difference between movements”.

According to Kellerman (2012), human action is the underlying nature of mobility. He highlights that mobility represents both the active (i.e. ability to move) and the passive (i.e. ability of being moveable) and suggest that potential mobility means “human action potential or action capacity.” (ibid: 172). Using the three factors suggested by Kauffman (2002) and Kauffman, Bergman and Joye (2004), Kellerman (2012) argues that mobility is
affected by one's access, competence or skills and cognitive appropriation. Access refers to "the availability of mobility possibilities, including options and conditions" (Kellerman 2012: 174); Competence refers to "mobility skills and abilities, at both the individual and societal levels", which varies from person to person and consists of both physical ability and acquired skills (ibid: 174-175); Appropriation refers to "the way in which mobility agents evaluate mobility options in light of their personal levels of access and competences, weighed by aspirations, motives, and needs, before potential movement," which includes choice and compromise (ibid: 176).

Furthermore, Kellerman (2012) documents that the practice of mobility results in five categories of capital: economic, social, cultural, symbolic and network (see: Bourdieu, 1984; 1987; and Urry, 2007). Kellerman (2012) also argues that there are two relevant spheres of mobility, i.e. individual potential mobilities and societal ones. Finally, Kellerman (2012: 181) argues that "each act of mobility adds to their own mobility experiences", which will "become of importance for future potential mobility choices and decisions."

Mobility could also be viewed from two further perspectives: the physical and the social; the physical represents the movement of people, knowledge and goods; whereas the social represents changes in social status (Duncan, 2012). Mobility is a critical factor in societies today as movement holds meaning, both socially and culturally, and the meaning can only be understood by understanding the deeper experience of this movement rather than merely movement itself (Cresswell, 2010; Urry, 2007). Furthermore, mobility could not be understood nor viewed merely within a single study but needs to be regarded more holistically – from all aspects of political, economic, social, technological and cultural processes (Duncan, 2012).

All in all, the value of mobility is on the learning and meaning-making opportunities that exist between movements (Büscher and Urry, 2009). As Jensen (2009: 146) argue: "meaning-generating processes are temporal as well as they are embodied. When the subject is a relational entity, mobility becomes crucial to notions of identity." Jensen (2009: 146) adds: "identity-production therefore relates to the environment in both motion and stand-still, as well as culturally and socially negotiated norms and powers". Clearly, one's production of identity is impacted by one's mobility; and travelling is one way young people are able to negotiate their cultural and social identities.
Cohen and Cohen (2012) highlight a few important points within the literature of mobilities. First, while the diverse and interconnected networks are spread out between locations, the distribution of mobilities is unequal (Hannam, 2008) largely due to power differentials (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). Second, the distance between ‘home’ and ‘away’ has now been replaced by the idea of a simultaneous ‘home’ and ‘away’, whereby the boundaries between the two are blurred (Haldrup, 2004; Hall and Müller, 2004; Paris, 2012; White and White, 2007). Cohen and Cohen (2012) argue that this blurring of boundaries affects the way tourism is being perceived, inasmuch as what used to be an extraordinary product of tourism has now become a product of everyday life (see also Duncan, 2012), hence there are also blurred boundaries between the notions of ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’ and the terms ‘domestic’ and ‘international’. This may result in one’s content fit/misfit with the environments or a threat to an individual’s sense of identity (Metcalfé, 2006). Although this new dynamic will impact on travel experiences, its impact on the sense of place, identity and belonging by travellers is not necessarily negative (Kellerman, 2006).

Finally, and importantly, Cohen and Cohen (2012) confirm the impact mobilities have on one’s identity, in which they argue that personal identity has become destabilised as, “individuals to have the power to perform multiple and shifting selves” (ibid: 9; see also Bell, 2008). This is particularly so with the merging notions of places as well as the merging notions of people as a result of the continuously growing mobilities (see also Hannam et al., 2006). Agreeing with this, Clavé (2012) underlines that the change of relationship between tourism and mobility indeed has brought a new understanding that modern society has been transformed into a hyper-mobility society (see also Duncan, 2012 on mobile society). In this sense, there is an impact upon the destinations and the individual travellers themselves. The identity of destinations have become blurred, where Clavé (2012) argues that destinations are now possibly “places without identity” (e.g. the destination identity weakens due to over commercialization). Jensen (2009) gives an important warning that if the individual is not careful, mobility could lead to the destruction of identity (see also Sennett, 1994). Nevertheless, Metcalfe (2006: 246) argues that today’s world is “a world of mobility, of transformation and change”, where security is no longer found simply in the notion of home or place but needs to be found in one’s sense of identity.
On the other hand, individual travellers' identities are continuously negotiated as they travel through these destinations and as they meet people. As Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005: 207) argue: "identities are developed through the networked geography of places." Yet, Sheller and Urry (2006: 216) argue that "as people, capital and things move they [say who in brackets] form and reform space itself." On this topic, Duncan (2012) adds that mobility in one way or another is a product of globalisation which has implications not only for issues of identity, but also sense of belongingness (e.g. belongingness to a particular society or places, etc.); furthermore, she argues that one's single identity or sense of belongingness also convolutes into multiple identities and sense of belongingness as the individual moves through more than two transnational spaces. Yet, Zachary (2000) argues further that when an individual is allowed to choose who they become, they gain not only sense of belongingness but also a sense of achievement.

Duncan (2012) further argues that mobilities are best viewed not as a singular theoretical model but rather as part of wider discussions encompassing many related factors. In conclusion, Jensen (2009: 154) argues that 'critical mobility thinking' means that "we have come to see that our lives are not just what happen in static enclaves, but also in all the intermediaries and circulation in-between places" and that in terms of identity building, "sense-making and identity construction take place in a more and fluid relationship." It is also acknowledged within the literature that the distribution of mobility (i.e. of who has the ability to be mobile and from where to where mobility could flow) is uneven, which brings questions about social inequality and the role of politics in mobility (Cresswell, 2010; Hannam, 2008; Jensen, 2011). This suggests that GYT is a middle/upper class phenomenon and that not all young people are able to have access to GYT and travel abroad due to inequality of economical and social power. With this in mind, those who are not mobile may experience exclusion of social mobility and mobility capital (Jensen, 2011) which can in turn cause them to miss out on both major economic and cultural advantages (Urry, 2007).

Furthermore, a few articles within the literature address the issues of emotion and relations in mobility (e.g. Conradson and McKay, 2007; Löfgren, 2008). Conradson and McKay (2007: 169) argue that "the happiness, sadness, frustration, excitement and ambivalence that accompany emplacement and mobility are central to social life, shaping our experiences of the world and relations with others." In his article, Löfgren (2008) links
motion and emotions, suggesting that analysis of both are necessary as they consist of skills and established cultural practices useful in exploring the world. He argues that travelling is not "just an emotion, it colours people's perceptions and activities" (ibid: 348).

3.4.2. GYT as a Form of Mobility

It has been acknowledged within the academic research in this area that "the remarkable expansion of personal mobility has been largely overlooked" (Zelinksy, 1971: 223); mobilities are often seen on a larger scale (e.g. government) rather than on an individual scale (e.g. a person such as a young gapper). Although the increasing literature on mobilities has increased recently with the emergence of high number of mobility journals (D'Andrea, Ciolfi and Gray, 2011), the number of theoretical and empirical research studies in mobilities focusing on children and young people are still limited (Barker, Krafil, Horton and Tucker, 2009), with a few exceptions mainly focusing on the relationship between space and identity (e.g. Horton and Krafil, 2006) and between age and mobility (e.g. Morley, 2000).

One paper by Ruddick (2003) on flexibility and youthfulness suggests that mobilities that provide opportunities for international and global exposure, e.g. overseas travel, provide the young person with an opportunity to construct their identity in relation to certain social and economic groups and education-based status and power. This relationship between power and mobility is highlighted further by Jensen (2011) who argues that the power of mobility is captured in space and time. With mobility there are some changes in one's spatiality and social practices (Baerenholdt, 2008; Jensen, 2011); with mobility the notion of time is accelerated and speed is increased (Cresswell, 2006; Jensen 2011). Indeed, travel and tourism, such as GYT, is a form of temporal mobility which involves time, space and distance (Hall, 2005). Metcalfe (2006) also documents that a few studies investigate young people's mobilities, nevertheless they are mainly focused on the end of a transition period, for example when young people leave home (e.g. Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005).

According to Metcalfe (2006: 245), "mobility is symbolic of transition". This is especially true for young people in their transition from the status of child to that of adult to the extent that mobilities are centrally involved in transforming the social and educational life of young people (Ateljevic and Hannam, 2008). Changes towards more complicated, unpredictable and fragmented youth transitions (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2007) are coupled with changes in mobility that is moving away from 'static, fixed and given' (Rifkin, 2000: 95).
This suggests that the speed of youth transition and mobility today are accelerated more than ever before. For this reason, understanding the importance of GYT as a form of mobility in young people’s life can be helpful in understanding the role of GYT in youth transition and in transition generally (see: Thomson and Taylor, 2005). This is especially because today mobility is an important component of the young gappers’ lives that can no longer be overlooked. Indeed, Duncan (2012) utilises the example of GYT and similar terms (e.g. backpacking and overseas experience (OE)) as an example of mobility. She argues that GYT takes form of an independent travel and longer term leisure mobility, which falls in between the increasingly blurring continuum of travel and migration (see also Duncan, 2004; Wilson et al., 2009). Furthermore, Hannam et al. (2006: 10) affirm:

“in many cases travel is necessary for social life enabling complex connections to be made... and the ways in which physical movement pertains to upward and downward social mobility is also central here. Moving between places physically or virtually can be a source of status and power for backpackers and other round-the-world travellers.”

This is to say that whether a gapper embarks on GYT or similar long-term trips has an implication on their personal status and power, at present or in the future.

According to Maoz (2008) and Myers and Hannam (2008) mobility can be a source of status and power because it is closely related to the acquisition of cultural and social capitals. As gappers move from one place to another they shape their thoughts and behaviours, and increase their ability to shift from one cultural context to another, and one society to another (Bennetts, 2003). Travel mobilises youth transition both culturally and socially. In today’s globalized world, adaptation to different national cultures and tolerance of diversity are regarded as both being valuable (Doney, Cannon and Mullen, 1998) and bringing benefits and contributing to success in education and employment (Inkson and Myers, 2003). Younger adults are likely to be more receptive to learning from cross-cultural experiences and exchanges (Wilson, 1993), but on the other hand travel may create difficulties on returning home (Useem, 2001), if the need for stability and settling down has been replaced with a desire for mobility (Selmer and Lam, 2004). For young people, complexities and tensions could possibly exist between the “notions of home, tradition and fixedness on one hand and of mobility, escape and transformation on the other” (Thomson and Taylor, 2005: 327). The notion of home is of extreme importance here; as Metcalfe (2006) argues home is a reference
point of our movements. It is “a stable central point, a point from which we journey and to which we return,” as such it is, “the foundation for our being in the world” (Metcalf, 2006: 244).

While young people access global cultures at the local level (Miller, 1992; Nayak, 2003), it is almost a necessity now for them to ‘get out’ in order to ‘get on’ (see: Jamieson, 2000; Jones, 2000). Geographical mobility is often seen as an investment and “a means to access to social mobility” (Thomson and Taylor, 2005: 333). Understanding the interpersonal relationships and networks of individual is now one of the main aims in the emerging part of mobility research, e.g. providing an examination of ties between those in the ‘home’ countries and those based in the travel destinations (Casado-Diaz, 2009; 2012).

Travel and mobility are central for some young people, especially in the accounts that they give of the development of the self as they make the transition to adulthood. For example, Desforges (2000) suggests that tourism consumption is mobilised for the development of self-identity. In this context, gappers may be seen as negotiating their identities through journeys across different countries and cultures. That said, not all young people have the resources or the capabilities to access such mobilities. Indeed, Johan (2009) argues that identity construction is potentially an important result of mobility, often brought about by cross-cultural exchanges that uncover the learning potential within the young gappers.

3.4.3. The Mobility Power of Cross-Cultural Experiences

Travel, especially across cultures, can be demanding both physically and mentally; gappers may experience stress, tiredness, and confusion while learning new things and facing unexpected difficulties (Hottola, 2004). Moreover the first experience of cultural differences between destinations sometimes has the most impact (ibid). Where substantial disparities exist between the home culture and that of the destination - referred to as ‘surprises’ by Biggs (1992), gappers are likely to experience greater difficulties in adjusting (Elsrud, 2001). In fact, Gmelch (1997: 486) suggests that learning comes from “having to cope with surprises and unexpected problems and predicaments”. Similarly, Biggs (1992) argues that the gappers’ exposure to these surprises (i.e. cultural disparities) and their attempts at resolution is a potent influence on their personal development (Biggs, 1992). In fact, this challenging
situation helps individuals to acquire new understanding about life, culture and self where they have to deal with changes in their physical environment and the circumstances in which they live (Gmelch, 1997). ‘Place’ is a significant factor in the changes experienced by young people which are brought about through mobility (Hall et al., 1999). Young adults require a "room of one's own to move" and "a space that they can enter on their own terms and on their own initiative, unaccompanied and unsupervised by adults" (Hall et al., 1999: 506). What usually worked or was acceptable at home may not work, or may have different consequences, in foreign locations (Ralston, Terpstra, Cunniff, and Gustafson, 1995).

Without adequate preparation or guidance it is up to the travellers themselves to negotiate these cross-cultural challenges, which they often do through trial-and-error learning processes. In this sense, GYT meets the needs for young people for time, place and space in which they can negotiate their sense of belongingness and their emerging sense of identity in approaching adulthood. The outcome of personal change is related both to the gappers' travel destinations (Noy, 2004) and the gappers themselves (Wilson, Fisher and Moore, 2008). An important part of the gappers' learning and transition relates to how well they manage issues of time and place in negotiating changes in self-perception and identity construction.

Duncan (2004; 2012) argues that during their trip young people do not only negotiate their personal identities but also their professional identities. This is so because personal self and professional self, and work and leisure are now synthesized rather than separated, making the process of identity construction more complex than ever before (Duncan, 2012). Cohen (2010a) highlights the value of the travel experience in giving the opportunities for identity reconstructions to take place.

The transitions brought about by travel do not occur in isolation. New social interactions in foreign cultures brought about by mobility are important factors the development of young adults. From a social constructionist perspective (Lave and Wenger, 1991), learning is a "relational activity, located within a process of social co-participation" (Lawy, 2002: 216) both at home and during travel. Indeed, fundamental to the development of an understanding of oneself is the concept of 'the other', and the interactions between the self and others. Gappers' personal development is in part a result of mobility-induced social processes in which they learn about themselves through interactions both with other gappers and with residents of the host country.
In addition, the cultural disparities brought about through mobility may also result in greater participation in risky behaviours (Pizam, Tarlow and Bloom, 1997). Risky behaviours are often seen as something young people have to do before they can feel secure (Lawy, 2002). During GYT, for example, young people are likely to move from a relatively low-risk life in a familiar culture to a one of a higher-risk (as a result of the journey itself, living in the host country and engaging in various activities) in a foreign culture with different values and norms.

Finally, one important note made by Zelinsky (1971: 225) is: “perhaps the greatest of the new mobilities is that of the mind.” While the emerging technology and evolution of the Internet may mean that people no longer need to move physically to be mobile, the opposite is also true: by moving the gappers geographically, GYT may also mobilize their mind even further by allowing them to stretch their capacity to learn beyond their home and usual cultural and societal norms and boundaries through real experience.

3.5. UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY

3.5.1. The Concept of Identity

The notion of identity has been prominent within psychology, sociology and other social and behavioural sciences since the 1970s. More specifically, the study of identity and self-concept are presented by Epstein (1973) and Markus (1980). Leary and Tangney (2003: 3) explain that the topic of identity itself falls under the umbrella of ‘the self-phenomena’ which is spread out over a large area (e.g. self-awareness, self-esteem, self-actualisation, self-evaluation, identity, ideal self, loss of self, etc.) however they all have one common focus, i.e. one’s “capacity for self-reflection”. According to Kihlstrom, Beer and Klein (2003), how one identifies him/herself from others creates his/her self-concept. In one way or another, self is one’s image and mental representation of oneself (e.g. see Shepard and Cooper, 1983). For this reason, identity questions usually are about “Who am I? What are my characteristics, which attributes describe me and which attributes do not?” (Showers and Zeiger-Hill, 2003).

John Locke (1690) suggested that identity is closely related to memory (i.e. the past) and argued that what creates one’s identity is one’s past experiences, past behaviours and past memories that he/she remembers. If s/he doesn’t remember these things, they are not part of his/her identity (see also: Kihlstrom et al., 2003). This is a particularly important insight for
this study, as this understanding provides a perspective that one can learn about one's past with regards to one's identity in order to create a new identity. This creates a separation between the old identity and the new identity, and hence creates a possibility for an identity construction.

While early literature considered identity as singular and is separated from interactions with other people, the literature of identity in the 1990s started to look at how an individual's identity is created through one's interpersonal relations with others (e.g. Ogilvie and Ashmore, 1991). Indeed, this view is the underlying sociological assumptions of self and identity (Stryker, 1980).

Furthermore, both classic and recent literature argues that identity is a product of reflection. As Tice and Wallace (2003: 91) explain: “the reflected self [is] the idea that people come to see themselves as they believe others see them.” As Giddens (1991: 53) states: “self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography”. In the same vein, Melucci (1996: 31) states that “identity is the product of our conscious action and the outcomes of self-reflection more than a set of give or inherited characteristics.”

Furthermore, it is also argued that the construction of self is done not only through self-reflective practices (e.g. Cooley, 1902; James, 1890) but also through social processes (Goffman, 1959; Rhodewalt, 1986). In fact, how we see ourselves is continuously changing based on the responses that we receive from others (Cooley, 1902). Identity also relates not only to how we see ourselves but also to how others see us: “identity depends on how people see themselves, which in turn is influenced by how others (i.e. society) see them” (Marshall, 1998: 6).

Mead (1934) builds upon on Cooley's (1902) understanding by suggesting that the most valuable social feedback comes from those whose opinions are most important to the individual and his/her sense of identity. Cook and Douglas's (1998) study gives an example relating to the importance of parental feedback to adolescents. In response, we may present different aspects of self to some audience and other different aspects of self to the others through different self-presentation. This process of making changes from our internal concept
(i.e. how we think about ourselves) to external behaviour (i.e. how we present ourselves to others) is called ‘internalization’ (Bem, 1972; Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959; Tice, 1992).

Linking between identity and behaviour (i.e. the internal and the external) is a meaning making system (Burke, 1980). This suggests that when one is interacting with others, one is constructing one’s identity by making meanings out of interactions. Clearly, the same interaction has different meanings for different individuals (Burke and Tully, 1977). Hence it could be argued that it is only through sharing these meanings with others that these various interpretations can be understood. For example, one’s meaning of an interaction may be completely different for different people based on their cultural view of their identity (e.g. ethnic identity) (Stryker, 2000).

James (1890) argues that there are many different selves in one person as that particular person holds different positions within society. Under this notion, the self consists of multiple identities, e.g. an individual could be a child to his/her parents, a parent to his/her children, a student, a co-worker, and a friend at the same time. Thereby, their identities differ based on the situation and interaction involved. Moreover, Burke (1980) argues that one’s identity is often affected by the identity of others around them, e.g. one’s identity as a student is in one way influenced by the teacher and his/her identity, etc. In fact, identity is continually negotiated during interaction (McCall and Simons, 1978).

It’s also interesting to note Thoits’s (2001) observation that as one becomes more comfortable with one’s identity, the likelihood of a creation of other identities unfolds, e.g. once a student feels comfortable with his/her identity as a student in the university, he/she is likely to be more open to other identities, e.g. as a sports club member, as student representative, etc. In this sense, identity is not only related to one’s role(s) (McCall and Simons, 1978), but also individuals have multiple role identities (McCall and Simons, 1978; Stryker, 1980) be they obligatory or voluntary roles. It is documented that while multiple role identities may bring complexity and stressful situations, having the capability to have, maintain and handle multiple identity is considered to be of benefit to the individual’s well-being (Thoits, 2001).

The relationship between identity and emotion is also highlighted within the literature (e.g. Bartels, 1997; Burke, 1991). Negative emotions may result if there are differences or
inconsistencies between expectations and reality, between the old and the new, etc. and positive emotions may result when there are consistencies and stabilities between expectation and reality, between old and new identity. Stets (2001) argues that the intensity of these emotions could vary largely during this process of adjustment until new reality and new identity is generated.

Kiecolt (1994; 2000) provides an insight in regards to identity change. She argues that identity change often occurs when there is a disruption in one's life, whereby the individual decides that change is necessary and regards it to be beneficial (ibid). During this time, a stressful situation may occur, especially if there are opposing identities occurring at one point in time (Stets and Burke, 2003). In changing one's identity, one can add or deduct meaning from it, and also to change the rankings of importance between one's role(s). Kiecolt (2000) also argues that identity change is likely to be a lengthy process as it involves a higher-level order change (i.e. change that requires more than merely adjustment to the outcome but also the process of change). For this reason, Stets and Burke (2003) underline that the process of identity construction is itself a dynamic process which needs to be examined over time.

3.5.2. Identity Construction in GYT

Although the transition from childhood to adulthood is inextricably bound up with identity construction (Stokes and Wyn, 2007), the effect that tourism has on youth transition has hardly been studied (notable exceptions are: Desforges, 2000; Hastings, 1998; Maoz, 2006a; Maoz, 2006b; Riley, 1988). On the other hand, the links between travel and concepts of 'personhood' (for example identity, subjectivity and the self) are well-established in tourism studies (Desforges, 2000). Indeed, it is documented that the desire to construct a new identity through travel is one of the main motivations for travel (Elsrud, 2001), and that many people have the goal of 'finding themselves' and achieving self-actualisation during their travels (e.g. Cohen, 2010b; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2006; Neumann, 1992; Richards and King, 2003). Indeed, tourism has been long known to have an important role in the search for and production of new identity (Abram, Waldren and McLeod, 1997; Urry 1995), and is considered to offer an ongoing process of identity construction (Desforges, 2000).

As discussed in the previous section, in psychology, sociology and other social and behavioural sciences the term 'identity' is considered as part of the 'self' phenomenon (Leary
and Tangney, 2003). Nevertheless in the study of tourism, the two terms are often used interchangeably with the term ‘identity’ being used more prominently than ‘self’ (Desforges, 2000). Generally, the tourism literature agrees on the premise that identity is formed through reflective examination of one’s similarities and differences to others, which often include explorations of their emotions and can only be examined through an individual’s interactions with others (Wearing and Wearing, 2001).

In the life of young adults in most parts of the world, leisure activity often plays a significant role in identity construction as it reinforces previous developmental trends and shapes new ones (Feinstein, Byner and Duckworth, 2006). Leisure also encourages and enhances participation in education and training (Gorard, Fevre, and Rees, 1999). Furthermore, travelling acts as an ‘informal qualification’, ‘professional certification’, ‘a record of achievement and experience’ (Bourdieu, 1984) which will often enhance one’s education and employment background (Inkson and Myers, 2003). Thus, the literature suggests that young adults can explore issues of identity through leisure activities (see: Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2000). Travelling provides the potential to enhance the process of identity construction, allowing individuals to define themselves according to their personal experiences of the world, which in turn could provide them with a sense of direction in their lives (Maoz, 2007). Furthermore, long-distance travelling as a leisure activity is more suited to younger age groups due to their openness to new experiences (see: Oppermann, 1995).

Travel activities free one from the pressures of old identities as they take the individual out of the context of their own home, and thus give gappers both control over and the opportunity to reconstruct their identity (Elsrud, 2001). However, Cohen’s (2010a) study on searching self through lifestyle travel demonstrates that seeking a core or true inner self could be a pursuit of an illusion that is overly romanticized. Cohen’s (2010a) findings suggest that instead the search for one’s self is an ongoing developmental process. Perhaps this is due to the fact that identity development is both relational and situational (Danziger, 1997). As Berger and Luckmann (1996: 152) argue: “identity is always specific to situations and to acquire an identity is to be objectively located in the world; that is to be given a specific place in the world”. GYT provides an opportunity to understand oneself more by withdrawing from daily routines and familiar places.
The question of ‘if’ and ‘when’ to travel is a crucial issue in the maturation of identity. It is important because the travel decision is often made when at a stage in life when “self-identity is open to question” (Desforges, 2000: 933). Turbulence in one’s personal situation may become the motivation to travel and travelling is considered to be a journey in which one can create and maintain a distance from the old identity and have exposure to a new identity (Desforges, 2000). In this sense, GYT can be seen as a personal experimentation for young gappers to evaluate their identity and have a chance to construct a new one. Travel is ‘broadening’ in this sense because it provides different perspectives and may lead to a perspective shift which may, in turn, result in learning and new insights into one’s potential identity (see: Kaplan, 1996). The trip helps gappers to be away from the home context, away from their usual routines, and provides an opportunity to concentrate in trying out new possible identities. GYT may be seen as an ‘inner journey’ (Maoz, 2008) on which gappers can reflect.

Nevertheless, any changes in traveller identity which occur during travel are usually a continuity of an individual’s former identity and sometimes reflect the archetypal values of their society (Galani-Moutafi, 2001); in most cases a Western society (Elsrud, 2001). There are perhaps two key moments in which travel is particularly important in the maturation of identity: (a) deciding to go on overseas for the first long-haul trip into a new context (outbound); (b) the homecoming back to the old context with a transformed identity (inbound) (Desforges, 2000: 927).

Furthermore, from an employment perspective (Desforges, 2000) travel experiences are appreciated by many business organisations for the valuable role they play in personal development. Travelling is considered to be an asset in the curriculum vitae that may lead to better employment prospects (Inkson and Myers, 2003). For example, one potential outcome of travelling is the development of new identities. Stokes and Wyn (2007: 502) argue more generally that the ability to develop identities provides young people with:

“the capacity to be good decision-makers; have a clear understanding of their own goals and priorities; juggle multiple responsibilities, keep options open and maintain a level of mental and physical well-being”.

While having the ability to develop one’s identity could be an important aim for many gappers, it should be remembered that travel may be positive or negative for the traveller.
Chapter Three - Related Concepts and Theories

The positive outcome may be 'finding oneself' and 'creating new identities'; nevertheless it can also easily be an 'escape' - a temporary solution in which one may be avoiding oneself, rather than getting to the roots of a problem that exist in the first place.

Identity construction is an ongoing process of negotiation. Identities are "not fixed givens, but are always in process and performed" (Cohen, 2010a: 121), hence, the need to be constructed by the individual (McLeod and Yates, 2006: 38). Indeed, identity is a product of on-going conscious efforts and unconscious processes, as well as being consciously managed it also needs to naturally unfold. According to Dwyer, Smith, Tyler and Wyn (2005: 23), young people often see the transition to adulthood as a process of identity construction, and regard adulthood not as a 'given' but as a project, task or journey that demands their on-going commitment. Some gappers are likely to be aware that identities are something that needs to be actively constructed by the processes of experience and reflection. Indeed, the potential for identity search during travel is significant, even short-term mobilities can have significant impact on transforming identities (Urry, 1995). These arguments reinforce the notion of GYT as active transition behaviour (see: Evans and Heinz, 1995).

3.6. INTEGRATION OF RELATED CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

A number of related concepts and theories have been presented and discussed in this chapter: learning, transition, mobility and identity. The review of transition theories, especially literature relating to youth transition, suggests that young people today are facing a much more complex transition process as they progress from childhood to adulthood, and from school to work. Indeed, the literature highlights a more complex view of youth transition than has traditionally been the case in simple linear models of the process.

GYT experience often occurs during this transition period for young gappers: during their preparation for university, towards employment, after education, in between employment, etc. As a result, young people may become especially vulnerable during this period of change. While the concept of transition is originated in the area of psychology/counselling, it is highly relevant to understanding the period of youth transition which forms the central focus of this study. It is also acknowledged that the transition period may cause disruption in an individual's life and bring about a range of emotions, but this period also has the potential to bring about positive changes. Clearly, transition will represent
a learning process for the gappers. There may be a potential for the gappers to arrive at new perspectives on themselves and new understandings of the world, and also to integrate what they have learnt into their life back home after the trip.

When young people travel during this transition period, they expose themselves to new environments and new cultures. GYT could be considered as 'active transition behaviour', which could lead to learning. During the trip, besides fun and enjoyment gappers will also face challenges and difficulties which could cause them some stress and strain and which in turn might result in the development of coping strategies and learning transferable skills that might be beneficial in the future.

The potential impact of mobility on GYT actually lies in the possibility for the young gappers to develop their identities during their trip. Indeed, mobility promotes engagement in the world, whereby learning and identity construction become possible through the availability of extra time, different location, and various opportunities and resources during travel. Through their experiences during travel, gappers have the opportunities to practice different behaviour that they would have not had the opportunity to do so. By doing so, they will also have an opportunity to reflect, compare and contrast between their new and old identities in new sometimes challenging social environments. If this is the case, GYT has a wider implication for the social, cultural and educational life of the young gappers and this makes it an important area for research.

Four learning theories (Andragogical Learning Theory, Experiential Learning Theory, Transformative Learning Theory and Levels of Learning Theories) were originally considered, which focus to varying extents on the role of experience processes in personal transformation and change. The emphasis placed on these factors (as opposed to problem-solving) was the basis of choosing between them). As Sadler-Smith (2006: 25) suggests, "there is no ‘grand theory’ of learning; hence there is a necessity to consider a range of theories," selecting the most appropriate ones for current purposes.

All of the theories mentioned above support the notion of self-directed and self-determined learning that could be effective strategies for coping with the challenges and demands of a life in which change is the only constancy. In this study, experience is considered to be a space in which transformative learning is able to happen, the idea which is
supported by tourism and education literature (e.g. Fordham, 2006; Morgan, 2010 and Stone and Petrick, 2013). The movement from pedagogy to andragogy provides a theoretical foundation for adult learning, which could compliment both experiential learning and transformative learning theories, but Knowles' (1990) theory is essentially a framework not a theory of learning process.

Learning has the power to enable individuals to achieve their full potential, and through learning, individuals can be transformed. In the context of GYT, the potential for transformation through learning is enhanced as one travels not only through unfamiliar countries and societies, but also through different value- and belief-systems that compel travellers to exceed normal boundaries in order to confront previous values and beliefs in exchange for change for personal growth and self-development.

Experiential learning does not necessarily result in transformation in Mezirow's (1991) sense of the term. For transformative learning to happen, individuals may require an ability to understand how and in what situation they learn best, and be willing to open up to a broader range of alternatives of opportunities and experiences, and take a risk to experience crises and/or dilemmas which may disorient or disrupt and experiences. In the context of GYT, gappers are given an opportunity to immerse themselves into various situations that are different from their familiar everyday situations, where usual solutions to problematic situations may no longer work. These new situations may serve as 'catalysts' that activate the different kinds of learning. Thus, a successful GYT experience may be one that provides the individual with an awareness and opportunity to realise their maximum potential in learning and coping with new situations as they arise, and one that leads them to a deeper understanding about themselves and their ability to learn and cope.

Mezirow (1991) suggests that transformative learning is not necessarily a single event, but a chain of continuous events. If this is the case, the question then arises about whether GYT could be the first stage in an on-going process of self-transformation. It could then be implied that transformative learning may inspire a lifelong learning process. This is the principal rationale as to why this area of study is worth researching, and it promises a significant contribution to the literature within the tourism field as well as in the study of education, learning and development.
Chapter Three – Related Concepts and Theories

To summarize the essence of theoretical and conceptual integration of this study, the three mobility-related factors of cross-cultural exchange, identity construction and transformative learning as illustrated in Figure 6 are important contributory factors in youth transition.

Figure 6. GYT, Mobilities and Youth Transitions (Adapted from: Johan, 2009)

Transition, as a process of maturation from childhood to adulthood, and from school to work happens to everyone. Whilst all young adults go through this transition not all of them undergo a transformational process. Mobility promotes engagement in the world, and transformation becomes possible through the availability of time, location, and opportunities during travel. Thus, GYT provides an opportunity not only for transition, but also creates the potential for transformation to happen. It does so by providing space, time and place for the gappers to ‘experience themselves’ for extended periods of time in cultural settings that they may never have experienced before. If this is the case, the question then arises of whether GYT is the first stage in an on-going process of self-transformation. Furthermore, travelling as a form of mobility, has potential to provide cross-cultural experiences and exchanges, identity construction, enhancing knowledge and skills and learning-how-to-learn from experience. In that case, the GYT process may have the power to mobilise lifelong learning and support not only youth transition but youth transformation also.

Indeed, the importance of this study lies in the argument being proposed that GYT has the potential to facilitate not only youth transitions but also learning and personal
transformation. It is anticipated that through the GYT experience, the young people have the potential to achieve more deep-seated and lasting personal transformation than would otherwise be possible, in the fundamental sense that GYT changes the way a young person makes sense of the world, which could ultimately result in a profound and lasting personal transformation. GYT therefore also has the potential for influencing society more generally.

3.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed four main concepts related to this study: learning, transition, mobility and identity in relation to GYT. To begin, definitions of learning from both generic and theory-specific perspectives have been offered, subsequently arriving at the most appropriate learning definition for this study. Following the review of these definitions, detailed discussions of the four theories of learning were offered: pedagogy and andragogy, experiential learning theory, transformative learning theory and level of learning theory. The four learning theories were discussed in lights of its theoretical offerings, critiques made on them and their relevance to GYT, which are followed by justifications for the selection of experiential learning theory and transformative learning theory as the most appropriate learning theories to be used in this study, in particular to address the second research questions.

The later part of the chapter was dedicated to exploring concepts of transition, mobility and identity in relation to GYT. It was discussed that GYT as a form of mobility (i.e. long-term travel) has the potential to serve as an ‘active transition behaviour’, which may assist gappers in both learning towards personal and professional development and in constructing and asserting their identity towards their adulthood. To conclude this chapter, a conceptual model that integrated these related concepts and theories was offered in illustrating the connections between them and the phenomena of GYT.
PART III.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters have been dedicated to reviewing the literature on Gap Year Travel (GYT) and its related concepts of transition, mobility, identity and learning. In this chapter, the focus will be on the research design for this study – both the preliminary study and the main study. First, a discussion of the research philosophy and research approaches to be adopted in this research is presented. Second, before continuing a discussion on research design for the main study, a discussion of the research design for the preliminary study is offered, along with a presentation of its findings, leading to a summary of GYT’s definition and categorization for this study as discussed earlier in Chapter Two. This is then followed by a review of the research design for the main study, i.e. the time frame and sampling technique considered to be most appropriate, along with data collection methods used. Next, data analysis processes as well as reporting structure and outlines of the main study are also discussed in preparation for the subsequent findings chapters followed by a consideration of data quality issues. Finally, a summary of research design for the main study is offered as the conclusion of this chapter.

4.2. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research design is “more than simply the methods by which data are collected and analysed. It is the overall configuration of a piece of research” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991: 21). Undeniably, understanding the complete research process is essential, and it should start with a clear comprehension of research philosophy and paradigm, and the differences between them.

Research philosophy, according to Saunders, Louis and Thornhill (2012: 127), “relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge”, which “contains important assumptions about the way in which [we] view the world”. Research philosophy could be understood in three main ways: ontology, epistemology and axiology as depicted and explained in Table 5.
### Table 5. Comparison of Four Research Philosophies in Management Research

(Source: Saunders, Louis and Thornhill, 2012: 140)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatism</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Realism</th>
<th>Interpretivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology: the researcher’s view of the nature of reality or being</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External, multiple, view chosen to best enable answering of research question</td>
<td>External, objective and independent of social actors</td>
<td>Is objective. Exists independently of human thoughts and beliefs or knowledge of their existence (realist), but is interpreted through social conditioning (critical realist)</td>
<td>Socially constructed, subjective, may change, multiple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology: the researcher’s view regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge dependent upon the research question. Focus on practical applied research, integrating different perspectives to help interpret the data.</td>
<td>Only observable phenomena can provide credible data, facts. Focus on causality and law-like generalisations, reducing phenomena to simplest elements</td>
<td>Observable phenomena provide credible data, facts. Insufficient data means inaccuracies in sensations (direct realism). Alternatively, phenomena create sensations which are open to misinterpretation (critical realism). Focus on explaining within a context or contexts.</td>
<td>Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus upon the details of situation, a reality behind these details, subjective meanings motivating actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiology: the researcher’s view of the role of values in research</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values play a large role in interpreting results, the researcher adopting both objective and subjective points of view</td>
<td>Research is undertaken in a value-free way. The researcher is independent of the data and maintains objective stance</td>
<td>Research is value laden; the researcher is biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringing. These will impact on the research.</td>
<td>Research is value bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection techniques most often used</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed or multiple method designs, quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>Highly structured, large samples, measurement, quantitative but can use qualitative</td>
<td>Methods chosen must fit the subject matter, quantitative or qualitative</td>
<td>Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A research paradigm can be defined as the “value judgments, norms, standards, frames of reference, perspectives, ideologies, myths, theories, and approved procedures that govern their thinking and action” (Gummesson, 2000: 18), or “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemology fundamental ways” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105). In simple terms, a paradigm is a way of viewing the world, a general perspective and a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world (Patton, 1990).
Based on the above definitions, it could be argued that clarifying the research paradigms and philosophical stance of this study is of importance in order to ensure the correct approach to research design, data collection and analysis, and to recognize possible use of new and innovative research methodologies (Collis and Hussey, 2003).

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (1991), the three main research paradigms there are: Positivism, Realism and Interpretivism. Saunders et al. (2012) added the fourth paradigm: pragmatism (see Table 6). Nevertheless, Hussey and Hussey (1997) also recorded that there are a number of terms used in the literature to discuss paradigms (see Table 6), a number of terms can be classified under two main underlying assumptions of subjectivist and objectivist which are the polar opposites of each other, with some paradigms fall in-between these two opposites.

Table 6. Alternative Philosophical Paradigm Names (Source: Hussey and Hussey, 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectivist</th>
<th>Subjectivist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivist</td>
<td>Phenomenological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Experimentalist</td>
<td>Humanistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist</td>
<td>Interpretivist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study, we will use the two main phenomenological terms: Positivism and Phenomenology, which is also followed by Postmodernism. As discussed above, the two paradigms (positivism and phenomenology) are also characterised by various terms which are used interchangeably and hence often contribute to the complexity of the paradigms used (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The applications of the two main paradigms, as well as Constructivism and Interpretivism, will be discussed in relation to the three main researchers' view on philosophical components in the next two sections.

4.2.1. Positivism, Phenomenology and Postmodernism

The term 'positivism' was originated from the natural sciences in the 1920s when scientists and philosophers strongly believed that any research undertaken required objective measurement and objective evidence, and that the individual being researched was distinct and separate from the researcher (Jary and Jary, 1991; Kolakowski, 1993). In recent decades, the paradigm has been criticized for its overemphasis of observations and measurements, and its
limitations in understanding the real meanings behind the data found. Based on these criticisms
and with an understanding of these differences, the phenomenological paradigm was formed,
particularly in relation to research into social phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

The roots of phenomenology can be traced to Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who
observed that a natural scientific approach (i.e. positivist) is not always appropriate.
Phenomenology proposed that "human meanings are the key to the study of lived experience",
and therefore the "individual is a conscious agent, whose experience must be studied from the
'first-person' perspective" (Ashworth, 2008: 12). This implies that that knowledge is socially
constructed, and hence, the phenomenological approach seeks to understand how the individual
creates meanings from the surrounding social world and processes. This view places a high value
on the significance of the individual lived experience, and an appreciation is given to
interpretations and meanings of individuals' action or experiences (Collis and Hussey, 2003).

The phenomenological approach is often criticized for neglecting the importance of
reliability and replicability, failing to provide a significant contribution to a cumulative body of
knowledge, and often lacking in clear procedures or methods which could lead to arbitrary and
compromised results (Daye, 2004). However, these criticisms could be refuted by following
proper research procedures and exercising judgements which indeed are the main advantage of
the phenomenological approach. Potter (1996) also suggests that lack of structure does not
necessarily mean that the study lacks theoretical consideration; in fact, flexible structure could
bring about new and innovative findings which may lead to foundations of new theories.
Furthermore, although the validity criterion is often considered to be problematic in
phenomenological research, Potter (1996) suggests that the readers themselves could judge and
validate the quality of data through reading the rich and detailed materials presented.

The main differences between the positivist and the phenomenological paradigms are in
their ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Gray, 2004). Ontologically,
positivism views reality as 'objective and singular' in which the researcher is an outsider,
whereas in phenomenology, reality is 'subjective and multiple' as it involves the participants' views (Creswell, 1994). Epistemologically, in positivism, the researcher is independent from the
phenomena being researched, whereas the researcher has interactions with those being researched in phenomenology. Methodologically, the two paradigms are different. The
positivistic view is likely to be associated with a deductive process, cause and effect, context-free
and pre-built categories aiming at prediction, explanation and understanding, whereas the phenomenological view is often linked with inductive processes, simultaneously affecting factors, context-bound and emerging categories identified in the process aiming for emerging patterns and theories in order to develop an understanding about the topic (Creswell, 1994). Furthermore, accuracy and reliability for the former is done through validity and reliability, whilst for the latter this is obtained through verification (Creswell, 1994).

In the late 20th century, phenomenology was rediscovered through the cultural movement of postmodernism, in which fundamentals on what to research and how to carry this out went through a transition from the perspective of objective values towards that of humanistic values (e.g. human beliefs and interests) (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). In this sense, postmodernism could be characterised as representing both the pure and social science, valuing objective criteria without neglecting the humanistic value of the research. In brief, Kvale (1990) concludes that postmodernist thinking attempts to purge the detachment of outer reality (e.g. society) into individual inner reality, and suggests that the researchers themselves are not detached from the study, which brings about ‘reflexivity’ as an important idea. Discussions of reflexivity will be reviewed in further details later in this study (see Section 4.5.6.3. in this chapter and Section 10.7. in Chapter Ten).

4.2.2. Constructivism and Interpretivism

Constructivism emerged as a response to positivism and aligned with postmodernism. Although the two terms are not synonymous, both views value first-person perspective of lived experience, and accept this as ‘inner reality’. From this view, reality is created through the perspective of mind. As Schwandt (1994; 2000) suggests, humans are mindful, self-reflexive beings who interpret their experience in the world in deciding on how to act; human beings engage actively rather than passively making sense of their world. This is the basis for insights into ‘meanings’ attached within the individual experience. Schwandt (1994; 2000) emphasises further that knowledge (e.g. concepts, models, and schemes) is constructed by the human mind rather than discovered. Finally, he argues that individuals do not only construct their reality in order to make sense of their experience, but also continuously experiment on new concepts in their life. Hence, human beings act not on things and/or situations themselves, but upon their understanding of these things or situations. Similarly, although the same individuals have
exposures to the same things or situations, the outcome (e.g. their reactions) may be completely different. Even so, each of these inner realities are truthful, given they are considered real by that individual. From a sociological perspective, Thomas William (1929 in Bryman 1988: 54) states that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences". Thus, the knowledge production in social sciences relies on the capabilities of individuals to both construct and interpret their inner realities from their outer experience in the world.

If knowledge production takes place within the minds of individuals themselves, it could be suggested that research involving the construction of meaning as product of the human mind takes a constructivist view and those involving the interpretation of meaning as a product of the human mind have an interpretivist position. Agreeing with this notion, Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 26) argue that "all research is interpretive" because they are "guided by set beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied".

Based on these reviews, this study does not only view the world as socially constructed, but also believes that individuals construct and interpret their personal experience (i.e. GYT Experience). In fact, how each gapper constructs and interprets their experience influences how they learn. Thus, understanding how they construct and interpret these experiences will provide an understanding of how learning occurs during GYT. As Schwandt (2000) suggests, reality is built through a particular conceptual framework which acts as a lens through which experience could be explained and described. Schwandt’s (2000) suggestion is in line with the main concepts used in this study. For example, the basis of the transformative learning concept is that one views the world through one’s personal frame of reference, which acts as a lens in understanding and making sense of one’s experiences (see: Mezirow, 1991). In this view, this study’s philosophical position is aligned with phenomenological interpretivism.

4.2.3. Qualitative and Quantitative Paradigms

Collis and Hussey (2003) caution that the terms in philosophies and paradigms have been used interchangeably, for example, the positivistic paradigm is often termed ‘quantitative’ and the phenomenological paradigm is often termed ‘qualitative’. Despite the facts that the terms between two philosophies and the two paradigms are often used interchangeably, the two philosophies and paradigms are by no means the same. Nevertheless, choosing research paradigms that are in line with one’s chosen philosophies are crucial.
Chapter Four – Research Methodology

Both the quantitative and qualitative paradigms have their own distinctive characteristics and differences as depicted in Table 7 below. Bryman (1988) suggests that the two paradigms are associated with various research methods. Surveys, structured interviews, self-administered questionnaires, experiments, structured observations, content analysis and analysis of official statistics tend to be used when the quantitative paradigm is adopted, whereas the following research methods are often used in the qualitative paradigm: participant observation; semi and unstructured interviews; focus groups; qualitative analysis of texts; conversation or discourse analysis. Punch (1998) added that in terms of sample, the qualitative method is likely to have a smaller sample with focus on individual cases and aimed at a detailed and holistic understanding of the subject(s), whereas quantitative research tends to be larger in scale and aims at generalisation, and thus replications.

In alignment to its philosophical position of phenomenological interpretivism, this study adopts the qualitative paradigm. Furthermore, the use of qualitative research is also considered most appropriate for the exploratory nature of this study in which no-predetermined theories have been established and instead the focus lies on the gappers’ experiences as they unfold.

Table 7. Main Characteristics and Differences of Quantitative and Qualitative Research (Source: Bryman, 1988)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Characteristics</th>
<th>Main Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concept measurement through observations</td>
<td>- Qualitative research has a preparatory role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Establishment of causal relationship between concepts</td>
<td>- Researcher is an outsider and has a distant relationship to participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aim of generalisation and replication</td>
<td>- Aim to confirm theory/concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Individual as object of inquiry, separated from its environment and society</td>
<td>- Structured research; pre-set research procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social reality is static and external</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Results in hard and reliable data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No pre-determined theories</td>
<td>- Qualitative research is the main study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Open and unstructured research towards new emerging issues</td>
<td>- Close relationship between researcher and participant, in which researcher is considered as an insider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Detailed description and contextualisation of events and behaviours</td>
<td>- Aim for revealing emergent theory/concepts from data findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social life as process</td>
<td>- Unstructured research and flexible procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Adoption of participants' point of view</td>
<td>- Image of social reality: processual and socially constructed by actor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Resulted in rich and deep data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.4. The Philosophical and Technical Stance of This Study

Besides philosophical discussions in social sciences, debates also surround the philosophical position of tourism (Ayikoru, 2009; Tribe, 1997), in which tendencies towards the positivistic view and quantitative methodologies prevailed in it until recently. It was noted that while philosophical issues in research are considered of high importance, tourism scholars sometimes hesitate and are may be indecisive in developing their understandings and establishing their philosophical position (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004), and tend towards subjectivity (Feighery, 2006). Yet, Ayikoru (2009) points out that it is critical for tourism scholars to establish their firm philosophical standpoint in order to endorse the value of their research given the criticism raised by other disciplines, and/or from other philosophical standpoints. Based on Ayikoru's suggestion (2009) and past criticism on tourism research discussed above, it is important for this gap year travel study, as part of tourism research, to establish a firm philosophical standpoint in advance of the data collection process.

Reviewing various philosophical and technical positions, this study uses the interpretivist perspective as it perceives its part of the world as being socially constructed and individually interpreted. Gappers' experiences are closely related to social interactions with the world; hence a deeper understanding could only be made through the exploration of meanings and interpretation of these experiences by the gappers themselves.

Similarly, adoption of a qualitative paradigm is considered most appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, although this study reviews various concepts and theories, no pre-determined hypothesis is established as the starting point for the study. The discussion of various theories and concepts in the literature review chapters serves as a foundation for an exploration of the gappers' learning outcomes and processes, whereby the data gained from the fieldwork would be the basis for building understandings. Second, an open-structured research process has been implemented to ensure that new emerging themes could be detected. Third, the gappers and their significant experiences are viewed in relation to social context. Fourth, a close relationship is established between researcher and participant, in which the researcher is considered as an insider with whom the gappers opened up and were willing to discuss their experiences, thoughts and emotions. Finally, a small scale study which provides depth and richness of data would be most beneficial for this study. The issues on data quality in qualitative
research and interviews will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter (see Section 4.5.6.1. and 4.5.6.2.).

4.3. RESEARCH APPROACHES

4.3.1. Inductive and Deductive Approaches

Gray (2004) highlights the key question: should a study begin with theory, or should theory itself be the result of the study? He also draws attention to the differences between induction (building theory) and deduction (testing theory) and suggests that the “deductive approach moves towards hypothesis testing, after which the principle is confirmed, refuted or modified” in contrast, “through the inductive approach, plans are made for data collection, after which the data are analysed to see if any patterns emerge” (Gray, 2004: 6). In the inductive approach, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2000: 88) argue that “theory would follow data rather than vice versa as in the deductive approach.” They also make a clear distinction between deductive and inductive approaches to research, in which induction emphasizes: (1) gaining an understanding of the meanings humans attach to events; (2) a close understanding of the research context; (3) the collection of qualitative data; (4) a more flexible structure to permit changes of research emphasis as the research progresses; (5) a realisation that the researcher is part of the research process; and (6) less concern with the need to generalize.

In the 20th century, the emergence of social science questioned the merits of deductive research for two reasons (Saunders et al., 2000). Firstly, it does not take into account human interpretation in the social world. Secondly, its rigid methodology suggests definite conclusions of research without allowing any alternative explanations to intervene. From that point on, the merits of including human interpretation and providing alternative explanations in research are amongst the main perceived benefits associated with the inductive approach. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that no study is purely inductive and that the two approaches are not rigidly divided nor mutually exclusive. Indeed, the idea of pure inductive theory generation (e.g. grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss in 1967) has been challenged by many scholars. For example, Willis (1977) argues that pure induction is non-existent, suggesting there is no research study that is not influenced by researcher’s previous knowledge. Hodkinson (2008) also believes that rigid adherence to only the inductive approach could be limiting. Thus, he advises that not all qualitative studies aiming at exploration should be purely inductive and reminds us that using
strictly inductive processes could, in fact, generate close-minded results (i.e. only based on the interpretation of the data as presented by the interviewees) and dispose of earlier advanced knowledge.

Adding to this, Glaser (1992) clarifies that while data collection and analysis should be based on emergent data first (i.e. without forcing any preconceived ideas or theory on the data), he also states that after a proper inductive process, a deductive process could follow: “later the researcher may show how his work is at odds with other theories and suggest corrections of it or suggest synthesis or other theories” (ibid: 14). Saunders et al. (2012) agree by stating that the two approaches are not rigidly divided or mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Gray (2004) also highlights the possibility and benefits of combining the two approaches. He suggests that inductive and deductive studies could work hand in hand, and in fact, combining the two could enhance the results of the research. He also argues that in reality the elements of both will exist in any project to certain degrees.

Based on the above discussions, this study will mainly adopt an inductive approach, but deductive theories will be used as an organising frame for the analysis of the data (particularly in the main study). The main application of the inductive approach to this study is done because of two reasons.

First, the literature available in the area of GYT is limited, and the links between GYT and learning (especially transformative learning) is under-researched (see also Section 3.2.2.). As suggested by Easterby-Smith et al. (1991), insufficient data of the topic may simply limit a possibility to frame a hypothesis. This implies that the result of this study could provide clues to the relationship between the GYT phenomenon and the key concepts which will assist in building a theory inductively.

Second, Saunders et al. (2000: 89) suggest that an inductive approach is more appropriate if the interest of the study is to understand rather than describe: “[to] understand on why something is happening rather than being able to describe what is happening”. This present study aims to understand both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of learning during GYT, in which explanations of ‘why’ will inform the findings further.

The above reasoning also calls for the main use of the inductive approach in this study. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while this study mainly utilises inductive approach, it
also applies deductive approach to the data in answering the third research question (i.e. what are the processes of GYT Learning (GYTL) (i.e. how the gappers learned), this was done because while the thesis aims to develop understanding on the process of GYT learning using the emerging data from the interview transcripts, it is also necessary to be based on relevant learning theories. Nonetheless, it is important to note here that any synthesis of the literature used in this study (e.g. the use of Experiential Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory) is used to aid understanding rather than as a pre-built theory to test or confirm a hypothesis).

Combining the two approaches will hopefully prove to be useful and complimentary to one another rather than limiting. Applying only inductive approach will result in an understanding of the process of GYT learning merely based on the data provided by the gappers with little considerations to the previous literature built in the area. Mere application of deductive approach will call for rigid applications of previous theories into the study without allowing any possibilities for potential variations from the previous theories; hence this may limit a new theoretical development as a result of this study. The use of this combination will address the limitations of the previous studies in the area (see critiques of previous studies in Section 3.2.2.).

Finally, the literature highlights that understanding the application of inductive and deductive research approaches is particularly important in the data analysis stage (Boyatzis, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 2006; Gray, 2004; Saunders et al., 2012). For example, the template analysis approach highlights the importance in pointing out the difference between *a priori* themes/codes from the literature and themes/codes based on preliminary reading of the transcripts.

### 4.3.2. Grand Theory vs. Middle Range Theory

The importance of understanding a theoretical view resulting from research is well-noted (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991), yet the word ‘theory’ itself is often misused or misunderstood. Therefore, it is important to understand the definition of ‘theory’. Theory has been defined in a number of ways:

> "a formulation regarding the cause and effect relationships between two or more variables, which may or may not have been tested" (Gill and Johnson, 1997: 178).
“a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomena” (Kerlinger, 1986: 9).

This study provides links between the GYT phenomenon and various learning theories and other key concepts (i.e. youth transition, mobility and identity) with the purpose of understanding the relationships between these various concepts and theories. Furthermore, it is important to note that this study attempts to develop an understanding (i.e. middle range theory) rather than developing a theory (i.e. a grand theory of GYT Learning), or to test a theory. Grand theory attempts to provide an overall explanation of social life, history or human experience at large, which suggests that grand theory is located on a paradigm level, e.g. positivism (Skinner, 1985), whereas middle range theory is the bridging gap between the (grand) theory and empirical evidence (Merton, 1968). Merton’s idea of middle range theory is based on the fact that studies should focus first on what could be understood and proven through empirical evidence, rather than creating universal theory, which endeavour to focus on the issue of the whole world rather than a specific issues of focus. By developing an understanding (i.e. middle range theory), this study provides an original contribution to the literature, providing opportunities for future studies to continue the development of the theory at a later stage.

4.4. PRELIMINARY STUDY

4.4.1. Research Design for Preliminary Study

4.4.1.1. Research Goal and Purpose

The research goal of this preliminary study is to understand ‘gappers’ from the perspective of the young travellers themselves: ‘how do they label, define and describe Gap Year Travel (GYT).’ The purpose is to explore the definition of a ‘GYT’ and thus also a ‘gapper’ in relation to the findings of the literature discussed earlier in Chapter Two.

4.4.1.2. Sampling

A sample of 21 travellers between the ages 15 and 35 years were recruited and invited to participate in this preliminary study (see Table 8). Using a convenience sampling method, participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to share opinions. However,
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several factors, i.e. representation of a variety of nationalities, gender and age were also considered in the sampling.

Table 8. Participants’ Demographic Information – Preliminary Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Hotel Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Engineer - Expatriate in London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Home Store Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Gapper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Gapper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Gapper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Student (Ex-Gapper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Market Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Gapper - working as Truck Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Gapper - working as Travel Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Gapper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Food and Beverage Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Student (Ex-Gapper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Research Analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Cultural Event Planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Gapper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Student (Ex-Gapper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>Student (Ex-Gapper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Gapper - Recent Graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to gain access to the sample as described above the study was conducted on the 1st and 2nd of November 2008 in three hostels located in the Central London area, due to the hostels’ willingness and support to participate in the study. The hostels chosen were three of the six hostels of Youth Hostel Association in London:

- YHA London Earl’s Court, 38 Bolton Gardens, London, SW5 0AQ
- YHA London St. Pancras, 79-81 Euston Road, London, NW1 2QE
- YHA London Oxford Street, 14 Noel Street, London, W1F 8GJ

The interviews took the form of an open-structured conversation. The short interviews lasted for approximately 10-15 minutes, with the following questions used as guidelines with other follow-up questions as necessary:
• How do the participants describe GYT?
• How do they compare GYT to other types of travel?
• Who and what kind of people undertake GYT?
• What do gappers do during GYT?

Upon the completion of this interview, the data were analysed using linear template analysis (King, 1998; see also Section 4.5.4. of Data Analysis in Chapter Four). Two main themes emerged from the data. First, the participants discuss the differences between GYT and its alternative terms and secondly, they go further by defining and describing what GYT is. These aspects have been discussed earlier in Chapter Two, in order to provide a clear understanding of GYT for this study.

4.4.1.4. Lessons Learned from Preliminary Study

A number of valuable practical lessons were learned from the preliminary study:

Timing. The best time to interview the young travellers was identified as between 06:00-09:00 pm (i.e. time to relax in the evening) and 08:30-10:30 am (i.e. preparing to check-out).

Location. Hostels that are conveniently located, with proximity to attractions to Central London, are likely to be the best place to locate young travellers with some knowledge about GYT. Within the hostel itself, common rooms (but not the dining room or the lobby) are the most convenient place to meet and speak to young travellers. The lobby is also a convenient place but people are likely to wait there for a departure, which may result in early termination of the interview.

Relationship Building. Building relationship with staff prior, during or after the interview is of paramount importance to the success of the data collection.

Sample. Those in the younger age group bracket (i.e. 15-35 years) are likely to be familiar with the term Gap Year. Nevertheless, upon analysis of preliminary findings and based on references from literature the age group bracket has been narrowed down to 17-30 years old, as 17 is often the youngest age of leaving school in South East England, which symbolised the stage of moving into adulthood and 30 years old was discussed by many literatures to be the current upper age limit of young people before settling down.
Language. To avoid language difficulties in understanding the topic of conversation, the researcher needs to interview only those who speak English reasonably well.

Approachability. Those who are on their own, or in pairs in general are more approachable than those in groups. Young families with young children are fairly difficult to approach. In brief, it is important to not inconvenience people with the interview.

Interview Process. First of all, it is important to physically separate the interviewees from the crowd, to ensure the comfort of the interviewee and enable clear audio recording. Similarly, it is important to assure participants that the study is anonymous and confidential, and that the audio recording device is only to assist in data collection. During the interview itself, the researcher may build rapport with easy-to-answer opening questions, withholding asking the direct question (i.e. What is GYT?) too early in the conversation. It is also apparent that at time, the researcher may need to help to direct the interviewees in order to define or describe what GYT is. While this preliminary study takes an open structure format, it may be useful for the main study to have more semi-structured interview process. This is also to ensure that all of the areas to be researched are fully covered.

4.4.2. Findings from Preliminary Study

4.4.2.1. Alternative Terms of GYT

When asked whether they know what the term GYT is, most interviewees suggested that they know or have some understanding of what gap year travel is with only a few were not familiarized with the term but know what GYT is. Nevertheless, none of them directly or clearly define what GYT is, but they define it through descriptions (see also Section 4.4.2.3.). One of the interviewees suggested that in general the idea “is becoming more familiar” (Interviewee 21). Yet, not all participants were necessarily familiar with the term itself. However, they were able to associate it with other terms. The terms that they used for GYT were largely associated with the terms documented within the contemporary literature of youth travel (see Section 2.3.). The terms that the participants associate GYT the most with are ‘backpackers’, ‘overseas experience’, ‘working abroad’ and ‘year out’. They explained that these associations are due to their views that GYT usually involves long term independent overseas budget travel, in which at times require gappers to work in order to be able to do so. For this reason, Interviewee 15 suggests that
the term 'Working Abroad' is widely recognized as most GYT involves working abroad. In one way or another they make reference that GYT share similar characteristics of contemporary backpackers, long-term traveller, independent traveller, overseas traveller, student traveller, budget traveller, overseas traveller, etc. (see: Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Mintel, 2002; Mintel 2003a; Mintel 2003b; Mintel 2004a; Mintel 2004b; Mintel, 2005; Mintel, 2006a; Riley, 1988; Sørensen, 2003).

Among others, the label backpacker was suggested to be most closely linked to GYT. According to Interviewee 21, usually "we just translate it [as] backpacking." As Interviewee 5 explained, "if they see us with backpack – they will call us backpacker". According to Interviewee 6, "there are not much a difference between a gap year traveller and a backpacker. If you are travelling in backpacker, you are still a backpacker." Indeed, these participants suggested close association between gappers and backpackers. Some other participants shared similar views. For example, Interviewees 5 and 6 who were doing gap year preferred to call themselves backpackers. They provided possible reasons that the label of backpackers link very closely with the concept of GYT. Interviewee 5 stated: "It doesn't bother me at all being called backpackers - that's what we are - really. We stay in the hostel and we literally carrying backpack. That's the easiest way we can travel, the cheapest way we can travel." Interviewee 6 added that actually "We prefer to be called backpacker – it sounds better." Interviewee 5 added that "there is a little bit of pride coming from being a backpacker. Yeah, because it's very independent - you are roughing it. You are staying at the hostel; you have to take care of yourself a lot more." These explanations could suggest two points. First, the terms used to describe the young travellers are interchangeable and could also be used in conjunctions to each other (i.e. a gapper could also be a backpacker at the same time). Second, the terms used could refer to emphasize different aspects of their travel. For example, backpacker has strong connotations to the movement of the travellers, their accommodation choice and their style of travelling.

4.4.2.2. GYT is a Situational Term

Those who were aware of GYT either have known it for a while, or have just been exposed to the term during their recent travel. Those who were not certain of the term Gap Year have an emerging awareness during the conversation. Only one interviewee (Interviewee 3) had
never heard about GYT at all. Interviewee 4 stated that "I haven’t heard that term before. I just heard it when I come here to Europe." Interviewee 5 shared that "when I start researching about coming over here [London], I notice a lot about it [GYT], but I didn’t realize it beforehand."

This suggested that although GYT has become a common term, its use is mainly among those with knowledge of travel, and according to some participants the term is also specific to particular regions of the world. As Mintel (2005) and Simpsons (2004, 2005) argued that GYT was originated from the UK, hence the term is mostly popular in the UK and in the most frequented destinations by the British gappers.

Furthermore, some participants suggested that depending on which countries they come from, the terms used and their understanding vary. According to some participants, the equivalent of GYT in New Zealand is called Overseas Experience (OE) (e.g. Interviewees 4 and 18). Interviewee 4 commented further that in New Zealand, "it’s not a common term that everybody is aware of. If it is heard of, it usually are people coming from other countries to New Zealand as ‘Gap Year Students’." Interviewee 6 commented that in Australia "we call it Working Holiday." According to Interviewee 11, the term Gap Year "is there, but is not very well known." Interviewee 12 explained that when "people go out [from New Zealand], it’s called OE; when people go in [to New Zealand], it’s called Gap Year." From the above explanations, it could be inferred that the term GYT is interchangeable with other terms depending on the location. It is suggested that the term Gap Year is usually used by and for those travelling mainly from the UK, in the above cases are inbound to New Zealand and Australia. These findings suggest that the term GYT and various terms are indeed situational. As Inkson and Myers (2003) and Noy (2004) argue these terms are interchangeable and used differently in different countries.

4.4.2.3. Defining and Describing GYT

In attempt to defining what GYT is, most interviewees have tendency to describe what GYT is rather than defining it, which suggests that GYT is to be seen more holistically rather than by specific definition. Only one interviewee who stated without hesitant: "it’s a gap... between your studies" (Interviewee 19).
4.4.2.3.1. Who is a Gapper?

It is interesting to note that the interviewees have tendency to use the gappers (i.e. someone who embarks on GYT) in explaining what GYT is. Interviewee 4 suggested that GYT is likely to be undertaken by “people [who] would finish university – or some kind of education - four years or so.” Similarly, Interviewee 5 explained that GYT is usually taken “in between high school and the university. They take a year off and travel, and then they go to university and then study for four years or so.” Interviewee 11 explained that GYT “is normally for people who finished school before they go to University.” So, it is done “if you are a student in between school and university” (Interviewee 12). Furthermore, Interviewee 21 suggested that, “a lot of students do it... pass university... they call it Gap Year. [It is] a break from the school and just go away.” Interviewee 21 agreed by stating that GYT is usually undertaken by “people who are travelling normally are either in the university or they just graduated.”

Only one of the interviewees (Interviewee 14) shared that although her three months trip was during employment (i.e. not between education), she suggested that she also consider her trip as a GYT experience. She explained: “I have done it because I didn’t get a chance to do it when I was younger. I left college and get a job directly. [So,] I just do it now, because I haven’t done before. So, it was like my little gap year of three months” (Interviewee 14). This explains that GYT usually is taken as a break from education, yet it is not necessarily inclusive to break in between education. Indeed, the interviewees suggest that GYT is mainly populated by student gappers, although they also recognize that GYT is not necessarily exclusive to students. This reflects the main categorizations of the gappers as discussed in Section 2.5. and Table 1, and serve as a foundation that this study should focus on student/career gappers within the young age.

4.4.2.3.2. Why go on GYT?

During exploration of what GYT is, the interviewees’ conversations explore the reasons for embarking into GYT. Interviewee 4 suggested that people go for a gap year to take “just a little bit time for yourself. Some people do need break from it.” Interviewee 12 believed that GYT “is a good idea. Some people who have been to the university and taking a year out, before they continue.” Another interviewee suggested that GYT “is just a year out to do the things you want to do before you settle down, before going to university at all” (Interviewee 14).
Interviewee 19 explained that "there are certain things that you can do at that very young age, before you have family or certain things." Interviewee 21 added that "after you work, you most probably wouldn't get this time. The most you can get it most probably is one month." The interviewees' opinions echoed the theme on the important of taking a break, as argued by the literature (e.g. Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005); it also confirms the needs for a preparation for moving from one phase of life to another, i.e. life transitions to higher education, career or parenthood (see Chapter Three for further discussion).

Also giving his own example, Interviewee 16 stated that "some people come back home, where they originally come from to know their home place." On his decision to take a GYT, he said that "I just decided to do something with my life. Like Sweden is a kind boring, where I come from actually is a small town. It's just a small bubble, and I just want to get out of there discover myself, other places." Later on he explained that he wanted to be "just not being in Sweden, working and just working. Just to live." Commenting on his own travel, Interviewee 4 said: "I needed a change... I really needed to do something to get a break away... I didn't want to do anything else in town... I just want to get out of town." This may suggest that besides taking time off, there are many other reasons young travellers decided to take GYT. This could include a need for a change, escapism, and revisiting some parts of their life that have been discussed in the literature (e.g. Barry, 1998; Simpson, 2005).

4.4.2.3.3. When, how long and doing what?

In regards to the length of the trip, Interviewee 13 stated that usually "it's a year. You can do it in different chunks if you want to. You can go like for six months first, etc." Similarly, Interviewee 20 believed that GYT could take a form of a round the world journey, and that is usually takes few months to a year. According to Interviewee 21, the students do not have to take a complete year out, but it could be just one semester break for travelling. Thus, it could be inferred from the interviewees' comments that the duration of GYT could vary greatly depends on each individual's planned activities although usually its length is about a year. It could be referred that the timing (i.e. when and how long the travel is) is not restrictive, although the usual situations were suggested.

The interviewees also suggest that GYT is undertaken by those in the younger age bracket mainly students, with no long-term commitments. They also suggests that the term GYT
also emphasize on the ‘break’ or ‘gap’ aspect of one’s life, mainly a break or a gap from education which mostly suggested to be between high school and university. Interviewee 14 suggested that “usually gap year [is] when you don’t do any education. You can travel, work, do anything you like with your time really” (Interviewee 14). Nevertheless, Interview 13 argued: “You can do education if you like when you are away you can do courses. And get visa or something to work. You can do it before going to University... before going to work. You can also do sandwiches [re: in between]”. Using her own example, Interviewee 19 stated that “I took one year break from the university. There are programs like volunteering, different cultures abroad, etc.” Interviewee 21 explained that GYT can also take a form of training/working experience. In his case, he took two working/training experiences for gap year, combined with activities, such as skiing.

Indeed, although gap year is often associated with students taking a break from their education, some interviewees believed that gap year now is also associated with those who work, as undertaking GYT requires funding. Interviewee 5 believed that “If you don’t have the money, obviously you can’t – especially [if you travel] in the UK.” Interviewee 20 agreed that “it’s something to do with money,” therefore GYT taken “after somebody is working is more common now than before some years ago.”

Furthermore, the participants also commented that people who do OE from New Zealand to UK usually have worked before their travel. For example Interviewee 9 stated that, “I worked for nine years before I come over.” He also shared that on the other hand mostly “people come to New Zealand and they don’t work. They just backpacking around the country and stay in the backpackers.” He explained further that “even if they get the visa to work in New Zealand, it’s different because of the money system. It’s not the greatest to earn in New Zealand if you are from here [UK].” Clearly, paid-work is one important part of GYT activities; the fact that young people can also work abroad is an activity that becoming more common option now among the gappers. Interviewee 21 explained that “Brazilian goes to the US mainly, because you pay to go and then you get your money back. Pay, go, learn English, and get your money back. You go have fun and still earning money. Otherwise, it’s expensive for us – Euro and Pound are very expensive for us. [For example,] it costs us much more than others from Australia or New Zealand for backpacking – we almost can’t afford that.”
The interviewees argued that there are many activities that one can do during GYT, whether it includes educational or non-educational components. Travelling for fun and leisure, experiencing other culture and volunteering are mentioned as few of the activities, with working abroad as being discussed the most. The financial resources needed are an important factor echoed by many interviewees to determine whether they can undertake gap year, which destinations to visit, and what activities to do (see also Jones, 2004). The diversity of paid or non-paid work described by Heath (2007) was explored by the interviewees. As these areas appear to be important part of discussions, this will be discussed further.

4.4.2.3.4. How, with whom and where?

The interviewees who took or were taking a gap year during the preliminary study interviews argued that they usually take the first step by exiting the country and then plan the rest of their trip on the go. For example, Interviewee 2 explained: “[we] haven’t worked it out yet, we just book the train – three nights here and we see where we are going.” Similarly, Interviewee 4 said that he just “wing it... going along and doing it” in his approach to both finding jobs and accommodations during his trip. On the other hand, Interviewee 13 suggested that alternative to open and independent arrangement, one can also have a more structured gap year in which “you can contact the company to make a package or something.” Furthermore, Interviewee 4 argued that flexible arrangement is more favourable as one could come back earlier if one needs to, or stay longer, and in some cases they end up settling somewhere else. They argue that trip planning is an important part of GYT.

A few interviewees travelled on their own while others travelled in pairs (e.g. Interviewee 5 and 6; Interviewee 11 and 12). Interviewee 13 shared that “I am glad that I went on my own... I could do what I wanted to do when I wanted to do.” Commenting on his solo travel, Interviewee 21 pointed out the difference in experiencing solo travel: “this is my first time travelling so it was a kind of scary in the beginning... you are alone and cannot have anyone to have a conversation with you... When you are alone it feels that people are looking at you, and being interested in what you are doing. With group, you don’t care about those things – you have people next to you and you can have a conversation. If I am by myself, I have to pay attention to everything and I need to solve everything.” Interviewee 11 also stated that “when you are alone, and when you are different, it’s easier to make friends.” Interviewees 5 and 6 commented that it is different “the fact that we are couple and that we are doing it as couple not as a single person
going to travel... Single people most probably will meet up with other people and meet friends, or other. We are not gonna do that." It was implied that travelling solo or with others have its own advantages and disadvantages, and have major influence on their GYT experience.

Interviewee 15 argued that gappers could stay in various types of accommodations—hotels, hostel and camping, and stated that "sometimes if you stay in the hotel, they are on their own holiday, so people are not quite social. While you are on camping, everyone is out having barbeque near the campfire... 'come out and join us'. I think people are a lot more open, and make friends." Similarly, Interviewee 1 suggested that "When I am in hostel, then I meet a lot of people." In addition, Interviewee 5 suggested that if "you are staying at the hostel, you have to take care of yourself a lot more." Interviewee 21 shared that he has stayed in rented house and also travel between hostels to hostels. He stated that "hostel make a difference... [in labelling] whether you are a backpacker or not." This suggests that the decision on which types of accommodation to choose from also influence on the types of travel experience the gappers have and their sociability when travelling. For example, staying at hostel could create a more independent and social experience. The interviewees’ comments also imply that meeting and interacting with other travellers appears to be an important theme during travel for some of them.

The interviewees also discussed on the impacts on the methods of travel. One participant commented that the gappers “are more independent because they have to a kind of fight to get on trains and break yourself open” (Interviewee 13). Another participant commented that he preferred to take train because he enjoyed it, “but because of time I have to mixed and match between the flight and train” (Interviewee 4). The two comments suggest that even though the choice of transportations may be a matter of convenience, it is also an important part of the whole experience.

4.4.2.3.5. What was gained?

Besides discussing the factors encompassing GYT, the interviewees also discussed the possible benefits of GYT. It was touched upon very briefly, as this preliminary study was mainly designed as an exercise in defining GYT. The interviewees suggest that they have benefitted from their trips: independence (Interviewees 2, 5, 7, 13), gaining confidence (Interviewees 8, 12), becoming more grown-up (Interviewee 6), appreciation of one’s own country and family
(Interviewees 5, 11, 14), learning about the working life and how to deal with others (Interviewee 6), etc.

On technical skills gained, one of the interviewees commented on gaining level of fluency in language (Interviewee 19). On social interactions, Interviewee 8 commented how he has gained from his interactions with others during his travel: "I meet a lot of people. It was great – I meet people from all nationalities and you can learn something from everybody." On personal level, Interviewee 7 suggested that travel could serve as "a kind of journey of finding yourself," which involves "lingering and finding your own values and knowledge." In general, interviewees believed that they are likely to benefit from their travel. Interviewee 7 even suggested that "You almost have to [travel], in order to a kind of to learn." The outcome of GYT experience and their learning during the transition period will be the focus of the main study. The issues of identity, mobility, transition and learning has been discussed in depth in the previous chapter (see Chapter Three).

4.4.3. Summary and Implications of Preliminary Study

In this section, the findings of the preliminary study revealed the challenge of defining GYT due to the fact that GYT is not a unitary or universally recognized concept. The preliminary study provided some confirmation on the definition and categorization, and the framework of GYT. The preliminary study also covered the discussion of the origins and the use of the term ‘Gap Year’ and other labels associated with it, along with the various factors surrounding GYT. Finally, the theme of transition and potential learning benefits were briefly discussed as important and this serves as guidance for the next part of the literature review.

The preliminary study has covered the origins and the use of the term GYT and other labels associated with it. The term ‘Gap Year’ is originated, and is more common in the UK. However, the concept is recognized by other countries mainly in New Zealand as ‘Overseas Experience’ and Australia as ‘Working Holiday.’ The concept has slowly gained popularity in other countries, although there is no common term used. An alternative term used to label GYT is backpacking, which is commonly used outside the UK, Australia or New Zealand. Also, it could be argued that there are different pull and push factors between the home and destination countries. For example, those travelling from UK tend to take a break from education, which usually focus on travelling rather than working which indicates younger age bracket of those
between school and university. On the other hand, the young travellers from New Zealand and
Australia tend to be older and have obtained some working experience in their countries prior to
their trip. They usually obtained a working visa so they can combine the travel experience with
working experience abroad.

The interviewees' opinions are in line with the literature reviewed earlier in the chapters. The
themes of leisure, work, education and transition also present to some extent in this
preliminary study. Finally, the preliminary study has also contributed to an understanding of the
categorization of GYT. The interviewees confirmed that GYT is usually undertaken by young
travellers, i.e. mainly students. Yet, the importance and possibility of career gappers by young
travellers was also highlighted by the interviewees.

Based on the findings of the preliminary study, a few important elements have emerged
from the interviewees' opinions on what GYT is. For example, it has highlights the elements of
purpose (e.g. a break from/after education) and age (tend to be younger people, student/recent
graduates). In general, the preliminary study provided some confirmation of what was suggested
in the literature review in Chapter Two. It has confirmed the definitional challenges facing GYT
in so far as GYT is not a unitary concept. It is not a single, well defined and generally accepted
concept; rather it can be defined in terms of a variety of factors. As noted by Interviewee 18, the
definition of GYT "depends on who you are and what you are doing." This highlights the fact
that both the gappers and the experience itself are important elements of creating a holistic GYT
experience.

This preliminary study also pointed out that there are various factors that may contribute
to defining the GYT experience: travel duration, travel destinations, travel arrangements, travel
mode, travel activities, and travel companions. To some extent the interviewees touched upon
these factors and these data indicate the importance of a range of factors in defining,
circumscribing and understanding one's own GYT. Therefore, taking these factors into account
in the main study could serve as an important foundation for a choice of definition of GYT (see
also Section 2.7. for further discussion in understanding the holistic GYT experience).
4.5. MAIN STUDY

4.5.1. Research Time Frame

Research generally falls into two time horizons categories: cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. Academic research often takes a cross-sectional approach, mainly due to time constraints (Saunders et al., 2012). Whether a study should consider a snapshot at a particular time or a representation of events over a given period of time depends entirely on the research questions. According to Bouma and Atkinson (1995: 114), the basic question in longitudinal studies is, "has there been any change over a period of time?". Furthermore, the real strength of longitudinal research is the capacity that it has to enable the study of change and development. Although the research questions in the present study focus on changes in gappers' lives, there are a number of reasons that make a cross-sectional study more appropriate at this point in time.

This present study does not take a longitudinal time frame, for the reason that it is still at the exploratory stage, where, for the first time, many new concepts are interlinked with the phenomenon of GYT. This means that how these concepts relate to each other's need to be addressed and understood first through an exploratory study prior to committing energy and resources (e.g. time and money) on a more comprehensive study. Furthermore, according to Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1991), gappers learn through various stages and phases, which suggest that data collection could be done at the end of the trip rather than during the trip itself. Any data generated through a longitudinal study may not actually be necessary to achieve the goals of this study. In addition, there are risks involved with the gappers' commitment for a long period of time (i.e. gappers tend to drop out of longer term research and hence resulting in incomplete research). Thus, by committing to a more focused and small-scale cross-sectional study at this stage, the research objectives are more likely to be achieved. For these reasons, a cross-sectional study is a more viable option for this study.

4.5.2. Sampling Technique

Sampling techniques provide a range of methods to reduce the amount of data to collect by considering only data from a subgroup rather than all possible cases, as it would be impractical (e.g. in terms of time and finance) to survey the entire population. The main branches
of sampling are probability sampling (representative), and non-probability sampling (judgemental). The first usually is used with survey based research, while the latter provides a range of alternative techniques based on the researcher’s subjective judgment: quota, purposive, snowball, self-selection and convenience sampling, as depicted in Table 9. Non probability sampling techniques provides the opportunity to select sample purposively and to reach difficult to identify members of the population.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample type</th>
<th>Likelihood of sample being representative</th>
<th>Types of research in which useful</th>
<th>Relative costs</th>
<th>Control over sample contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quota</td>
<td>Reasonable to high although dependent on selection of quota variables</td>
<td>Where costs constrained/data needed very quickly so an alternative to probability sampling needed</td>
<td>Moderately high to reasonable</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposive</td>
<td>Low although dependent on researcher’s choices: extreme case heterogeneous homogeneous critical case typical case</td>
<td>Where working with very small samples focus: unusual or special focus: key themes focus: in-depth focus: importance of case focus: illustrative</td>
<td>Reasonable</td>
<td>Reasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowball</td>
<td>Low but cases will have characteristics desired</td>
<td>Where difficulties in identifying cases</td>
<td>Reasonable</td>
<td>Quite Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-selection</td>
<td>Low but cases self-selected</td>
<td>Where exploratory research needed</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Where very little variation in population</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After considering a range of alternative sample techniques for this study, a combination of self-selection and snowball sampling techniques were opted as the most appropriate techniques. In self-selection sampling, an advertisement is generally made to encourage
participation. Data then was gathered from those participants who identify their desire to take part in the research. Due to the self-select nature, it could be argued that the participants are likely to be more committed to and interested in the study. Snowball sampling technique requires low number of cases; however, the samples will have characteristics desired. It is particularly useful, when there are some difficulties in identifying the desired cases. Initial contacts with one or two cases are continued by identifying further cases, and so forth. A convenience sampling is deemed unfavourable for this study, because although it may be the easiest technique, it has a high possibility for bias (e.g. social desirability bias, etc.).

In obtaining a self-selected sample, participants’ recruitment was done through flyers distributed at higher education institutions (e.g. universities and colleges) in the South East of England (see Appendix 3). Flyers (see Appendix 2) were posted or sent to all Students’ Union offices in these higher education institutions in South East England area requesting assistance in posting flyers at their educational institutions in order to recruit potential ex-gappers, with further snowballing. This application of self-selected sampling is likely to engage participants who consider their GYT to be important and who are motivated, committed to and interested in sharing their experiences.

In this study, all participants were recruited through self-selected sampling with only two exceptions who were recruited through snowball sampling (i.e. Participants 11 Ethan and 25 McKenzie; both were recommended by Participant 5 Rebecca – see Table 10 and also Appendix 1). At that stage, i.e. the interview of Participant 5, the recruitment process was still slow and it was uncertain whether self-selected recruitment will generate necessary numbers of participants for the study.

Based on the literature, the criteria for participant selection was for individual gappers: 1) within the age range of 17-30 years; 2) who were based in the UK; 3) embarked on any major overseas travel experience in the form of independent or unorganized travel (before, during and after university); 4) within a 3 to 24 months travel period taken within the last 24 months of the research period. At the filtering process of interview participants, the researcher ensured that the participants met the criteria for the study either via brief telephone conversation or by e-mail prior to the interview. The aim was also to provide them with the necessary information about the study.
While statistical analyses usually require larger sample sizes, studies which do not require statistical estimates can be based on far smaller samples. Yet, what is the most appropriate sample for this study? Answering to this question, Marshall (1996: 523) suggests that the appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is the sample size that adequately answers the research question. Saunders et al. (2000) suggest that in-depth study research objectives can be achieved using a relatively small sample and state that "undertaking an in-depth study that focuses on a small, perhaps one sample, selected purposively" could often be satisfactory in achieving objectives (ibid: 170). Marshall (1996) confirms that if a qualitative study attempts to answer simple or very detailed questions (i.e. that focuses on quality rather than quantity), 'single figures' are often sufficient. Clearly, the usefulness of studying small samples should neither be undermined nor misunderstood since statistical generalizability is not the ultimate goal of a qualitative study.

Furthermore, Marshall (1996) argues that in practice, the sample size required for a study usually becomes obvious as the study progresses, and points out those data, theoretical, and/or thematic saturations should be the benchmark. Data saturation occurs when new categories, themes or explanations stop emerging from the data. Similarly, as the data collection process is usually driven by the theory, the sample size is sufficient when the emerging data from new sample has allowed an adequate examination and elaboration on the theory (i.e. in this study an understanding of a phenomena). This is also true when the data has resulted in the similar thematic patterns over time. Hence, the emerging data itself will determine the proper sample size for a study.

In this study, a total of 27 gappers (see Table 10; see also Appendix 1) were interviewed and interviews were terminated at the 27th interview as data, theoretical and thematic saturations were judged to have been reached. The interview transcripts repetitively echoed the initial codes without new codes emerging and formed larger themes at the subsequent coding process, confirming that data and thematic saturation has been reached in the analysis of the inductive findings (see Appendix 7). Similarly, data shared by the participants have also repetitively confirmed the resemblance of the stages of Experiential Learning Theory and phases of Transformative Learning Theory, confirming that theoretical saturation as the benchmark for the deductive findings were reached (see Appendix 8).
### Table 10. Participants Demographic Information – Main Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Travel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Student (UG; 1st year)</td>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>8 months Duration Oct 07 to Jun 08; Destinations Australasia, North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Giovanni</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Student (UG; 1st year)</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
<td>3.5 months Duration May 08 to Aug 08; Destinations North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Student (UG; 3rd year)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>6 months Duration Feb 08 to Aug 08; Destinations Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dylan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Recent Graduate (UG)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>1 year Duration Sep 07 to Sep 08; Destinations Australasia, Central and South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Godalming</td>
<td>1 year Duration Nov 06 to Nov 07; Destinations Australasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Student (PG-R; 1st year)</td>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>4 months Duration Apr 07 to Jul 07; Destinations Australasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Keanu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Student (UG; 2nd year)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>1 year 5 months Duration Oct 05 to Feb 07; Destinations North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Brayden</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Student (PG-T; 1st year)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>4 months Duration May 07 to Sep 07; Destinations Africa, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student (UG; 1st year)</td>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>6 months Duration Sep 07 to Mar 08; Destinations Asia, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gavin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student (UG; 1st year)</td>
<td>Dorset</td>
<td>4.5 months Duration Feb 08 to Jul 08; Destinations Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Business Consultant</td>
<td>Godalming</td>
<td>1 year Duration Nov 06 to Nov 07; Destinations Australasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Kiefer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>1 year 3 months Duration Apr 06 to Aug 07; Destinations Australasia, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Student (PG-T; 2nd year)</td>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>9 months Duration May 08 to Feb 09; Destinations Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ulrich</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Student (UG; 3rd year)</td>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>1 year Duration Aug 07 to Aug 08; Destinations North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student (UG; 2nd year)</td>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>8 months and 4 months Duration Sep 06 to May 08; Destinations Africa, North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Anna-Rose</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student (UG; 2nd year)</td>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>6 months Duration Feb 07 to Aug 07; Destinations Africa, Australasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student (UG; 2nd year)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>8 months Duration Jan 07 to Aug 07; Destinations Australasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student (UG; 2nd year)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>3.5 months Duration Feb 07 to May 07; Destinations Asia, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Whitney</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student (UG; 2nd year)</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>7 months Duration Aug 06 to Mar 07; Destinations Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Student (UG; 1st year)</td>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>6 months Duration Nov 07 to Apr 08; Destinations Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Yves</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>1 year 5 months Duration Apr 06 to Aug 07; Destinations Asia, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Student (UG; 1st year)</td>
<td>Sutton</td>
<td>5 months Duration Apr 08 to Sep 08; Destinations Africa, Asia, South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Verity</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Student Coordinator</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>5 months Duration Aug 07 to Jan 08; Destinations Australasia, North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Student (PG-T; 1st year)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>3 months Duration May 07 to Jul 07; Destinations Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>McKenzie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student (UG; 1st year)</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>4 months Duration Apr 08 to Aug 08; Destinations Central and South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Vivienne</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Student (PG-R; 1st year)</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>9 months Duration Jan 08 to Jun 08; Destinations Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student (UG; 2nd year)</td>
<td>Hampton</td>
<td>7 months Duration Nov 06 to Jun 07; Destinations Australasia, Europe, North America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The table provides detailed demographic information and travel records for participants in the main study. The destinations include various regions such as Australasia, North America, Europe, and others.
In trading between the quantity (i.e. the number of the gappers interviewed) and quality (i.e. the data gained from the interviews), each gapper was interviewed twice (approximately 30-60 minutes each depending on the flow and direction of the discussion), in order to achieve the desired depth of data. While the participants’ experiences have been explored in depth in the first interview using open-ended discussion, the purpose of the second interview is to allow follow-up and further discussions that have not been covered in the first interview; this allowed participants to explore areas that they were not ready or able to discuss in the first interview.

4.5.3. Data Collection

In choosing the most appropriate strategy for data collection for this study, a number of research strategies were reviewed. The first strategy: experimental research was dismissed due to ethical considerations (i.e. manipulating young gappers’ perspectives of learning is deemed to be inappropriate) and this approach would have been utterly impractical. The second strategy: action research, was also dismissed because to promote change is not the current intention of this exploratory study. Although the strategy may be useful in subsequent studies (e.g. positive reinforcement towards effective learning during GYT), an intervention by researcher at this point in time was not considered to lead to the desired outcomes and threatened to introduce a level of bias. The third strategy: grounded theory, was not exercised as it required fieldwork to take place at the commencement of the study, whereas this study started with literature review as its foundation. The fourth strategy: survey, was not employed since it does not serve the purpose of the exploratory and mainly inductive nature of this study. Although surveying may be useful in the follow-up study, its use for the current research was felt to offer limited benefits.

The fifth research strategy considered was ethnography, which involves the researcher’s participation in the gappers’ experience. Although ethnography could potentially be beneficial in providing a first-hand opportunity to observe the gappers’ experience at its occurrence, it is not the most appropriate strategy for this study for three reasons. First, gappers’ learning and reflection takes time to develop, and occurs slowly over time, and hence could not easily be captured through this strategy. Second, the presence and the intervention of the researcher in the environment being researched may alter the course of the gappers’ learning, which hence introduce potential bias. Finally, it is practically impossible for one PhD researcher to be present for each individual gapper being researched as they travel to different global destinations with
different activities during roughly the same research period. Although this issue could be refuted by researching on learning from group travel, yet the gappers’ individual learning within the social context is the interest of this study, rather than gappers’ group learning. For the above reasons, although ethnographic research would be interesting for this study, this option is not viable at this time given the circumstances.

The sixth strategy: case study research, was originally considered to be potentially beneficial for theory generation in this study in comparison to the other strategies discussed above. Nevertheless, it was not opted for, mainly because this exploratory study requires a number of participants, and a relatively small number of cases (i.e. participants, starting from one case) (Yin, 2003), may not be sufficient in fulfilling the objective of this study. Yin (2003) suggests that conducting multiple-case studies can require extensive resources and time beyond the means of a single student or independent research investigator; for this reason case study is not the most appropriate choice for this study. Nevertheless, Yin (2003) provides a direction when stating that interviews are considered the most important sources of evidence as they give a clear focus on specific topics and insightful results. Furthermore, Fontana and Frey (2005) agree by pointing out the merits of interview as a data collection method in that they allow researcher to access the thoughts and reflections of the participants, which clearly are a critical element for this study.

4.5.3.1. Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in gaining understanding of human subjects, as it creates possibility for social dynamic and active interactive processes between the researcher and the participant which shape the nature of the knowledge generated (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Gubrium and Holstein, 1995). Furthermore, Fontana and Frey (2005) point out that interview has an ability to obtain a rich experiential account of an event or episode in the life of the respondents and to capture their realities in the words of the respondents themselves. They also suggest that it is a source of information for a true and accurate picture of the respondents’ selves and lives, providing they provided truthful information.

Considering various types of interviews, in-depth semi-structured interviews were considered to be the most appropriate for this present study for a number of reasons. First, these types of interview provide a balance between having pre-established main questions which are
flexible in terms of ordering and additional follow-up questions, included as deemed appropriate depending on the flow of the interview (Gray, 2004). Second, this approach provides greater breadth than other types of interviewing, since it allows participants to explore freely any particular issues of interest in detail and using a non-directive manner (ibid). Finally, it has been documented that this type of interview have been found to be most appropriate for exploratory research and/or when the research questions focus on understanding the insights of the what, how and why of people's lives (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995, 1997; Robson, 2002; Silverman 1993). A semi-structured interview was felt to be more appropriate than a structured interview, mainly because this study involves issues that may be sensitive to the interviewees, thus direct, structured questioning could be too impersonal. Indeed, the research questions in this exploratory study were best addressed through face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted twice for each participant to ensure thorough coverage of the topic researched as well as allowing for more open discussion as a follow-up from the first interview. As suggested by Saunders et al. (2000), researchers should start with general questions before moving to more specific questions in order to ensure they put the interviewee at ease, assist them in warming up to the topic and ensure they have sufficient opportunity to recall relevant information. Accordingly, this technique was applied throughout the interviews. The main question for the interview was “what was the most significant experience during your Gap Year Travel (GYT)?” which was repeated a number of times until there was no further answer from the participants. This decision was adopted on the basis of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) by Flanagan (1954) as it is well documented that the question proves to be helpful in identifying important events, incidents, or happenings, which in the case of the gappers’ experience translates to occurrence of GYT learning. However, the research did not use the Critical Incident Technique in any strict sense, but instead relied on ‘significant experiences’ as a starting point.

Clearly, this raises another important question about what ‘significant’ means. Flanagan (1954: 337) advises that “the definition of ‘significant’ will depend on the nature of the activity” itself. Following this advice, the interpretation of significant was left to the gappers themselves, without any interference from the researcher. The question was repeated throughout the interviews with the gappers as a guiding question in order to facilitate gappers’ memory recall as
well as their thinking and sharing process. Despite of the adoption of a CIT questioning technique for this study, the use of CIT as merely a foundation/support to arrive at the main question is important, as this allowed the gappers to remain focused on their most significant experiences during their trip and the interview was successfully facilitated, hence use of the complete CIT procedure was considered unnecessary for this study. Although the rigidity of the procedure of CIT is well documented within the literature, in his original publication Flanagan (1954) advised that the procedures themselves are not necessarily rigid, and in fact should be fairly flexible according to the given situation and context.

4.5.3.2. Interview Schedule

The first interview consisted of three main parts:

1. Introduction (approximately 10 minutes)
   - Providing Information for the Participant Sheet (see Appendix 4)
   - Signing Consent Form (see Appendix 5)
   - Warming up: Filling in the background information about participants and their trip

2. Main Interview (between 30 - 60 minutes; depending on the information provided by the participants)

   The main interview questions were as follows:
   - What was the most significant experience during your Gap Year Travel (GYT)? (this question is to be repeated as necessary to elicit other significant experiences; the definition of ‘significant’ are left to the understanding of the participants)
     - Can you please tell me more about it?
     - What did x mean to you?
     - What does x mean to you now?
     - What was important about x to you?
   - What do you think have changed for you as a result of that experience?
   - What have you discovered about yourself as a result of this experience?
3. Closing (5 minutes)

- A brief summary of the interview.
- Thanking the participant for their time and willingness to share.

The above questions were used as guidelines. The style of the interview was conversational, in order to ensure the flow of the interview and that the participants were comfortable in answering the question and expressing themselves. According to Mathison (2005), asking the right question at the right time is an important skill that researcher need to practice and develop. Appendix 6 provides more detailed on potential questions that become useful during the interview. Furthermore, gappers were also invited to bring along any related materials which may help in facilitating the sharing of their experience although they were not a mandatory requirement. The items brought along to the interview by the gappers included pictures, letters, diaries, agendas, blogs, postcards, souvenirs and brochures, which aided in the illustration and exploration of the experiences shared and generated further insights for the researcher.

4.5.4. Data Analysis

One difficulty facing qualitative researchers according to Bryman (2004) is finding analytical paths through the richness of data. Indeed, although the richness of the data in qualitative study could be a point of advantage it might also be troublesome if not managed properly (Flick, 2009). Furthermore, in qualitative research each stage of the research process not only plays an important role, but each of these stages is interdependent on the others (Flick, 2009). Clearly, this dynamic needs to be taken into account when considering the best strategy for data analysis. Upon review of a number of data analysis strategies, it was found that thematic analysis was the best strategy for this study.

4.5.4.1. Thematic Analysis

The term ‘template analysis’ was originated by the work of Crabtree and Miller (1992), and the term is often used interchangeably with other alternative names, e.g. thematic analysis, thematic coding, codebook analysis, etc. Nevertheless, template analysis (which is also called the ‘template approach’) is a specific style of thematic analysis. While there is much written on thematic analysis and similar thematic approaches, very little literature is dedicated to the
specific subject of template analysis. The originators, Crabtree and Miller (1992), along with King (1998) are the main scholars focusing on the area.

King (1998) describes the steps involved in template analysis. First, researchers are to define initial themes and codes from the emerging data. Second, upon review of the transcripts the researcher applies a priori themes/codes to the transcripts. Unlike basic content analysis, it is possible to alter the codes/create new ones if they are not felt to be relevant (Weber, 1985). Third, based on the established codes researchers can start generating an initial template. This step could start after a few transcripts have been coded; nevertheless this is usually done after all transcripts have been reviewed. Fourth, the initial codings are then grouped into higher-order codes which cover broader themes. Fifth, after all code hierarchies have been reviewed several times, the initial template is produced and then applied to all transcripts. If necessary, parts of the templates could be changed. Finally, the template provides the basis of interpretation and report writing.

In terms of coding, whiles Miles and Huberman (1984) define codes in a structured and closed approach (based on prior research questions or theories), Willms, Best and Taylor (1990) suggest codings are established through readings of the majority of the transcripts. Nevertheless, both King (1998) and Crabtree and Miller (1992) suggest that the best codes would come from a combination of prior knowledge (e.g. literature) and preliminary scanning of the text. King (1998) also advises that depending on each individual study more than one template may be used for one single study.

Two different formats of template are usually used: linear template and mind map (King, 1998). While the first is the traditional way which assists in report writing, King (1998) provides a reminder regarding the second format that a template is not a model or theory. Nevertheless, a template is a set of codes and themes, which could be a foundation for model-, concept- or theory-generation (King, 1998). Having a clear understanding of the difference between the two is crucial. Finally, the criterion for a final version of the template is theoretical saturation, which means that there is no benefit in scrutinizing the codes further (King, 1998).

A few other points raised by Crabtree and Miller (1992) and King (1998) include: producing a clear template by ensuring it is focused (i.e. not too many levels of coding), checking for quality through member checking, audit trails and the researcher’s self-reflexivity.
Finally, while the essence for this approach is that the researcher is looking for themes in analysing the data, no hard rules apply in choosing which themes are to be included. Thus, King (1998) advises researchers to choose the most prominent themes in writing-up in order to maximise impact.

The literature notes a few advantages of template analysis. First, its main merits are for its ability to draw trends and relationships from the data as well as its applicability to a priori codes/themes (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). Second, this type of analysis is favoured by many scholars adopting a phenomenological perspective as it counteracts any criticism for being too subjective (Burr, 1995). Third, it is an approach that offers flexibility (i.e. fewer procedures and space for necessary adjustments). Fourth, it is applicable to many types of data and a variety of research approaches (King, 1998). Finally, it is relatively straightforward and simple to follow especially for the relatively inexperienced qualitative researcher (Stein, Lauer and Kharbili, 2009). The disadvantages include possibility loss of meanings through coding (Crabtree and Miller, 1999) and the time requirements that the approach may impose on a researcher if a thorough codebook is to be developed (Stein et al., 2009).

Upon review, template analysis offers many potential benefits for the present study. First, it provides an opportunity for the researcher to include both a priori themes/codes and emergent themes/codes, thus, it is in accordance with the mainly inductive nature of this study whilst allowing application of deductive elements. Second, it is in line with the phenomenological approach and the use of interviews in this study. Third, it accommodates the need to analyse data by applying codes at an early stage, while recognising that a concept is likely to emerge only at a later stage after a template has been established through continuous comparisons of codes, which follows the nature and process of the data collection for this study. Fourth, the final template as the final product of template analysis is a foundation for the development of theory/model/concept, which clearly aligns with the aims of this study. Along with other benefits, e.g. flexibility and easy application and despite that it is time consuming, this approach is considered to be the most suitable for this study.

In brief, the choice of final strategies and techniques for this study was guided by: 1) the intention of the study (to generate an understanding, a middle-range theory); 2) the research questions of the study; and 3) the alignment with the process and various aspects of research designs.
### 4.5.4.2. Data Analysis and Reporting Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive</th>
<th>Deductive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial Data Collection</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data Collection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>↑</strong></td>
<td><strong>↓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial Coding</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>↑</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsequent Data Collection</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>↓</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Initial Template)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsequent Coding</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Initial Template)</strong></td>
<td><strong>↓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical Saturation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>↓</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Refined Template)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Coding</strong></td>
<td><strong>↓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Initial Template)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Middle-Range Theory Generation**

**Interpreting Results**

(Revisiting Literature Review)

**Report Writing and Re-Writing**

**Theory Verification**

(Future Studies)

#### Figure 7. Summary of Steps in Data Analysis and Reporting

As previously discussed, this study is positioned mainly as an inductive study with a deductive dimension. Hence, the data analysis of this study is in accordance with this position, i.e. using mainly the emerging data from the field. Only later in the research period, when new understanding emerged from the data resulting in themes, the deductive process (i.e. use of literatures of GYT concepts and learning theories for coding) was undertaken to complement the inductive findings. This is also in line with the view of thematic analysis in which Boyatzis (1998) clarifies that themes may be generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory or prior research. In this study, the emerging data provided inductive findings on what the gappers learn, which were then complemented by deductive findings by applying Experiential Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory to the data in order to understand the learning process of the gappers. Furthermore, Hodkinson (2008) advises that
regardless of which approach is selected researchers need to be particularly clear in outlining the way they develop their concepts, by providing explanations on the processed used to arrive at a particular theory. In this way, the following section illustrates the step-by-step approach used by the researcher in this study in the development of the theoretical framework which underpins the research.

4.5.4.2.1. Inductive Processes on What the Gappers Learn

First Interview (Initial Data Collection) According to Bryman (2004), initial data collection in accordance with theory generation should be relatively open and non-prescriptive using flexible qualitative methods in order to allow maximise the potential for explorations. This is in line with the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants. Each participant is interviewed twice in order to allow a thorough follow-up discussion on the topic researched, as participants may need time to build trust and confidence in sharing their informations and to regain memories from their GYT. After the first interview was conducted, the audio recording was immediately transcribed and a second interview was set-up.

Initial Coding “Examining data may begin as soon as the first set of transcripts is available” (Bryman, 2004: 85), hence after the first interview with the first participant the researcher reviewed the transcripts several times for data immersion, highlighting any emergent thoughts. According to Saldana (2009), the benefits of open coding (i.e. line-by-line coding) is to minimise the loss of data. In the case when no related information was contained in the data (e.g. Participant 2: “Anyway, I kind of got off the question,” i.e. the previous sentences cover unrelated materials to code line-by-line), holistic coding (i.e. grasping basic topic in some amount of data) is applied instead of line-by-line coding. All codings (initial, subsequent and final codings) in this inductive process are based exclusively on emerging themes/codes from the data, not from a priori themes/codes.

Subsequent Data Collection. During the subsequent interviews, the researchers built upon the initial findings of the earlier interview(s) while using the same procedure as used the initial interview. Based on the analysis of the earlier interview(s), the researcher invited participants to revisit a few themes identified from the first transcripts and/or ask for verification (e.g. Researcher to Participant 15: “I have a few questions from the first interview. You said it
was important to bond with people from other cultures, could you tell me more about that?) as well as to explore new topics (e.g. Researcher to Participant 8: “what other significant experience would you like to share?”).

As depicted in Figure 7, the process between initial data collection, initial coding, and subsequent data collection is iterative. The earlier interview built up understanding of the subsequent ones. This assists the researcher in observing the occurrence of previously identified themes during the interview, allowing the researcher to probe further on the issue without neglecting new emerging topics brought up by the participants. While an interview with a new participant may take place between the first and second interview of an earlier participant due to the availability of the participants, this does not have to impact on the way data is collected and analysed as the same inductive process is applied to all participants for the first interviews and for the second interviews. Furthermore, probing was done based on the information shared by the particular participants, not on the interview results of the previous participants.

Researchers are also advised to make comparisons both within and across categories and by doing constant comparisons during the above three steps, a theoretical understanding could emerge from the early stages of data collection (Bryman, 2004). For the present study, when a new code occurred, earlier transcripts would also be revisited to review and compare them with the new identified theme. At this stage a comparison with the literature is not undertaken, but it will be conducted at the interpreting results stage.

**Subsequent Coding.** After all interviews were finalised, researchers read and reviewed all transcripts from both the first and second interviews several times. A few themes became apparent and were identifiable. Based on the researcher’s experience during the early stage of data collection, comparison between the first and second transcripts, and between one participant to another as well as constant comparison within and across categories comparison at early stages resulted in some insights which assist in coding data, arriving at themes and further understanding. This is in line with Saldana’s (2009) reminder that coding and categorizing needs to be done iteratively through re-coding and re-categorizing throughout the process.

At this stage, the initial template is produced. According to King (2010), the timing of the development of the initial template is important, and the methodological position of the study needs to be taken into consideration when making this decision. In particular, he advises that
studies based on a phenomenological view should wait until all transcripts have been reviewed and initially coded prior to producing a template. This allows the researcher to remain open without prejudice which is in line with the requirement for an inductive approach. Hence, producing the initial template at this step is considered to be the most appropriate timing.

**Theoretical Saturation.** Through the iterative process of data collection and initial coding, an extensive amount of coded data emerged. Towards the end of the data collection, similar codes reappeared numerous times and no new code emerged. At this stage, the findings through analysis have 'saturated' in which diminishing returns were reached and no additional data to what currently have been collected were useful (Robson, 2002). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), continuing data collection when saturation has occurred would only add to the amount of data, rather than enriching the theory. For this reason, the researcher decided to terminate the data collection process. As Glaser and Strauss (2006) note, time and resources may be wasted if unnecessary further data collection is undertaken, and doing so may also result in irrelevant incidents and categories, which in turn could impact on the quality of theory. The researcher decided to not proceed with further theoretical sampling in this study, as the theoretical criteria for data collection had occurred (i.e. understanding what the gappers’ learn and how they learn them inductively with deductive inference have occurred).

Although the existing data informed the researcher of a few groups for further theoretical sampling at a later stage, e.g. based on various destinations (e.g. visitation to one vs. multiple countries, etc.), various activities (e.g. volunteering vs. travelling vs. working, etc.), different educational background (e.g. high-school graduates, higher education graduates, etc.), and so on, these will be reserved for future studies. It is also important to note here that this diversity occurred not due to improper choice of sampling, but sampling was chosen keeping in mind that this is the first exploratory study researching GYT experience from the perspectives of relevant learning theories, and that it aims to gain understanding from the fieldwork. Choosing narrow rather than holistic descriptions of samples would be inappropriate, as it was the intention of this study for it to be followed by further studies for verification in various contexts.

**Final Coding.** After theoretical saturation and subsequent coding, the researcher arrived at the final level of codes. This is an integration process in which all previous codes are processed for final codes in building themes (and sub-themes). Glasser (1992) suggests
concentrating on not more than one or two main core and relevant areas. In this case, the thesis focuses on the outcome of learning, and the process of learning of the gappers. As all codes are finalised in this step, the template is also refined. All themes were compiled into one table with all its sub-themes and definitions of these themes and sub-themes are provided. The final inductive codes for this study are depicted in Table 11, which will form the structure of the findings chapters on what the gappers learn (Chapter Five to Chapter Seven; see also Appendix 7).

Table 11. Themes and Subthemes on Outcomes of GYT Learning (GYTL)

|                                            | 1.2. Gaining Life Skills (Time Management, Financial Management, Well-being Management) |
| 2. Relationship Building                   | 2.1. Relationship with Family                                                                 |
|                                            | 2.2. Relationship with Friends and Other Gappers                                                                 |
|                                            | 2.3. Relationship with Locals and Society                                                                 |
| 3. Life Management                         | 3.1. Study Direction                                                                                   |
|                                            | 3.2. Career Direction                                                                                  |
|                                            | 3.3. Lifestyle Balance                                                                                 |

4.5.4.2.2. Deductive Processes on How the Gappers Learn

Data Collection. While data was collected and analysed in iterations through an inductive process, data analysis for the deductive processes did not commence: this only commences at the end of the inductive data analysis process. This is to ensure that the inductive processes took place without deductive interference. Although it has already been stated that any study would have prior influence (e.g. researchers previous knowledge or experience or prior-reading of the literature – theoretical sensitivity), nevertheless the inductive-deductive order used in data analysis was followed for the present study in order to reduce, if not eliminate completely, this influence, and to have a clear understanding about when each approach commences and terminates.

Coding. Coding using pre-coded themes/categories (i.e. a priori coding from the literature) is more straightforward than coding from the emerging data. Nevertheless, the two have equal value as they complement each other. The researcher revisited each transcript and
applied the pre-determined codes to the data. Pre-determined codes from the literature are as follows (see also Appendix 8):

- **Experiential Learning Theory**: Stage 1: Concrete Experience (CE), Stage 2: Reflective Observation (RO), Stage 3: Abstract Conceptualisation (AC), and Stage 4: Active Experimentation (AE).

- **Transformative Learning Theory**: Phase 1: Disorienting Dilemma, Phase 2: Self-Examination with feelings of Guilt or Shame, Phase 3: A Critical Assessment of Assumptions, Phase 4: Recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change, Phase 5: Explorations of Options of New Roles, Relationships and Actions, Phase 6: Planning of a course of Action, Phase 7: Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans, Phase 8: Provisionally trying out new roles, Phase 9: Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and Phase 10: A reintegration of new assumption into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.

### 4.5.4.2.3. Integration Processes

**Middle-Range Theory Generation.** Both the inductive and deductive findings were then analysed to generate a middle-range theory. Based on the final table of themes and codes, insights and explanations from the researchers’ notes and through data reduction, initial middle-range theory is generated. Saldana (2009) suggests that a thorough coding at earlier stages should result in categories, themes, or concepts, or at least one theory. In order to optimize results, the researcher needs to build theoretical sensitivity, which Glaser (1992: 42) refers to as “the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate pertinent from that which is not”, whereas Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to it as the ability to generate concepts from the data and relate to them according to normal models of theory. They advise that this expertise could be built from literature, professional and personal experience and the analytical process itself (Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

After several iterations of theory revisions, the final version of theory is refined. Nevertheless, the question remains: how do we really know that theory has really been generated? In accordance to the stance of this study, Charmaz (2006) revisits definitions of
theory from an interpretive perspective: "emphasizes understanding rather than explanation" (ibid: 126), and concludes that what theory means differs according to what the researcher's perspective and experience is, and that "theories serve different purposes and differ in their inclusiveness, precision, level, scope, generality and applicability" (ibid: 149). Hence, the answer lies in the researcher's reflection on the outcome of the research process in relation to the research objectives.

In line with the aims of this study, there is a need to generate an understanding of a phenomenon resulting in middle-range theory rather than grand theory. The objective of the main study is to provide an understanding on the learning outcome and processes of young gappers during their GYT – how learning occurred and what impact it has on the gappers. These objectives have been achieved and are offered as the final outcome of this study (see Conclusion in Chapter Ten).

Interpreting Results. Using the initial theory, results are interpreted accordingly through guidance of a previous literature review and new search of literatures to explain the GYT phenomenon. As advised by Hodkinson (2008), a literature comparison of this type is a crucial element in interpreting results. In fact, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) highlight the importance of literature in identifying an area of potential focus and reframing boundaries of research. Hence, referring back to the literature at this stage is important and in line with the inductive-deductive approach used in this study. This step is also an iterative process with the previous step and the next step.

Report Writing and Re-Writing. Upon generation of the final version of a theory, the report is written. Section 4.5.5. provides explanations on how findings and discussion chapters are discussed in the report. It could be argued that it is through writing (i.e. revisiting thoughts and memos, reviewing literatures, revisiting categories, writing and re-writing once again) that findings can be transformed into theory, yet the research journey is completed through reflection on the research process. The researcher's summary of reflection on the research process is discussed later in the conclusion (see Chapter Ten).

Theory Verification (Future Studies). As previously discussed, this study aims at an understanding (i.e. middle-range theory) of the learning experience of young gappers during their GYT; to generate rather than to verify is the intention of this study. While middle-range theory to
understand the phenomenon has been generated, verification of this theory will be done through future studies with possibilities of using the deductive approach and surveying as data collection methods.

4.5.4.3. Manual vs. Technology-Based Analysis

In the last few years, the use of QDA (Qualitative Data Analysis) software has rapidly gained prominence through a range of software programs, e.g. ATLAS.ti, NUD*IST, NVivo, and MAXqda, and is expected to generate benefits in managing data, e.g. saving time, increasing speed, enhancing quality and facilitating sampling (Flick, 2009). Nevertheless, there are concerns among researchers it could result in “short-changing the analytic process, generating superficial analyses, and forcing qualitative research into a single method” (Charmaz, 2006: 179), and hence potentially “distort the qualitative research practice” (ibid: 359). Finally, it may result in a more quantitative study than qualitative study, which could reverse the purpose of the research (Flick, 2009).

To ease concerns of over the use of data analysis programs, Flick (2009) advises researchers to pay attention to a few important considerations when using software programs, e.g. ask what kind of analysis is desired, and how fine the analysis is to be done, and to focus on the style of analysis before its functionality, rather than the other way around. Furthermore, Saldana (2009) suggests starting with manual coding prior to entering the data to the software. He also points out that for new researchers to learn the basics of coding and qualitative data analysis at the same time as learning to use a computer program could be overwhelming, and advises that coding by hand could provide “more control over and ownership of the work” (Saldana, 2009: 22). Agreeing with Saldana, Flick (2009) recognises the importance of a researcher's personal style in analysing the data, in such that personal creativity and connection to the data are not to be restricted. Clearly, the analytical process could not be replaced by any use of software, and caution should be used to avoid software distracting the researcher from the analytical process. It is also implied that not all studies should use software programs. The present researcher attended to these considerations in her decision on whether or not to use software.

While at the beginning of this study the researcher considered a few programs and has been trained to use NVivo in analysing data, this approach was discontinued as the data
collection and analysis process of this study evolved. Despite its appealing benefits, the use of software distracted from the main purpose of this study. The process of data collection and analysis in this study is recursive. For this reason, using such programs has proven to be not only more time consuming, but also to decrease the effectiveness of the analysis and potentially sabotage the process completely. Instead, manual coding was done on all transcripts during the data analysis stage of this study. Some parts of the data analysis (e.g. data reduction), etc. are done through the use of various word processing programs and voice recognition software at various stages of the research. This has allowed the researcher to focus on the task at hand, i.e., analysing the data. While manual coding and analysis is time consuming, its benefits in enhancing analytical thinking and allowing creativity to develop in this study are justified and worthwhile.

4.5.5. Report Structure and Outline

As a suitable report structure for this study, the linear-analytic structure suggested by Yin (2003) will be applied as an overall structure to the thesis (i.e. introduction, literature, findings and discussions and conclusion/implications). This is not only the most widely used structure, but also the most acceptable overall structure with which to present a PhD thesis. Within the findings and discussions chapters, theory-building structure will be used to discuss both inductive and deductive themes. The findings are directly discussed in comparison with the related literature. The following report outlines are used in this study:

- **What the Gappers Learn:**
  
  Self Understanding (Chapter Five)

  Relationship Building (Chapter Six)

  Life Management (Chapter Seven)

- **How the Gappers Learn:**

  ELT and TL Perspectives (Chapter Eight)

  Gap Year Travel Learning (GYTL) Process (Chapter Nine)
4.5.6. Data Quality Issues

4.5.6.1. Quality Issues in Qualitative Research

The relative value of quantitative and qualitative methods, along with the worth of a scientific versus humanistic approach is greatly debated. Despite literatures denying any hierarchy of methods in application to research questions (Hammersley, 1992; Silverman, 1993), the debates remain and stem mainly from data quality issues. Furthermore, the debate on data quality issues within tourism research could also be explained through the lens of history. As tourism research has historically been dominated by positivism and a quantitative view, the criteria often used to determine validity of research are objectivity, reliability and (statistical) generalizability. However, as the discipline gradually adopts a more phenomenological and qualitative standpoint, these criteria may no longer be relevant. Giorgio and Giorgio (2008) provide a few explanations which are explained further below, demonstrating the irrelevance of the above criteria (i.e. objectivity, reliability and (statistical) generalizability).

First, in response to the query of objectivity, Giorgio and Giorgio (2008) point out that the close relationship between researcher and participants in phenomenology and qualitative study should be valued rather than criticized. The researcher’s influence (e.g. in formulating research questions, choosing a particular measure and analysis, and interpreting findings), and the participants’ influence (e.g. sharing their personal experience, expressing their thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs, and providing comments on the data analysis) are in fact the benefits of qualitative research. Only through mutual participation and active engagement, the insights, meanings and disclosure of subjective experiences may be accomplished. Thus, subjectivity should be acknowledged for its merits, rather than be compared to the different merits of objectivity.

Second, the issues of reliability could be explained by the fact that the subject of the study (i.e. the individuals as participants) should not be viewed separately from their environment (e.g. social context). Thus, the contexts of the participants’ stories are in fact the source of information which generates rich data and interesting perspectives. Finally, qualitative and phenomenological studies are more concerned with generating theoretical, vertical, or logical generalizations rather than statistical generalization (Giorgio and Giorgio, 2008). They also have a preference towards an understanding of the context/processes of a small number of...
carefully selected individuals so that the findings of the study can be useful to other similar studies instead of looking for a sample size to represent a wider population. Clearly, the criteria for evaluating validity for qualitative research are different than those of quantitative research.

4.5.6.2. Quality Issues in Interview

The four main concerns around data quality issues in semi structured or in-depth interviews are related to reliability, forms of bias, validity and generalizability (Saunders et al., 2012). The lack of standardization in semi structured and unstructured interviews bring about a concern of reliability, over whether alternative interviewers will reveal similar information. The interaction between interviewer and interviewee may introduce issues of bias/errors (e.g. interviewer bias/errors, interviewee/response bias/errors, etc.), which may also be another source of concern. In terms of validity and reliability, it is important that the interviewer gains “full access to the knowledge and meanings” (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991: 41) from the respondents, and that the study makes clear those generalizations about the entire population are not the purpose of the interviews (see also Yin, 1994). Clearly, importance needs to be placed on conducting the interviews carefully. Furthermore, thorough preparation and training for the interview should take place in order to build the interviewer’s competence in this area.

For this present study, to address the issue of quality in the qualitative research and interview, a number of practices: reflexivity, triangulation, member-checking, audit trails and ethical consideration were also considered.

4.5.6.3. Reflexivity

As discussed earlier, the researcher and the participants hold close collaboration in qualitative research. Based on this mutual relationship, the researcher has a significant role and position in influencing the knowledge production process and results; this consideration of the role and position of the researcher as a ‘transformative intellectual’ is often termed ‘reflexivity’ (Ayikoru, 2009; Yardley, 2008). In brief, reflexivity is a representation of the researcher’s intentional effort to reflect on their position in relation to their study. Although the concept of reflexivity was originated in ethnographic research, it is now largely used in phenomenology research (Seale, 1999). Due to reflexivity’s high value in qualitative tourism research, Ayikoru (2008) advises that tourism scholars’ should ensure their engagement with the issues of reflexivity in order to verify the transparency of the study.
Yardley (2008) suggests that qualitative researchers include a reflexive analysis of how their presence in the study could influence the process, data interpretation and conclusions of the study. A few features of the study that must be disclosed are the researchers’ background and interests (race, gender, class, ethnicity, citizenship, ideology, etc.), in relation to the choice of philosophical view, methodology, research question, and the way they could introduce bias into research (e.g. what have been chosen to be represented and omitted, etc.) (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004; Smith, 2008). A further reflection on the research process is provided in the conclusion chapter of this thesis (see Chapter Ten).

**The Researcher’s Background.** The researcher is a female of Indonesian Canadian nationality with Asian ethnic background. She currently resides in Guildford, U.K., undertaking this research and working at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, University of Surrey. She previously lived, studied and worked in Indonesia, Switzerland, US and Canada, and has travelled in Australasia, Europe and North America. She studied International Tourism and Hospitality Management and holds a Higher Diploma from IHTTI School of Hotel Management, Switzerland, BA from University of Bournemouth, U.K. and MBA from University of Guelph, Canada. Previously, she has worked in tourism and hospitality fields and in educational institutions in various countries. She also worked for non-profit organisations working closely with disadvantaged young people for training and counselling purposes in Canada.

**Self-Reflexivity of the Researcher.** The researcher’s first trip abroad was at the age of 14, when her mother took her and her sister for a two-week trip to Western Europe. The trip somehow has changed her life; since that trip tourism and travel has been her passion. At the age of 24 and 26, she went for two solo backpacking trips of two months each first across North America, and then Western Europe. Her life and travel experiences and exposure to other countries and cultures has brought about changes in her. She then became interested in finding out more about GYT and its potential role in self-growth and personal development. Furthermore, her personal interests in and previous experiences working with young people have propelled her to learn more about the potential impacts of GYT into their lives. This led her to ask the questions: What are the effects of GYT on young people? This is the reason why she embarked on this doctoral study.

The possible issues of bias may include looking at GYT from a mainly positive perspective whereby learning and self-development is warranted. The researcher acknowledges
this and accepts that this study is primarily interested in looking at the potential of GYT in learning and self-development. For this reason, this is adopted as the premise of the thesis and research questions. The interviewees’ direct quotes are given whenever possible, and whereby learning or self-development were not reported by the gappers, it is also reported.

4.5.6.4. Triangulation and Member-checking

Triangulation, according to Flick (1992), is a method of enriching understanding of a phenomenon by viewing it from different perspectives. Its functions are to provide breadth and depth to research (i.e. produce a more complete and fuller picture) and to address the problems of the validity and reliability. Although Easterby-Smith et al. (1991) suggest that triangulations could take various forms: methodological, data, theory and investigator, they also suggest that not all types of triangulation should be applied, nor are beneficial in all research.

In terms of theory triangulation, while the main discipline of this study is travel and tourism (i.e. GYT), this study applies various theories from other disciplines (i.e. sociology, psychology, education, organisational behaviour, etc.) in the area of learning theories, and youth transition and transformation. The application of theory triangulation in this study offers advantages for new contribution to the literature. In regard to investigator triangulation, although only one researcher collected and processed the data, the data was examined by two other researchers. Furthermore, to overcome possible weaknesses of using one single method (i.e. the interview), this research also cross-checked the results of the interview through member-checking procedures (i.e. participants feedback, respondent validation) by providing them with the data transcription and data analysis (see: Silverman, 1993), and by inviting them to a second interview for further discussions and clarifications for comprehensive member checking procedures. In this sense, member check is not only an ethical practice, but also a quality improvement practice, which is done in order to ensure that the participants’ experiences, values, and views are not misinterpreted by the researcher. Finally, the researcher also gathered the experts’ opinion through discussions on the field of GYT and learning during the literature review process. This was achieved through conference presentations and discussions, informal visits and discussions, and correspondences.
4.5.6.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration is of importance in this study especially because the participants are young gappers who often revealed sensitive issues about their personal life (see: Gubrium and Holstein, 1995). The general practice of ethics should include the minimal requirements, such as informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm (e.g. physical, emotional, etc.) (American Psychological Association, 2002). Furthermore, a confirmation letter of Ethical Approval by the Ethic Committee of University of Surrey (issued on December 12th, 2008) along with an acceptance letter by the researcher are provided in Appendix 9 and 10, outlining the ethical protection practised for this study.

4.6. CONCLUSION

Table 12. Summary of Research Design for The Main Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Most appropriate choice for this study</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Philosophy</td>
<td>Phenomenological Interpretivism</td>
<td>This study is interested in the lived experience of gappers from their perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Approach</td>
<td>Mainly inductive, with deductive influence</td>
<td>This study aims to develop understanding on the outcomes and the process of GYT learning using both the emerging data and literature reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Horizons</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
<td>The gappers are interviewed shortly after completion of their GYT to enable reflection on events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>• Two semi-structured in-depth interviews per participant • Recruitment through flyers in all universities in South East England</td>
<td>• The interviews are used to enable an open-ended discussion of the participants’ experience. • The purpose of the second interview is to allow follow up and further discussions that have not been covered in the first interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>• Self-selected and snowball sampling techniques • 27 participants recruited</td>
<td>• The sampling techniques are chosen to ensure engagement with participants who are motivated, interested and committed in reflecting upon their GYT experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>• Thematic Analysis</td>
<td>• The thematic analysis as data analysis strategy was used in accordance to the research approaches, i.e. to identify inductive themes and apply deductive theme where appropriated. • Thematic and theoretical saturation was practised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Reporting</td>
<td>• Linear Analytic Structure</td>
<td>• The structure is to enable exploration of themes and findings as well as to facilitate and relate back to literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Quality Issues</td>
<td>• Reflexivity, Triangulation, Audit Trail, Member-checking and Ethical Consideration</td>
<td>• The various practices were exercised to address and minimize data quality issues and to ensure a standard practice.</td>
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Chapter Four – Research Methodology

This chapter started by reviewing various research philosophies in general and also in relation to this specific study, along with a discussion of the appropriate research approach. The review on research methodology and the findings of the preliminary study were offered before discussing the main study. The time frame, sampling technique and data collection were also explored, along with the data analysis process and reporting structure. Finally, quality issues and ethical considerations were discussed. The most appropriate research design applied for the main study is summarized in the Table 12.
PART IV.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT THE GAPERS LEARN:

SELF UNDERSTANDING

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the gappers’ understanding of the self as a main theme of the findings. The discussion will start with the effect that GYT had on the character of the individuals, and four main qualities (confidence, independence, responsibility and open-mindedness) will be discussed. Then, the discussion will extend to the life skills that gappers have gained as a result of the trip, mainly on the topics of time, finance and well-being management, along with other life skills. The chapter will then conclude with a summary of findings.

5.2. BUILDING CHARACTER

Throughout the narratives of their travel, gappers expressed the view that they had changed as a person. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Maoz, 2007; Miles, 2000) which argue that travel could serve as an important preliminary learning process of ‘becoming’. When expressing how they had changed, the gappers painted new pictures of themselves through a number of attributes (i.e. traits or qualities), with a tendency to compare and contrast the attributes they previously associated themselves with (i.e. who they were) and the attributes they believe they had gained (i.e. who they have become). As previously discussed in the literature, various personal factors such as demographic background, motivation and personality (e.g. Carr, 1998; Inkson and Myers, 2003; Mintel, 2005) are likely to play a part in influencing the GYT experience itself, and the outcomes of the experience.

The accounts of the gappers suggested that of all the personal qualities they gained, four main ones were most common: confidence, independence, responsibility, and tolerance, with the first two – independence and confidence – given the greatest significance by the gappers. This
corresponds with the findings by Brown and Hesketh (2004) which suggests that students returning from GYT are likely to be more mature, independent and self-reliant. Other studies of GYT have also made similar references to these attributes (e.g. Jones, 2004; King, 2011; Nieman, 2010). The character built during GYT has potential in developing one's identity (O'Shea, 2010), which could result in transformative power in accelerating the development of the individual (Blackburn et al., 2005). The findings of this study below, along with the findings from other literatures are related to several of the themes and issues in Figure 6, i.e. that changes and learning in relation to gappers' identity could occur during their mobilisation through GYT.

5.2.1. Confidence

Many gappers expressed that they have become confident or more confident as a result of their trip. It is interesting to note that gappers expressed their development in degrees (e.g. "I'm much more confident than I used to be... (Chloe, P6)) and in comparisons to oneself (e.g. "Before the trip I was insecure, ... after my experience in China I become more confident" (Jessica, P3)). This was also observed in the study of King (2011).

Confidence, as explained by the gappers, may refer to social confidence (e.g. "[I am] more confident, happier and I'm not afraid to make stupid jokes or to have any difficulties in my languages." (Jessica, P3)), business confidence (e.g. "I can deal with things where I have to be confident and I have to be professional." (Chloe, P6)), or simply confidence in managing life by themselves and to cope with their lives as expressed by Yves (P21):

"I was quite shy, not very confident in taking things on and doing them myself, I would be looking to others for approval ... I would have said "I couldn't do that, I couldn't do that"... so then coming back and thinking to myself ... I don't need to be scared about these things." (Yves, P21)

Clearly, confidence is part of the concept of self on how gappers see themselves in relation to how others see them (e.g. as shown by Yves (P21) above). This is in line with Frosh's (2010) argument that the self is always intertwined with others in such that identification could not be made without reference to others.

Often the development of the gappers' confidence started from the time they planned their trip through to their capabilities in carrying out their plans during the travel. It also comes from the opportunities of performing various activities and overcoming various challenges during the trip, as expressed by Rebecca (P5) and Kiefer (P12) below. These in turn can impact
on how they feel about themselves and their capacity to deal with various circumstances, other than the trips themselves.

"The trip itself, the fact that it happened boosted my confidence, that I was able, confidence in myself that I can make things happen and the challenges that we faced whilst travelling ... I knew that I could go and do something on my own, and I was able to try things." (Rebecca, P5)

"Knowing that I've lived for a year and a half away from England, I had the confidence to teach in China, I had the confidence to do the trip in the first place and we did it all ... it shows that if I can plan that sort of trip and I can live for over a year without any sort of Western influence. It gives you confidence inside to go on and do other things that perhaps you wouldn't have thought of doing before." (Kiefer, P12)

5.2.2. Independence

Independence is another personal quality expressed to be developed during and as a result of the trip by many gappers. While being independent is aimed for by some gappers (as also noted in the study of King, 2011; Neiman, 2010), often it happens incidentally as they were on their own for the first time having to cope with the situations. For example, to Whitney (P19), independence occurred as she was trying to rely on herself for the first time:

"[I was} working out what it was to live on my own,... I have always been generally quite independent but before then I had never been away from home very long ... I think it was just being able to look after yourself and support yourself."

A similar story is expressed by McKenzie (P25) in which he became more self-reliant as a result.

"Before I went travelling I had never probably spent more than 2 weeks away from my parents. I had always been at home. I have always lived in the same house. I am much more comfortable about spending time away from my parents or my friends now." (McKenzie, P25)

It could be inferred from the above that there is a relationship between gaining independence and travelling independently, away from parents, for the first time. The young gappers' intention to put distance between themselves and parents or influential figures to exercise autonomy is documented by Ansell (2008). In the case of Gabriel (P27) below, gaining independence was a goal rather than mere serendipity where he put himself in a situation to learn independence.
"I wanted to be more independent, more in control of my life,... when I was in Sydney I was living in the garden house, I think that is when it started; I had this whole space to myself ... that was probably the big thing for my independence ... That was the sense of picking up a life there and nobody, not friends, not family was there to pick up the pieces there, if I messed up I was on my own." (Gabriel, P27)

Independent living according to Ansell (2008) has a strong supporting role in forming 'active individualisation'. Similarly, Desforges (2000) argues that one's ability to manage life is often regarded as a positive sign for adulthood transition.

5.2.3. Responsibility

Along with confidence and independence, many gappers indicated that they had learnt the meaning of being responsible as a result of their trip. The gappers' sense of responsibility is often enabled by them being responsible for others during their trip, especially those more vulnerable than they. The following examples were illustrated by Charlotte (P15) and Whitney (P19); Charlotte (P15) taught children in Tanzania and worked with vulnerable adults at the camp in the U.S. whereas Whitney worked as an au pair taking care of a couple of young boys.

"There were occasions when I had to perhaps stand up to colleagues about situations for example with the hitting of students ... it's the safety of the children and I guess you always feel more responsible for people less, like not as strong as you, and I think to a certain extent that the children were my responsibility and the teachers' responsibility ... You have a real adult role you know it just teaches you to be more responsible." (Charlotte, P15)

"We were responsible for vulnerable adults ... I had to learn a good amount of respect for other people because when you are in like a care job you are responsible for very intimate hygiene for other people, and I think that you have to do that with quite an adult perspective ... That was definitely an eye opener and that made me grow up quite sharply ..." (Charlotte, P15)

"I think realising that the kids rely on you and you can't really rely on the people around you because I was the only responsible adult with the children, so I realised that I had to be responsible in a way that beneficial to the children and not for myself... I think the shift has changed from being selfish, I say selfish in a sort of way, rather than focusing on myself I am more focused on other people." (Whitney, P19)

In both stories, gappers suggest that activities with high level of responsibilities could help them to become more personally responsible in a short period of time, and they relate this to being more 'mature' and 'grown-up', and argue that in turn it increases their confidence and independence. Furthermore, the case of both Charlotte (P15) and Whitney (P19) also show that
they are developing the character of integrity through practice of personal sacrifice and moral standards.

5.2.4. Open-mindedness

Many gappers expressed the view that they had become more open-minded towards other people, activities and ideas, as well as become more sociable and less judgemental towards other people/cultures which they argue increased their adaptability and awareness.

"I am like open to travelling ... I will kind of do anything now ... I never enclosed myself off and was always open to new experiences and new things." (Giovanni, P2)

"I have become more open to situations ... more adaptable... you accept that there are different factors and influences on loads of things ..." (Felicity, P18)

"[It] opens your mind up to different ideas and different things... interacting with different cultures makes you see how they live and what they do and just makes you think about things a lot more." (Connor, P20)

"[It] makes me more tolerance and less prejudice... so I'm like feel more comfortable and open in general to talk to them you know not to try to put a mask on..." (Jessica, P3)

"You don't judge people as soon as you see them, you give people more of a chance... you are not judgemental or anything like beforehand." (Daisy, P17)

From the above, it could be inferred that by experiencing more they, in turn, become more open to new experiences. In that sense, successful experiences encourage them to experiment on new experiences alike. Furthermore, the connections between the gappers' internal (i.e. what they think or believe in, e.g. their thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values) and external (i.e. what they witness and experience, e.g. real happenings they gained from their new experiences) realities are apparent from the above illustration. Being more open and flexible with others may help them develop themselves interpersonally, which is described well by Melissa (P13) below. Indeed, this is consistent with Hollway (2011) who argues that there is always a transaction between the internal and external.

"It makes me realise that this is the way to learn more about different cultures and about life in general ... It is also about flexibility and making use of opportunities that come your way ... you want to explore different things, if you want to have some kind of a development and if you want to change different things and to have possibilities ... If I close myself off from what is happening around me and if I'm not more flexible in the things I do in the end of the day I cannot progress that much ... “ (Melissa, P13)
This is in agreement with the general literature which highlights that major impacts often result when people of different cultures and backgrounds come together (Ryan, 2002), e.g. resulting in global mindedness and broader perspectives beyond differences through cross-cultural awareness (Douglas and Jones-Rikkers, 2001). Little has been researched in this regard on GYT context, nevertheless Jones (2003) argues that these are important skill areas of employability resulting from GYT.

5.2.5. Interrelationships between qualities

Moreover, the analysis of the gappers' stories in terms of personal qualities gained suggest interrelationships between the development of one of the personal attributes to the others, and that the development of one may impact on the others. For instance, the development of confidence and independence are closely linked as illustrated by McKenzie (P25):

"I have discovered that I am capable of doing certain things that I never thought I was able... I feel more confident in myself in certain ways, capable of living by myself, which I think was good preparation for university." (McKenzie, P25)

It could be argued that confidence may breed independence, whereas the opposite is also true that the capability of being independent could lead to higher confidence. Furthermore, it could be suggested that there are close associations between all combinations of qualities. For example, two gappers illustrate this below:

"Well, it just being in a situation where I was mostly on my own where I had to become independent in terms of dealing with responsibility that I hadn't previously dealt with." (Whitney, P19)

"I discovered it in myself that I can be independent and confident, and I can do these things without having to say to someone else 'what do you think I should do about that?' So I am happy to take that responsibility." (Yves, P21)

In a number of GYT studies (e.g. Jones, 2004; King, 2011; Nieman, 2010), these relationships have been implied but not fully discussed. A plausible explanation perhaps is in the fact that all of these attributes are equally integrated important signs of transition towards mature adulthood. In fact, Leary, Tangney and Harter (2003) argue that in becoming an adult, the several attributes of self become not only apparent, but also become related to the concept of identity construction. In his study of gap year, King (2011) also acknowledges that the terms used (e.g. confidence, maturity and independence) may indicate identity work in progress, especially at the age bracket of transition to adulthood. Lucey (2010) confirms that young people
are going through an intensive process of ‘becoming’, especially during this period of self-
change.

5.3. GAINING LIFE SKILLS

While building their characters, gappers reported that they also gained new knowledge and life skills. The knowledge gained tended to relate to the countries visited (i.e. its history, everyday knowledge). Furthermore, the gappers also accounted that they gained a number of life skills as a result of their trips, which include skills to maintain their day-to-day life, such as cooking skills (e.g. Perry, P1), navigating skills (e.g. Rebecca, P5), etc. Nevertheless, time management, financial management and well-being management arose to be three main skills gained by the gappers as a result of the trips, and will be reported in further detail below.

Besides the three main life skills which emerged, a number of other life skills are also reported. Experiencing and handling uncertain and extreme situations by themselves during GYT increased gappers’ ability to handle their emotions, manage their stress levels, and handle difficult situations. At the same time gappers become more aware of the availability of options and alternatives, are able to solve problems independently and creatively and to make decisions for themselves without parental influence. The simultaneous demands facing gappers resulted in the gappers’ ability to both multi-task and prioritize, as well as to be organized and to have plans in achieving their goals. Also, the gappers learned to communicate with others through team work and leading others. Clearly, the space and time that GYT offers as a form of temporary mobility provides gappers with an opportunity to grow and learn during their transition period (see also discussion in Section 3.6).

The limited literature on the outcomes of GYT also suggests that GYT brought about life skills enhancement, which includes greater independence, ability to make decisions, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, self-discipline, leadership skills, communication skills (e.g. team working) and managing money (e.g. Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005; Nieman, 2010). As O’Reilly (2006) argues, the skills and qualities gained from travel could be transferrable to the world of employment. In fact, Inkson and Myers (2003: 180) acknowledge that learning that comes from Overseas Experience (OE) is “transferrable across a range of work and non-work situations”, although work-related development appears to be “accidental for some participants, but is apparently significant for most.” It was reported that these newly-gained capabilities also
translated into their lives at home upon their return from the trip, which will be discussed below along with other transferrable skills in greater length.

In this study, personal and professional developments of the gappers are sometimes closely related. Moreover, it could be argued that the personal qualities and capabilities gained during the trip are transferrable to their professional environments. For example, one of the foremost learned skills from GYT is how to manage resources, i.e. how to manage money and time, as well as personal well-being during the trip, and these resource management skills are important to both personal and professional life.

5.3.1. Time Management

Managing time, in the beginning (i.e. planning the trip) or during the trip itself was reported to be a major learning experience by the gappers. Whitney (P19) provided an example on how she needed to manage her time in order for her to do her tasks well and on time while still having time for herself from her experience looking after two little boys and running errands as an au pair on her trip explained:

“I was on my own and it was a necessity to have better time management skills... it was pushed on me almost in the beginning... to be punctual, careful and responsible... these skills developed over time... that perhaps helped me because I am able to plan more.” (Whitney, P19)

This finding is in line with Jones’ (2004) study which also found that time management, i.e. self-discipline in particular is one of the many life skills gained. Whitney (P19) emphasized that she needed to change, because she was alone. According to Giddens (1991), there come times when one needs to take charge, confronting the old habits and starting with the new ones – which arguably is an example of subtle occurrence of the ‘fateful moments’ during the GYT.

The gappers’ narratives suggest that they experience a change of perception of time, in which the gappers become more aware of the importance and value of time in their life and have realized that time is a concept that is within their grasp to manage or to control. For example, Melissa (P13) realised the importance of time and its management as ingredients for success during her internship experience:

“I need to do more things in less time and to actually challenge myself with that... I was not aware before... In fact, to be honest I realised that this is a very big miss on my part... I could have structured my time in a different way. I realised
Chapter Five – Self Understanding

"that [I] have got to be a better planner now than I was before. I have got to upgrade myself to a certain level." (Melissa, P13)

Other gappers also shared this change of perceptions and the importance of changing their behaviours in order to manage their time more efficiently. The comment by Gabriel (P27) below exhibits this finding. On this, Giddens (1991) argues that change of behaviours is a sign that self-development is taking place.

"I don’t wake up late any more. I used to wake up happily at 10:30 or 11 everyday but now at the very latest, I mean if I have had a very late night out I will let myself wake up at 10 but otherwise the latest I want to be is 8 maybe 8:30 because otherwise you miss so much of your day." (Gabriel, P27)

Pocock and McIntosh (2011) point out that re-adjusting to the home routine is not always a straightforward or easy transition. In particular, Jones (2004) argues that returning to formal education after GYT could be challenging. Indeed, this is experienced by Ulrich (P14) who prior to his trip was able to work, study and be involved in other extracurricular activities, but got accustomed to focus only one thing – just working during his traineeship and focusing on just studying upon his return to the school. Nevertheless, he concluded that instead of losing his ‘multi-tasking skills,’ he in fact has gained ‘prioritising skills’, which suggests an ability to choose wisely and to balance one’s activities in regard to time management.

A similar example is shared by Daisy (P17). She explained that she used to be a rigid planner, however changed her approach upon her return from Australia and became “a lot more easy-going. I didn’t plan things..." Although she commented that her organisation skills are slightly impacted, she also indicated that she had changed for the better as she is no longer uptight, “took things just one day at a time and didn’t worry and was sort of happy about everything, like didn’t get upset over silly little things” and considered worrying as ‘a waste of time.’

It could be inferred that young gappers are likely to continue to negotiate with themselves their new way of living upon their return based on the experiences during their trip, and these negotiations are embodied in a number of changes. Giddens (1991: 70) points out that when one questions on what to do, how to act and what to be, one is asking central questions of identity. Furthermore, it could be implied above that the impact of GYT may differ from one gapper to another, depending on the gappers themselves, and it may require some time for them to adjust
between their approaches during their trip and back home as postulated by Pocock and McIntosh (2011).

While the gappers became aware of the value and role of time and its influence in their life, the cases of Daisy (P17) and Ulrich (P14) also illustrate the outcome of GYT is not always in one particular direction. It could be highlighted that they are able to re-prioritise, which is likely to be an indispensable and beneficial skill allowing them to balance and to cope with daily life. In that sense, no one direction is the correct direction nor an indication of successful outcome of GYT, as the change is likely to help the gappers in understanding themselves and enhancing their ability to adopt the best approach for themselves. As emphasized by the various researchers, today’s transition processes are unpredictable and there is no exact formula for identifying whether a process is successful or not (see: Goodwin and O’Connor, 2007; Stokes and Wyn, 2007; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998).

5.3.2. Financial Management

Another major topic shared by the gappers is on how they manage their finances prior, during and after their trip, and how their experience had altered their way of handling and dealing with money. For most gappers going for the trip is not necessarily an easy financial decision, they need to work while abroad or work and save before their trip, with the exception of one gapper who was fortunate in using an heritance for her trip (Nicole, P22).

The financial restrictions could determine and put limitations on their GYT experience, e.g. restraining destination choice: “It came to quite a lot of money so I just cut it down to India and Australia.” (Gavin, P20), or activities and the kind of experience they had:

“When I initially left I wanted to have a different job totally, but then once I got to Australia and I was running out of money I had to take whatever I could get so office work, having already done it, was the easier option.” (Yves, P21)

Nevertheless, many gappers learned that while resources were limited, they could overcome these impediments by planning ahead and equipping themselves with financial planning skills prior to their trip:

“I didn’t want to work when I was out there but that I could go and actually enjoy the trip. Having worked beforehand, I had that cushion of money to just go wherever ever I pleased.” (Chloe, P6)
For some gappers, they discovered and gained knowledge of the importance of financial management during their trip, as financial problems may often occur. Indeed, running out of money is one of the common problems experienced by the gappers usually due to budget miscalculation or spending too much too early in their trip. Charlotte (P15) for instance experienced this; however she recognized the important of money management at the end of the incident:

"We had run out of money because we hadn't really budgeted for the trip at all... We literally didn't have enough money to eat... That was a bit of an eye-opener that we needed to manage our money better and also, that if you needed to you could live on very little." (Charlotte, P15)

During a time of such financial difficulties during the trip, one of the skills gained by the gappers is to cope with minimal resources and to prioritize what is more important as Charlotte (P15) explained, and stated by Anna-Rose (P16): "I can cope with quite basic and difficult conditions, I carried on, and you can survive with very little." Soon enough, gappers learnt how to budget their money better and looked at the trip as a whole in their planning:

"When you travel you have got to learn how to handle your money but beforehand I didn't have to so when you are travelling you have got to remember that you can't just spend all of your money in one place so obviously that has helped me from now." (Daisy, P17)

The financial management lessons continued during and beyond their trip as many gappers voiced the opinion that they have different attitudes on savings and spending. According to Perry (P1), he used to waste money (e.g. buying everyone rounds of drinks in the bar) but an incident happened during the trip and he has changed his attitude towards money as he learned its value.

"When I lost my money, when I couldn't get all my money shipped over that's when I thought 'hang on a minute' this isn't as easy as I thought it was. So that kind of curbed my spending slightly and kind of made me look at it realistically. I got a job after that...I tightened up my spending slightly, stopped wasting money on silly things..." (Perry, P1)

On the other hand, Giovanni (P2) who prioritised savings has changed his perspective of money in the opposite direction as he rediscovered the meaning of 'fun' during his GYT. He commented on how his priorities between money and opportunity to connect with others has suddenly shifted as he learnt that relationship with others is of more value to him; spending
money is part of creating the social environment which he associates with happiness. His value has shifted, as he states:

"I used to be quite a stingy person moneywise and it's just saving for the future and as good as that, going to America made me think 'living for the moment' thing... it's ok to spend money if it's for a good cause like if you're having fun stuff like that...I was really happy, that made me definitely more generous... I wouldn't really turn down any opportunities regardless of money. Money just turned into no object." (Giovanni, P2)

The above cases illustrate that financial management could entail different approaches towards money, for example being more or less constrained in spending and/or saving habits. Nevertheless, the important aspect of the gappers' learning is in the fact that they are now able to make not only rational decisions, but also informed decisions as a result of their experiences (Knowles, 1984). It could be argued that experiencing difficulties and restrictions in resources could help gappers grow and learn from these experiences.

The findings suggest that time and financial management are closely related in the mind of the gappers. While Jones (2004: 54) argues that one of the drawbacks of GYT is "an opportunity cost in time and money" in which "valuable experience or earning money" could be exercised instead (see also Holmlund, Liu and Skans (2008)); the gappers’ narratives indicate that GYT is a valuable opportunity, representing a good value of trade between time and/or money and experience. According to Chloe (P6), the use of time to embark on GYT itself is a good time management practice: "[it is] not wasting time, but using time as I pleased." Perry (P1) also regarded GYT as a good financial decision: "It costs me plenty of money, and it is money that I will never get back, but it is money I wouldn't want back for the experiences that I get".

5.3.3. Well-being Management

Although the previous literature has not discussed the ability to manage well-being (i.e. overall state of one's physical and mental/psychological health), some gappers in this study discussed this topic. It appeared that the issue is discussed only in the event of the gappers being unwell: "the most significant [experience] was most probably when I ended up in the hospital in Africa. I was scared of nothing but my health." Nevertheless, a psychological and even physical shock seemed to be experienced by some gappers, e.g. Gavin (P10), Daisy (P17), McKenzie (P25), Chloe (P6) and Brayden (P8). In all cases, they were not accustomed to the weather and
the living standards of the country visited. Additionally, they were overwhelmed emotionally by the extremity of the experience. For example, Gavin (P10) explained:

"It was really cold... it was raining and we were all sort of really ill... things like the toilet... no shower, no hot water, and all of these kind of stuff... just sort of, I just become ill, because in the first bit I was just a bit shocked." (Gavin, P10)

Indeed, experiencing a completely different environment for the first time was a challenge to which they had to rise. A few gappers also indicated that they were despondent and homesick, especially if and because they were feeling lonely, or if they were not in a good relationship with their travel companions or other travellers (e.g. housemate, etc.). As Wood (2010: 263) explains, "any secure sense of identity is thrown into question while an individual struggles instead to re-orient themselves to the personal risk relations, or trust relationship, with which they are faced." This is illustrated by McKenzie (P25) who was left out by his travel companion to travel by himself in South America, as he explained:

"I stayed in bed at the hostel and just kind of spent two weeks fully recovering. I was depressed because of the situation. And also I was very sort of, it really sort of brought down." (McKenzie, P25)

In all cases, the gappers explained that having fellow travellers to talk to helped them with emotional difficulties which in effect helped them through any overarching emotional or other health issues. Wetherell (2010) also argues that when one is able to connect and identify themselves socially their psychology is influenced substantially. McKenzie (P25) illustrates how his best friend came all the way to see him for a few days gave him some strength to carry on his trip:

"He flew out because he was like 'I can't believe that happening to you, it is really harsh but I will come out and keep you company for the last two weeks.'" (McKenzie, P25)

Another participant, Daisy (P17), also explained how having a friend helped her to cope during her trip:

"At the time, I felt extremely lonely and scared and like this girl could suddenly make me feel so much better just by offering to take me out or something... it's just those little things that made me feel so much more at home and comfortable." (Daisy, P17)
Similarly, Chloe (P6) shared that staying at her family’s relative house helped her to overcome her dismal feelings:

“It was just like being in my own family that I think I could relax whilst I was there, because obviously I had a bit of tension and a bit of stress deciding to part ways with my friend, that it was almost like recovering to prepare me to go on and do the next bit of my trip.” (Chloe, P6)

The gappers’ stories imply that GYT also represents an emotional journey for them as they construct their realities within the new and foreign places. Mischel and Mischel (1983) state that emotional experiences are in progress when self is in close interactions with others. Lee, Dean and Jung (2008) also highlight the importance of social connectedness in developing healthy relationships and contributing to overall psychological well-being. This highlights the importance of relationships in the gappers’ learning and identity construction (see also Chapter Three and Chapter Ten). Furthermore, the findings also suggest that the influence of cross-cultural interactions could be particularly important in the learning and identity construction process occurring in GYT (see Figure 6). In some cases these interactions could be smooth but in other cases it may involves some confusions and disorientations in their learning process (see also Chapter Eight).

Despite difficulties experienced during their trips, the young gappers interviewed were able to manage and get on top of their situations. During this process, gappers became aware of the importance of health issues and different ways to handle them, be it physical or emotional. As an example, Jessica (P3) had fallen sick, having fever, flu and food poisoning throughout the duration of her GYT period. According to her, the feeling of being alone along with heavy traffic, noise, and stressful life in China had made her feel depressed. Nevertheless, she was able to navigate her way through the negative aspects of life in China, managed to get her health levels back to normal and as a result she is now more aware of her personal health needs, the health system in a different country and how to plan for her well-being (e.g. taking up insurance, etc.). Furthermore, she also claimed that at the end of the trip her health state was generally better than before travelling, possibly as a result of her experiences.

5.4. CONCLUSION

Gappers reported that they learned about and improved themselves, and had the opportunity to be re-acquainted with themselves and hence becoming aware, discovering,
developing and accepting themselves. When illustrating changes about the person they felt they had become, gappers generally reported that they had become more mature and grown-up during and as a result of their GYT. As reported in this chapter, these personal developments mainly take forms of increased confidence, independence, responsibility and tolerance with the first two being the most reported and often being planned for as intended outcomes of GYT. While building their characters, gappers also learned new life skills. In particular, the gappers suggested three main areas of personal development: time management, financial management and well-being management. In managing these three areas, the gappers reported that they learned the value of time and money and the importance of managing these things well. They also reported themselves as becoming more aware of their well-being and that the support offered by others often made a difference. Beyond this, gappers continued to learn other life skills that were beneficial for them both in their future personal and professional lives.

The findings in this chapter clearly illustrate that the young gappers have undergone some personal changes during their trips. While some of the changes could be considered as basic changes, it could be argued that these changes are fundamental to their growth and personal development during their transition periods. These changes are those that may occur easily at an educational institution or home environment; nevertheless, mobility through GYT has allowed the gappers to engage with new environments that they would not have experienced otherwise. As discussed earlier in Section 3.6., these new environments and situations act as laboratories for their identity construction. Those who did not feel confident or independent had the opportunity to push themselves outside of their usual boundaries in order to test their own limits and abilities. They then became more certain about their individuality – who they are as opposed who they think they are – by checking their self-conceptualisation with others around them. In the gappers' narratives, it was clear that their characters were tested by new incidents and new challenges that they had not previously experienced. When they realised that they needed to enact certain behaviours as the old ways of doing did not work, the gappers became mentally more open to new approaches. By doing so they not only became more individualized (i.e. knowing who they are), they also internalized what they had learned by acting differently based on these new knowledge. As the literature argues, self-awareness and self-understanding (Adams et al., 1976) could be the beginning of one's journey towards adulthood. The gappers' narratives indicated signs towards their maturity.
Along with developing their internal character, the gappers also gained new knowledge and life skills that were transferable to not only their personal life but also their professional life. Knowles (1990) argues that in becoming an adult, one's way of learning changes. Not only did gappers become more independent and were able to choose what knowledge/skills were directly related and beneficial for their lives, but they also started to take charge of their own learning. The gappers' comments clearly state that they became more internally motivated in solving tasks and problems at hand.

At the basic level, the gappers learned to manage their time, finances and well-being that they considered as important resources for their life in the present and in the future. In discussing these resources, the gappers are working on their current and future concept of who they are (i.e. the present self) and what they want to be (i.e. the future self) by planning and prioritizing what is important in their lives. As such, they are making decisions in changing their attitudes and behaviours where necessary, which indicates that change and learning has occurred. Touched upon briefly in this chapter is the personal development of the gappers with regards to their ways of coping and managing their well-being, a topic argued by the literature to be today's priority for young people (Stokes and Wyn, 2007) and is clearly confirmed by the gappers' narratives in this study which become a foundation of both their self-understanding and their understanding of their relationship with others as will also be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. Indeed, the main learning points of this chapter are the gappers' understanding of themselves in terms of their characters and their ability to manage their life skills, which represents their efforts for shaping their identity and transitioning towards adulthood.

While some of these outcomes have been discussed in the previous literatures, for instance that travel may bring about and strengthen aspects of one's character such as confidence, independence, responsibility and open-mindedness (e.g. see Coetzee and Bester, 2009; Dwyer, 2004; Inkson and Myers, 2003; Pearce and Foster, 2007; Scarinci and Pearce, 2012), these characters as learning outcomes have not been discussed in relations to each other (see Section 5.2.5.) and certainly have not been studied in depth in the case of GYT (i.e. other studies used students enrolled at higher education institutions as samples of the studies as in the case of Pearce and Foster (2007) and Scarinci and Pearce (2012) and as a quantitative study hence the relationships between these qualities could not be explored further (see also Pearce and Foster, 2007; Scarinci and Pearce, 2012). The studies by Inkson and Myers (2003) and Coetzee
and Bester (2009) have used interviews as methods, yet their samples are consecutively overseas travellers from New Zealand and South African gappers whereas this study utilises UK based young gappers, which represents many nationalities (i.e. not only British) with diverse backgrounds as well as travel destinations and activities (see also Section 2.7.2. and Appendix 1) as samples. From comparing this study to previous similar studies, it can be concluded that travel for young people may bring similar results in terms of character building, this however raises another question of whether their new characters are built based on the same or similar or different factors, and whether there are certain factors that potentially impact the outcomes.

Similarly, some of the previous studies made references to time management and financial management as part of their lists of outcomes (e.g. Scarinci and Pearce, 2012; in their study these are represented as parts of the list of skills in a quantitative study). Nevertheless, there has not been any discussion on well-being management in previous studies whereas as highlighted in Section 5.3.3. in this study the gappers’ stories clearly indicate that well-being management is one area that needed to be highlighted as learning outcome.
CHAPTER SIX

WHAT THE GAPPERS LEARN:

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings on the theme of relationship building. First, it will start with a discussion on the gappers’ relationships with their family back home. Then, the discussion continues on how gappers talk and reflect on their relationships with their friends at home as well as their newly-made friends, and other gappers. Finally, the chapter reviews the gappers’ relationships with locals and society.

6.2. THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN GAPPERS’ LEARNING

Much of the gappers’ learning that occurs during GYT focuses on building and understanding their relationships with themselves and with those around them, family and friends back home and the newly made friends – fellow travellers, co-workers or locals. The discussions of the gappers’ relationships with others will be examined in detail in this chapter, following the earlier discussion on how the gappers’ self-development unravelled. Indeed, the gappers’ interaction with others is very important and is closely related to their self-development, to the point it could initiate change. As Ethan (P11) conceptualised: “The real things that have actually changed me are all related to people... it’s the people and the interactions that you have that the life changing part.” This confirms the understanding that self-identity is understood and created through relationship with others, which Bagnoli (2007) refers to as the identity model of ‘self+other’. King (2011: 353) also agrees that interactions with others are important, particularly in relation to identity constructions which, “are situated in context, they are always related to the wider social context and other social identities.”
6.3. RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY

One of the ideas that emerged very early during the interviews was that the gappers had become more appreciative and caring towards their family as a result of their trip. Hitherto, there has not been any study in the field dedicated to this specific matter. Nevertheless, the gappers in this study reported that their appreciation of their family grew strong that in some cases that their attitudes and behaviours towards their family had changed. As described by a few gappers below, these changes occurred incidentally during the trip.

"It makes you appreciate your family a lot more, and the thing they actually do for you... It's strange really, because before I went I wouldn't have done anything around the house apart from lift my feet up so that my mum could hover underneath! So I do a lot more stuff around the house when I am there now. If I have been working, I will still come home from work and cook a meal for everyone... things like that I would never have thought of doing before." (Perry, P1)

"My behaviour wasn't so good to my parents and my family and now I am more... I don't know it's difficult to explain, I care more about my parents and my family because I realise how important they are to me." (Ella, P9)

"I don't think I really appreciated my family before. When I came back I was definitely much more appreciative of my family and wanting to spend time with them and see more of them... It just makes you a little more conscious of it, it just kind of makes you aware that you really do want them around rather than taking them for granted... when I came back I said I am never going to be away from home at Christmas time again because I really, really missed it." (Ethan, P11)

The echo of appreciation is stronger amongst those who have travelled and separated for the first time from their parents such as Perry (P1) and Ella (P9). Nevertheless, Ethan (P11) who previously ‘wanted to be independent’ from his parents through his year of university abroad, also gained this new perspective and appreciation. This poses a question about whether it is the nature of the relationship (i.e. how close the relationship was to start with) that has impact on these changes, rather than whether they have been separated with their parents before. Nevertheless, the findings confirm those from previous research that GYT serves as a ritual symbolising separation between the young gappers and their parents (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995).

While the stories above were told by gappers who believed that they are ‘family people’, the following stories are shared by other gappers (Jessica, P3; Keanu, P7 and Felicity, P18) who
did not consider themselves to have harmonial or close relationships with their family prior to their trip. In the case of Jessica (P3), a Chinese German, she felt confused and distance from her family because of how she was being brought up within conservative Chinese tradition by her parents living in Germany.

"I understood my parents much more. That was very important to me because I understood how the Chinese people were thinking, why they think like that and why they act like that because before I felt my God no one understands me... I think I was less angry towards my family, towards my parents because I understood how they think, why they think like that because they were brought up like that..." (Jessica, P3)

Clearly, Jessica’s (P3) trip had a very positive effect on her relationship with her family. Furthermore, this understanding of her parents and their rationale for her upbringing had given her self-acceptance in her socio-cultural identity (see also Section 5.2.1. and 5.2.4. in Chapter Five) and hence strengthened her understanding of self-identity. Lucey (2010) argues that the gappers often make reference to their family, which may be explained by the fact that family is where they start to understand and develop their social identity thus it is natural that there is a need to revisit their identities were initially formed. Similar to the case of Jessica (P3), Felicity (P18) of Indian origin British reported not to know her roots well. She was brought up in Britain by her family, but had never had close interactions with her culture or her extended family before.

“When I went to India... I like properly bonded with my grandparents and my uncle a lot I got to know them and got to know about their past and how they think and I guess they kind of taught me... it’s a good thing because before I would always say I prioritised my friends first before my family but now you kind of realise that family is really important.” (Felicity, P18)

In the case of Keanu (P7), a Japanese British male, since he was 15 he had purposely distanced himself from his parents due to personal problems and the fact that he used to bully his younger siblings. Yet, when he was in trouble during his GYT his family came, visited and rescued him, which in turn mended his relationship with his family. He explained how reflecting on his experience and his previous behaviours with his family changed him and his views.

“Before I went on my gap year, I had a really bad relationship with my family... my father, he got me a lawyer and my mother came to see me... She saw me when I was incarcerated, and it was quite a profound experience... and I beat the case, and after that the relations between me and especially my father were really good,
because I felt a sense of gratitude towards him and the relations between me and all my siblings were really good as well after that.” (Keanu, P7)

It could be argued that GYT, in particular the experience of being apart from one’s family and those close to them have the potential of aiding realisation of their value to the gappers. In understanding themselves, gappers are not only looking at themselves as a subject but also their relationships with others as the subject of their learning. In fact, it could be argued that individuals construct their identities in relation to others. Identity can be defined as a sense of self in relation to others (Weis, 1990). For example, Perry (P1) expresses: “It made me realise how much of a family person I am.” This view was expressed by nearly all gappers. In fact, from the 27 cases interviewed, only one case appeared to be an exception in which the gapper felt more distanced from his family after the trip:

“On a slightly harsher level, I don’t feel as close to my family anymore, they are still my family and I still love them to bits but you don’t feel that sense of needing to be around them, it’s like you have outgrown the nest.... I am obviously getting older and it’s a change that comes with age and as much as I like to pretend it I am not the teenager that I used to be anymore. I guess that’s it!” (Gabriel, P27)

Gabriel (P27), a British male of South African, felt out of place in school in England, and wanted to move to Australia. During his GYT in Australia, he had a living space of his own and felt accepted by the others who surrounded him. It was clear from his story that he was happy about ‘who he was’ (i.e. his identity) when he was in Australia. This may be explained by the fact that identity is context-bound and specific to locations and situations (Berger and Luckmann, 1996) and hence Gabriel was not able to sustain his new identity when he returned to UK as the context was not the same as that in Australia and in fact the UK introduces the old identity for him. Furthermore, the fact that he was not happy with his old identity as a child, and was searching for his identity as an adult might have contributed to how he felt towards his family. While perhaps Gabriel’s experience could be explained as an example of GYT as ritual of growing up (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Johan, 2009), his story also shows that he experienced confusion about his social identity with his peers as well as his identity moving towards adulthood which he tried to work out during his travels. Once again, having ‘space’ has been mentioned as a condition to assert identity (Muller and O’Cass, 2001); while acceptance by others is given as a comforting situation which creates a sense of belonging during the identity quest.
The number of stories above suggests various issues of transition to adulthood and their identity construction during this period, and that there may be differences for those with a mixed-culture background as portrayed in the above cases. Indeed, the gappers’ situations above illustrate a few important discoveries that require further future investigation. As discussed earlier, the gappers’ references towards their family is a natural reaction, as their family is where their social identity was originally developed (Lucey, 2010). In other words, in understanding their identity, the gappers refer back to the relationships with the first people they formed their social relationships with. Lucey (2010) also argues that growing up may require a closer look at these relationships.

6.4. RELATIONSHIP WITH FRIENDS AND OTHER GAPPERS

The word ‘friendship’ was one of the most-used terms by gappers while sharing their experiences. Gappers gained an extensive amount of learning from their interactions with others during their trips, with those they travelled with as well as with fellow travellers, locals, and those they became engaged with through their work or internship activities. Besides the newly-made friends, gappers also discussed their friendships with those back home. They compared and contrasted their interactions during their trip to their experience before and after the trip, questioned the meaning of friendships, evaluated their interpersonal relationships with others, and prioritized those relationships that were most important to them. Although in the beginning some adjustments were often required, at the end of the experience they gained social skills and a deeper understanding of themselves and others. Once again, it is apparent that gappers’ interactions with others are vitally important components of their trips. The importance of ‘friendship’ to the gappers may be explained by Brooks (2002) who argues that the notion is particularly important during the transition period for the young gappers as they start to move away from their family and seek the supports of others, especially of those of similar age and experience. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the literature with regard to the gappers’ relationship with others, especially relationships with those back home, is very sparse. The literature mainly discusses the relationship between travellers and the locals, and only a few studies make a reference to and highlight the relationships between and among travellers.

While to some gappers, meeting new people was a natural process during their travel in which they gained benefits (e.g. people skills, etc.), meeting people to gain skills was one of their
objectives of travelling. This was especially for those who faced challenges in their social life and use the opportunity to overcome these challenges by getting to know people. Yves (P21) identified this as one of his travel motives:

"The idea of meeting people from all over the place was quite an attractive one when I thought about travelling... meeting new people was up on the list... the fact that I travelled on my own, I was hoping that it would improve my people skills, so improve my ability to small talk and strike up conversations... that was one of the main reasons that I wanted to travel on my own to see if I could meet new people without having people I knew there already. "

While to others, this was not necessarily the case; meeting new people and making friends was not necessarily their intention.

"I wasn't really worried about meeting people... because I had my friends with me... but as you go along you realise that you want to make new friends and meet new people." (Kiefer, P12)

Overall, gappers reported that it was sometimes difficult for them to adjust to the new people they met, nevertheless they also reported that they had learned more as a result. This was reported mainly by those who travelled alone. In the beginning, they often felt lonely and not particularly at ease in making friends because it required adjustment and courage. Nevertheless, they reported that by gaining people skills this made them more at ease in meeting others. Both Daisy (P17) and Whitney (P19) spoke of the turning points and their end results, suggesting that they went through a transitional period in meeting others (e.g. in the case of Daisy P17) that lead them to attitudinal change (e.g. in the case of Whitney, P19).

"I was absolutely terrified, I didn't know what to expect... but I think that was a really significant moment, because it made me realise that it doesn't matter... that was the time when I saw transition between the slightly lonely period when my friend left me and then to the point where the next part of the journey, that symbolises the beginning of that, really." (Daisy, P17)

"I felt quite isolated at first...I didn't know anyone in a new place... and at that point I didn't have the self-confidence or desire really to push myself to go out there and be confident and make new friends... it was just the whole negative attitude that I had, and so towards the end of the whole trip it was me that was making the contact at first." (Whitney, P19)

In spite of the difficulty of adjusting at the beginning, all gappers reported that within a short period of time, they became more open and at ease, they found commonalities and spent a lot of time together with others:
“You make friends so quickly there... Just because when you meet someone all your boundaries go and you just get on with everyone and anyone... You've all got the same interests in that you are travelling.” (Daisy, P17)

“She [re: her friend] experienced similar things, [so] we were able to talk it through. It was really, really nice to me to have someone else there who understood what I was going through.” (Whitney, P19)

Pahl (2000) argues that as people become closer and build friendship and trust they are more open in resolving some of their personal issues. Indeed, Mezirow (1991) also argues that it is through sharing that personal transformation may occur (see also Chapter Eight and Nine on How the Gappers Learn, whereby sharing is considered an important part of relating to others which inherently relate to the identity work of the gappers). The fact that gappers met many people, with commonalities and differences from themselves was very important. Dunning (2003) argues that people have tendency to emphasize both similarities and differences with others for balancing the feeling of inclusion and distinctiveness as they are making sense of their identity in relation to others (Dunning, 2003). All gappers indicated that they learned from the similarities and differences among them. According to Giovanni (P2), it is important to be able to share with those who are similar: “they were like same minds as me... you are so happy to be with... other people your own age.” According to Dunning (2003: 423), “people tend to surround themselves with like-minded folk.” Nevertheless, the gappers in this study suggest that meeting others who had different mind-sets, lifestyles or backgrounds also appeared to be important factors in their learning. In fact, the gappers argued that these are one of the main sources of their learning. For example, Gavin (P10) who came from a well-off family shared that he learnt from another gapper whom he worked with in India. His exposure to people he would not normally associate himself with had opened his eyes and showed him life that he had not experienced before.

“She told me about her life, she has had it really hard... She is not the kind of person that I would normally sort of hang out with. She is totally different.” (Gavin, P10)

Rebecca (P5) explained that meeting others who are dissimilar to her could have a significant impact on her attitude, personality and outlook of life:

“The people I’ve met and the friends we’ve made had different attitudes and approaches on life, and I think they’ve shaped my own personality a little bit.” (Rebecca, P5)
Similarly, Dylan (P5) shared on the impact of his experience on his change of attitude:

"My feeling was changed by people around me, seeing what their ambitions are... it rubbed off on me slightly." (Dylan, P5)

The above examples illustrate that differences in others could inspire and encourage the gappers. To change one’s attitudes one often needs to understand the different options available, understanding attitudes of others towards certain things could help them to gain their own understanding of their own attitude and whether modifications are needed. Seeing the successful experiences of others breeds beliefs in one’s own experience, whereas bad or sad experiences may challenge one’s thinking and hence start their learning for the future. One of the experiences that was often described as a turning point for the gappers is when they experienced disagreements with those around them, or even split from their travel companions. Nevertheless, they indicated that they could resolve the situation and were able to grow out of it. Indeed, they argued that they had learned from these unfortunate experiences.

"We didn't get along ... I had to work with her every day and live with her for four months so it was a learning experience, like a learning curve to have to live and work with someone that you don't like, and I think that that was important ... Well it is difficult when you don't get on with someone especially when you are in a different country with no real friends to begin with ... But you had to learn to deal with it and I think that was good because I hadn't learnt to deal with people like that before." (Charlotte, P15)

"We had a very unpleasant conversation in the flat where I was living. I thought it was a bit insulting ... I was able to in a way probably to stand up for myself and to see the things objectively ... I had to work with her afterwards, that was a challenge ... somehow we came to terms with the whole situation ... you find out that you are able to deal with difficult people and things like that in terms of working environment as well." (Melissa, P13)

It appears that disagreements experienced by gappers are often as a result of them asserting their own identity rather than conforming with others, which takes forms of certain attitudes or behaviours toward others. As a result, the gappers are able to see themselves more clearly through their disagreement with others.

The loneliness and challenging situations experienced by the gappers also acted as a push factor for them to adjust to their environment. In fact, various occasions provided the opportunity for gappers to exercise team work - working and dealing with others. For example, Charlotte
(P15) explained how she and her colleagues at the disability camp worked together towards a purpose, whereas Nicole (P22) also shared similar comments:

"We all had to grow together, because none of us had worked with disabilities before, and so it was quite challenging for all of us, we all had to do it together really." (Charlotte, P15).

"Because of the nature of the things that we were doing, often we were camping or doing physically demanding activities, were you really had to pull together, and so you form really close friendships, in quite a short space of time." (Nicole, P22).

Facing the challenge that one does not feel confidence (in their ability to do certain task) at the beginning was soon replaced by feeling of togetherness and strengths of being with others which in turns helped them to be confident and learn about themselves and their capabilities. Similarly, they also reported that they formed friendships during and as a result of these critical situations.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding in terms of what gappers learned from their interactions with others was that they were building a deeper understanding of themselves and others, as well as an understanding of the important impacts of these relationships on themselves and their relationship with others. Friendship is a way the young gappers build their identity, in which they build capabilities in re-evaluating and prioritizing their relationships. Verity (P23) shared her thoughts in which she reviewed the meaning of friendship and loyalty:

"I also looked more at nurturing friendships and I asked myself what is being loyal because while you are away, you know who your real friends are... when I came back I kind of looked at my friendships ... and who my loyal friends and there are far less than I originally thought there were... I have found who my real friends are and their loyalties and the other way round." (Verity, P23)

Loyalty to her means:

"that it doesn't matter where you are in the world but if you need someone that they will be there for you." (Verity, P23)

Similarly, McKenzie (P25) who was suddenly dropped by his travel companion in a foreign country during the trip expressed how lost and deeply disappointed he felt. As suggested by Mezirow (1991), facing these negative emotions are part of learning process that may lead to change and transformation. Indeed, having overcome a challenging period, McKenzie (P25) in fact gained a new level of confidence:
"As soon as I left the city... I met some new people and started to realise that it would not necessarily be so bad so I got a lot more optimistic, and after the first few days I realised that it would be a lot easier by myself." (McKenzie, P25)

In this instance, once again people and the gappers' interactions with others that bring about motivations and results. In this example, McKenzie's (P25) assumption and belief on what friendship constitutes had changed. Based on this particular experience, he re-evaluated his friendships with others, especially this particular friendship. He deemed that relationship to be:

"an illusion, it was not even a real friendship, it was kind of nothing, it is discarded." (McKenzie, P25)

According to him, the experience:

"is a significant change in my friendship, and I am now more wary about certain people that I put trust in or confide in... it just had you know, there is a lasting effect about the way that I interact with people." (McKenzie, P25)

Other gappers also indicated some changes in their attitudes and behaviour towards others. It could be argued that the changes were highly influenced by interactions with people around them. These interactions represent the reason, the mean and the results of their internal work. In the story of McKenzie (P25) as he described it, the change resulted has had a long-term effect. Whether the effects of these changes are long term or merely short term is always open to question and is difficult to predict and can only be witnessed over time (Beedie, 2003).

Looking at it from a more positive perspective, Whitney (P19) explained the effect of her experience:

"I think to value friendship more actually... I don't regret going at all, and I think without all of it and the friendships I wouldn't be where I am today that's so sure." (Whitney, P19)

Then, she concluded by stating that:

"What I would take away would definitely be family and friends... I think it is getting a balance between everything and that is my priority." (Whitney, P19)

Clearly, Whitney experienced some shifts in what is important and of value to her. A similar experience of value shift is portrayed in Nicole's (P22) story:

"You really miss your friends when you are away, you make new friends and great friends... so you really sort of value to your friends and family."
Furthermore, some gappers explained that the trip also tested their relationships. While some friendships or personal relationships broke up, some passed the test. Nicole (P22) provides an example that illustrates this:

"And my relationship with my boyfriend, I think that was a bit of a make or break trip, ... that's really solidified relationship for us... we got to work that out while we were away, you become a real team and rely on each other and it worked really well. I know lots of couples who go travelling who don't make it back together and it was the opposite effect for us really." (Nicole, P22).

Finally, the gappers clearly indicated that during their trip and/or as a result of their trip they gained not only people skills as explained by Giovanni (P2) but also social capital as explained by Charlotte (P15):

"It's just the sociability... it's really good to be able to really make new friends. It's quite good for like confidence and self-esteem because in that year, the year of working I had such difficulty making friends... being able to make these new friends, getting together and just getting on with everyone really boosted your self-esteem, your confidence and also the kids will really like you because they do really look up to the councillors." (Charlotte, P15)

"I made some very good friends there that I think was a big part of the experience that I had... we have seen each other quite a lot since we got back, they all live in different parts of the UK." (Charlotte, P15)

Indeed, many gappers shared the view that the friendships they made during the trip endured. In fact, they often built new meanings in their life and coped with situations based on their new friendships. In many cases, they kept in touch and made their friendships part of their lives after they returned home. The people they met became part of their social capital, and furthermore the encounters with them also gave them cultural capital as discussed in the next section. All gappers shared that they remained in touch with others after the trip as the newly gained ‘friends’ as emotional supports as they are considered to be those who ‘could really understand them’ (e.g. Verity, P23), are not only a reminder of their GYT but also who they are during their trip (e.g. Daisy, P17). Daisy’s (P17) comments suggest that she would like to retain the contextual identity she exercised during her trip, although she no longer maintains that identity at home in her current situation.

On a different note, Scanlon et al. (2007) argue that students often face a difficult transition into their first year at the university and that the main causes of these difficulties appear to be those of socialising adaptation (e.g. feeling lonely and to not belong). The gappers
in this study pointed out that the fact that they had embarked on GYT and learned about ‘socializing’ with others during the trip and this has helped their transition into university (e.g. Gabriel, P27).

6.5. RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCALS AND SOCIETY

Richards and Wilson (2004) document that people travel with the intention to have cross-cultural interactions and authentic experiences (i.e. socializing/living with the local hosts) during their trips, nevertheless, they also argue that there are discrepancies between the results and these intentions. In this study, it was found that while the intentions for cross-cultural interactions and authentic experiences are echoed by the gappers but their voices on the topic are not as strong as those on other themes. Some gappers clearly indicate their intentions and/or voiced strong experiences on this matter; nevertheless the gappers tended to focus their stories on how they had come to understand themselves through exposures to other cultures. This confirms Urry’s (2002) argument that travel allows both enjoyment and exploration of ‘the others’ while travellers at the same time could also learn about their own identity through these differences from others.

Earlier in Section 3.6., this study also proposed that cross-cultural exposure as a result of travel may also have an impact on the gappers’ learning, identity construction and hence their transition process (see Figure 6). Based on the above discussions, it becomes clear that cross-cultural experiences of the young gappers may provide them with a number of unfamiliar scenarios and may therefore have a direct impact on how they relate to other cultures or it may influence how they see their own culture in comparison to those of other cultures. For instance, exposure to cultures other than their own could increase the gappers’ awareness, appreciation and patriotism towards their own country and culture and inspire them to be an ambassador to their own nation. Giovanni (P2) and Ella (P9) expressed this:

“When I was in my country I didn't really think about my country but when I was travelling I thought more about my country... when you are outside from your country you realise how important it was then.” (Ella, P9)

“I am now more patriotic... [it] was really just nice of them to be so interested in your culture and stuff.... I want them to come and visit me so I want Britain to be in a good light...when they think of England to think of me and I wanted to give the best impression of myself and then they think of England in a good light.” (Giovanni, P2)
It could be argued that one thinks about one's social/national identity when one is outside of that social/national boundary. This is the case for Ella (P9). In the case of Giovanni (P2), he clearly linked between his personal and national identity during his trip.

Furthermore, being in a multicultural society provided gappers with new experiences which evoked new thoughts and feelings. This also provided them with some sense of belonging, enabling them to conform not only to their national identity but also to larger sense of belonging, as 'citizen of the world' (i.e. beyond belongingness to their own culture and society).

"It was like a melting pot of different people from different cultures, especially as there were people from all around the world... I was out of my comfort zone originally and so that is where I developed my love for new cultures" (Dylan, P4)

"I was feeling, as a Bulgarian, part of if you want to call it a big family of European nations... you live in a completely multi-cultural society with all these people so it was a good feeling that I am part of that.” (Melissa, P13)

For Dylan (P4), learning from being outside of his comfort zones prompts him to learn and discover beyond what he already knows, which in turn provide opportunity for identity to be questioned and changes to be made; whereas for Melissa (P13), the experience provide her with the opportunity to conform her national identity in relation to the larger identification group.

From the statements of Dylan (P4) and Melissa (P13), it could be argued that by visiting other countries and experiencing a way of living that is different than their own prompts gappers to think about their own national identity. Hogg (2003: 462) explained this by stating that one's identity is provided through group's interactions as one's sense of identity “derives from the groups and categories we belong to.” Cross and Gore (2003) also argue that exposure to multicultural worlds bring awareness of the importance of culture on one’s self.

Clearly, undertaking GYT has provided gappers with an opportunity to question, challenge and in some instances assert their identity, in particular those of their ethnic and national identity due to the cross-cultural environment they were exposed to (see also Figure 6). Melissa (P13) explained this even further, it could be argued that a process of learning has begun (see also Chapter Eight and Nine), as she started to see differently and change her perspective:

"You start asking yourself a lot of questions about your culture through the experience of that other culture, you look back on your culture and you see things differently sometimes and you asked yourself for example you ask why do Bulgarians do things in this way?" (Melissa, P13)

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Once questioning had started, they also began to be more critical in comparing and contrasting the old and new cultures and societies. Yves (P21) in his comment below show that he started to question his earlier assumption about the system, which leads him to a new perspective.

"...my opinion of England changes based on the experiences in other countries... having been away you come back and see what’s wrong with here as opposed to the other places you have been and where things at home could be better... just things in society, like the systems they’ve got abroad... when you see another system and the way in which it works better you come back thinking well why aren’t we doing that?" (Yves, P21)

"I think society here says that you have to work...we’ve gone a whole year where yeah, we worked but we didn’t work the whole year and we’re still alive and we managed it... I mean that’s a crucial point... we just felt guilty to society that we were kind of breaking free and not doing what society’s telling us to do which is that you have to work." (Rebecca, P5)

Similarly, a change of perspective was experienced by Rebecca (P5) as she experienced a different environment that challenged her original assumptions that work is a priority. As discussed earlier, identity is prone to specific location, situation and context (Berger and Luckmann, 1996; King, 2011). Hence it could be argued that one may have a clearer understanding of one’s own desired identity, i.e. one’s perception of one’s own current identity and one’s expected identity as projected by the society when one removes oneself from an old location, situation and context (e.g. society) where old identity is formed and asserted.

In essence, through their experiences in other societies gappers have learnt to discriminate about what they think and feel as individuals opposed to what the society believes or expects of them. This has given them a sense of independence, some freedom of choice, less restrictions and more courage in deciding life issues for themselves. Furthermore, gappers indicated that they were more ‘in-tune’ with the feelings of gratitude upon returning from visits from underdeveloped or developing countries. These are mainly because they witnessed much lower standards of living and unequal treatment of citizens in some countries. For example, Nicole (P22) shared her new appreciations for things she used to take for granted:

"It’s really about feeling privileged because women in India are some of them are actually second-class citizens to their husbands... just really appreciating where I live and that I have got a good education and that you have running water and health care. You see a lot of amputees in India because if you have got something
wrong they wouldn't try and save it they would just chop it off. I wasn't judging them, but it was just really enforced how lucky you are." (Nicole, P22).

The above is also noted in the study of Simpson (2004; 2005), although in that study she claimed that the 'feeling of privileged' is the only end result. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the feeling of gratitude or privilege is only the beginning of learning and identity work, and a key to a better holistic understanding of gappers' lives.

According to Wetherell (2010), Nicole (P22) is undertaking identity work as Wetherell (2010) argues that identity work involves paying attention to social differences and may include the process of comparing and contrasting one's life with others and considering both the advantages and disadvantages. Jessica (P3) shared similar stories about her understanding of gender roles in her society as opposed to other societies, which arguably is closely linked to her own understanding of her own gender identity. Indeed, young gappers assessed their own culture and value against those of others and decided on the position where they feel comfortable with.

"In China there are lots of stereotypes about feminism, that females have to behave in a certain way and have to do certain things and when you don't obey the rules, you lose your face in the society... my western beliefs are that it is more about emancipation about equality, that I have the same values." (Jessica, P3)

Moreover, some gappers spoke about the reality of life that they had encountered during their trips such as, poverty and violence. Dylan (P4) spoke about the Aborigines he encountered in Alice Springs, Australia, whereas Yves (P21) spoke about his encounters with the history of Cambodia. Seeing the realities of others' life and other societies helped them in gaining new knowledge and perspectives.

"It is quite sad actually, because they are massively marginalised... we would see a couple of aborigines just a begging or something, you didn't really see them in high places of society... there is a massive problem with alcoholism, and lots of racialism towards them as well, and it just seems like people ignore them...I couldn't understand why... it's like a clash of culture really." (Dylan, P4)

"Cambodia was probably the most eye opening country in terms of the way people live and things... mainly because the people I met and the history of the country they have just been through so many sort of traumatic experiences and yet they were really friendly and you know it sort of it makes you take a step back and you can't help but be impressed." (Yves, P21)

Such personal encounters and experiences with the locals and the society had a profound impact on the gappers that these encounters and experiences may influence on their perspectives.
(i.e. how they see lives and their world). Yves (P21) explained on the impact of his experience on him below.

"... quite an interesting experience just to see what people went through and I think it just makes you sort of value the time that you are in now to see what people went through before..." (Yves, P21)

It is evident from their stories that the gappers experienced changes on many levels, e.g. assumptions, attitudes, behaviour, beliefs, values, identity and purpose, as well as gaining knowledge and skills (see also Chapter Ten). Furthermore, it could be argued that understanding the identities of others from other cultures or the past may provide them with opportunity to understand themselves. Giddens (1991) also argues that identity is a product of self-reflection as part of personhood, which may vary across cultures. This suggests that travelling across cultures as the gappers try to understand and reflect on their personhood is of significant importance to their identity construction.

Through the above stories, seeing how other people live has helped the gappers to see their own life in comparison to others. Wetherell (2010) argues that this opportunity may eliminate incorrect perceptions of the existence of others and therefore create a better understanding of oneself as a mirroring experience. Furthermore, through the above stories by gappers, it could be concluded that the gappers’ self-construction is based on the cultural and social world they lived in. As Hogg (2003) argues, people tend to define themselves through the various tools (e.g. concepts, terms, values and ideologies) belonging to their cultural and social environments.

6.6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the impact of the gappers’ experiences on their relationships with others has been discussed and reviewed. The gappers reflected both on themselves and on their relationship with others: their family, friends and other gappers as well as locals and wider society. First, being apart from their family made them more aware of the maturation process of becoming a young adult and provided them with some space to see their relationships with their family objectively. Secondly, friendship is an important and frequently noted component of gappers’ accounts, where gappers learned to relate to others on their own, without the societal pressure which may have been exerted at home. This helped them to reflect on their friendships
back home. Relating and socializing with other gappers was self-reported to have strong influence on the gappers, regardless of whether this outcome was intended. Finally, travelling and adjusting through foreign culture provided gappers with the ability to adapt to different environments. In turn, the diversity of people and destinations that gappers visited or met showed high influence on the gappers. In all cases, social learning was evident, whereby gappers often related their sense of personal identity with their relationships with others and the world.

The literature on identity emphasizes the importance of ‘relationships’ and the significance of ‘others’ in identity construction (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Kihlstrom et al., 2003; Marshall, 1998; Ogilvie and Ashmore, 1991; Tice and Wallace, 2003). In this chapter, all aspects of relationships that gappers had with others have been reviewed and their narratives clearly suggest that gappers attempted to understand who they were in the light of their relationships with others. In fact, this effort could be considered as one of the main highlights of their GYT experience. As they learn more about who they are, the gappers become more motivated in working on their personal relationships. This is when their action of reviewing values and re-prioritizing of their relationships began, which shows their work on their identity. As Stets and Burke (2003) argue, amendments to identity could be done by adding or deducting meaning and by changing the ranking of the relationship importance.

The gappers’ relationship with their parents could be considered as the foundation of their social identities, as it is the starting point of their social interactions with others at home. Through various incidents, personal reflections and sharing with others, gappers revealed the state of their relationship with their parents or families. Their new perspectives either strengthened or weakened those parental or family relationships. As the gappers mature they search for their own personal identity resulting in the occurrence of a process of individualization. During this process they use their closest relationships as a point for comparison; dissatisfactions in their relationships often being a call for an identity adjustment.

The gappers reported that they were able to look at their relationships more objectively when they stood back from the relationship itself. The principle that identity is specific to situations and contexts (Berger and Luckman, 1996) also means that the new identity exercised during the trip could not necessarily be carried forward to their home environment. Nevertheless, the gappers appear to have benefitted from the experience abroad regardless of whether they continue to practice these new values and behaviors at home. It was important that they took the
opportunity and courage to push the limit of their typical identities. By doing so, they understood themselves by comparing their understanding of themselves and their abilities before and after based on the practiced actions.

Through the friendships built with others who are similar and those different to themselves during their trip, the gappers were able to review their self-concept through sharing and listening to each other’s life stories and activities. This resulted in either confirmation of or the need to review their identities. Meeting others that are similar in personality could be as beneficial for them as meeting others that are different, regardless whether it is intended or not as it provides them with equal opportunities for learning. Moreover, the gappers’ voices suggested that they also learned more about their cultural self (i.e. about their nationality or race) and their gender (i.e. female role) self from their encounters with others from other cultures, inasmuch as they explored and developed their sense of belonging and learned about what they could gain from other cultures through making comparisons with their home culture.

Both in the learning literature (e.g. Mezirow, 1991) and identity literature (e.g. Giddens, 1991), the importance of sharing and social interactions was highlighted and indeed, its role was clearly demonstrated in this study: the gappers’ identity works on their identities were enacted through their interactions with others. Within the tourism literature, interpersonal, social and communication skills are often highlighted as outcomes of travel (e.g. Inkson and Myers, 2003; Pearce and Foster, 2007; Scarinci and Pearce, 2012), yet their relationship building skills have not been investigated in detail or separated into their sub-components as it has been in this study (i.e. from the perspective of their relationship to family, friends and other gappers locals and society).

Interestingly, the gappers in this study did not provide much reference to online interactions with those at home, hence their social interactions through technology and media could not be explored. Nevertheless, considering the speedy infiltration of flashpacking as sub-culture and therefore the use of social media during travel (see Hannam and Dickmann, 2010; Paris, 2012) this could potentially be an area of further investigation, e.g. whether social-media interactions occurring during GYT may have an impact on their learning.

Previous literature in the area of travel and learning also indicates that cultural learning (i.e. cross-cultural understanding) is one of the learning outcomes of travel (e.g. Inkson and
Myers, 2003; Janes, 2008; Pearce and Foster, 2007; Richard and Wilson, 2003). But the study by Raymond and Hall (2008) suggest that misunderstanding instead of understanding could also be an outcome, hence their study serves as a caution that not all travels may result in positive cross-cultural understandings.

In this study, while the findings agree that learning in GYT occurs in the context of cross-cultural environment (see Figure 6), the outcomes of the gappers' learning are not necessarily culturally dependent. In other words, their learning occurred in both cultural and non-cultural context since the gappers remain to have exposure both to the local and society of other cultures and those friends, family and other gappers of their or similar culture. Nevertheless, the findings remained to suggest that both exposures provide them with learning that enriched their identity. In some cases as explored in this chapter (see Section 6.5.), learning from cross-cultural exposures could result in further understanding of one's own cultural value, which is in line with the findings of previous study by Dwyer (2004).
CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT THE GAPPERS LEARN:

LIFE MANAGEMENT

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the findings on the theme of life management. The gappers suggested that during and as a result of their trip, they started to think more deeply about their future, about their education, their career as well as their life in general. First, how the gappers discuss the direction of their study will be presented. This is followed by a discussion of gappers' career directions and their views on lifestyle balance. Finally, an overview on how these three sub-themes relate to each other as shared by the gappers will be explored.

7.2. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

All gappers spoke about their past as well as their future direction to certain degree during the interviews – their education, career and general lifestyle. This finding resonates with Gidden’s (1991: 81) argument that “life-planning presupposes a specific mode of organising time because the reflexive construction of self-identity depends as much on preparing for the future as on interpreting the past.” Often the three topics are intermingled with each other; the decisions for embarking on higher education or a career are closely linked to each other. This is in line with Wallace and Kovatcheva’s (1998) suggestions that the two paths (i.e. career and education) often merge and play out simultaneously rather than as a linear path as may have been during the transition period of the previous generations. Furthermore, the study/career decisions of an individual are clearly linked with the lifestyle they choose. The clear directions on both study and career were also found in a previous study by Jones (2004), whereas the lifestyle direction has not been researched in depth in the previous study. More importantly, this study confirms Leary et al.’s (2003) suggestion that during the period of movement to adulthood, self and identity is often related and used to shape goals. This explains why ‘having directions’ became so apparent in the stories of the young gappers, which is in line with Johan’s (2009) assertion that GYT may enhance the transition process of the young gappers towards their next steps of adulthood or the world of work or further education (see Figure 6).
7.3. STUDY DIRECTION

A number of gappers indicated that they were not entirely sure about their decision to study before the trip and in some cases they indicated that they had difficulties with school (e.g. the case of Felicity (P18), and Nicole (P22)). Birch and Miller (2007) document that some students who did not perform well academically are more likely to be less motivated to continue their education and may choose to embark on GYT. This is the case with both Felicity (P18) and Nicole (P22) who did not do well on the commencement of their university year. In the case of Felicity (P18), the GYT is considered an involuntary pause as a result of a failure to do well during the university year. In some cases, according to Holmlund et al. (2008: 695), waiting “for better educational opportunities” may be enough of a motive to take GYT. Hence, while to some the trip merely serves as ‘a break’ between their A-level to university transition, a few gappers see the trip as an opportunity to explore their options, or to give them a little bit more time before making final decisions about their study (e.g. whether to go or return to university or not, or on what subject to take for their study). This is apparent in the following:

“I had applied for university before I went travelling but I wasn’t sure if I was going to take up the offer or not until I went travelling.” (Perry, P1)

“I was lost actually... I didn’t know what I was going to do afterwards, I think I had just applied for Uni[versity], I re-applied... I was worried.” (Felicity, P18)

“I didn’t exactly know what I was going to do when I came back, I was toying with the idea of doing a masters degree, and I had looked into doing some graduate schemes jobs... but I knew that when I got back that would be it the start of my career in whichever way.” (Chloe, P6)

Before their trip, these gappers accepted their uncertainty and remained open during their trip. In fact, they shared that during the trip they observed others and other societies and their way of living, and also talked to other people. As indicated earlier, communication with others appears to be important. By doing this, gappers were able to make decisions on which direction to pursue, or became more certain about their choice. For example, going to university was a big decision for Perry (P1) as he was the first in his family to do so. He felt that by talking to other gappers who had gone to university, he had gained the necessary information to make an informed decision. This is in agreement with Ball, Maguire and Macrae’s (2000) suggestion that young people’s decisions about their education are often highly influenced by their wider peer group. Similarly, Felicity (P18) who dropped out during her first year of university, felt more
confident in returning after having a few training experiences and prolonged conversation with her extended family during her trip. Nicole (P22), who was also a little uncertain before her trip about her decisions on returning to university as mature student, shared that her trip served as a confirmation for her decision:

"While I was away I got to think about some of the choices that I had made and I knew that they were right for me so it was just [a] confirmation." (Nicole, P22)

Holmlund et al. (2008) also argue that GYT may serve as a response to gappers' uncertainty of their preferences or decisions (i.e. decisions to continue to higher education or not and preferences towards certain subjects). Indeed, some gappers clearly indicated that their personal working/training experiences during their trip, their observation of and conversation with others in their working/training place coupled with their self-reflection made them realise that having qualifications is important for their future career. This corresponds with Nieman's (2010) study which also found that a gap year could help students in determining the choices of their fields of study. In the case of Gavin (P10), doing manual labour during his trip had enhanced his ambition towards higher education; as he explained, "I think it has made me a bit more driven towards getting a degree."

According to Nieman (2010), although some students may find it difficult to re-adjust to university after their GYT, she also found that taking time out is likely to increase students' motivation and interests in continuing their study. This is also argued by Jones (2004: 59) that GYT could improve educational performance through 'greater self-discipline in studying' and 'greater motivation to achieve educational goals.' In extreme cases, as in the case of Keanu (P7), his experience serving jail time during his GYT had converted his belief about his future:

"I had to try and convince the judge that I was a hard working boy with aspirations of going to university. At first I wasn't really like that, but in time I got to see the other side of the coin and I became that person, really, in the end...the person who aspires to go to university and who tries to be on the right path." (Keanu, P7)

He later also expressed his view that:

"In all honesty I think if I didn't get arrested,... if I didn't go on the gap year, I just went from A level to college to university I reckon I would still be partying it up really." (Keanu, P7)
Chapter Seven – Life Management

As discussed in Section 5.2.3., becoming more responsible is one of the traits gained by many gappers as a result of their trips. Although there is an impression that gappers 'tend to just drink and party' during GYT (i.e. Gap Year or Gap Yah? which alludes to GYT as a middle/upper class activity in which gappers are often portrayed as being irresponsible during their trip), even if it is partially true for some gappers, Nieman (2010) argues that there is a tendency to make up for the time lost. While the case of Keanu (P7) is fairly rare, many incidents reported during Gap Year Travel (GYT) in this study have become a motivator for the gappers to look forward to their next education path. Consistent with this finding is Birch and Miller's (2007) argument that taking a gap year between high school and university could have a positive impact on students' subsequent academic performance. One exception was experienced by Dylan (P4) who had finished his undergraduate degree and was ready to embark on his next course before his travel. Nevertheless, upon return he re-thought his future plan:

"Before I went travelling, I definitely was 100% certain that I wanted to do a law conversion course... and become a solicitor. I am still quite keen on that idea, but... I think that I am more open to a job that I could enjoy a more and one that I would have more free time." (Dylan, P4)

Clearly, from Dylan's (P4) case and other cases discussed above, exposure to other people during travel could act as a big influence on how the young gappers perceived life differently: their future and their possibilities. It often made them ask questions about the balance between their personal and professional life. Indeed, the issue of lifestyle became a priority as expressed by a few other gappers (see Section 7.5.), in line with the literature (see: Stokes and Wyn, 2007).

From a learning perspective, this raises a question about whether GYT has a positive or negative impact on learning and education. An earlier discussion by Holton (2000) on positive, neutral and negative learning shed lights in exploring the answers. Holton (2000) argued that positive learning encourages individuals to grow and develop themselves towards their best potential for the benefits of both the individual and society at large, while neutral learning is simply a process by which knowledge transfer takes place resulting in an ability to solve everyday problems. In the case of Dylan (P4), negative learning (i.e. forced learning with detrimental impact on the learner) is irrelevant. In fact, it could be argued that there might be a movement from neutral to positive learning as he explores his potential within himself and through his perception of reality during and after his trip, and looks at his life from a larger
picture rather than in terms of career/study only. Further discussion on learning will be provided in the next chapters (Chapter Eight and Nine – GYT Learning Process).

Jones (2004: 54) also argues that there is some evidence suggesting the possibility for young people to feel demotivated to continue their study and may face some difficulties in returning to their study. A number of public newsletters on graduates and education (e.g. Goldsmith (2010) and Barrow (2007)) also suggest that GYT may create confusion and crisis in some cases as many graduates start to re-think and re-plan their life as they return from their trip. Nevertheless, it could be argued that this may not be a bad thing; it may just be a sign of the transformative effect of GYT in which the gappers reflect on themselves and their lives at a deeper level (see Chapter Eight and Nine).

7.4. CAREER DIRECTION

When interviewed, some of the gappers had finished their study and embarked on their first career position. Nearly all of the gappers in this category expressed their discontent with their previous jobs prior to the trip. This is also found in the study by Inkson and Myer (2003), and was suggested by Mezirow (1991) as a potential source and sign of a dilemma. This finding, along with the findings that many gappers were at a crossroad regarding their decisions for their study in the previous section (Section 7.3. on Study Direction) and this confirms the suggestion in the literature that many people were at juncture before the beginning of their trip (e.g. Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Maoz, 2006b; Sørensen, 2003). For example:

“None of us had a very good job that was fulfilling, so we thought that once we had been travelling perhaps we would get a different mindset and want to do something different once we got back.” (Kiefer, P12)

“I was working in a place where I knew that I didn’t really have, wasn’t allowed to have ambition really because there was no way to grow for me at work.” (Verity, P23)

“I had a mid-life crisis at 23/24 because I couldn’t see any value at all in what I was doing.” (Ethan, P11)

Nevertheless, the three gappers (Kiefer, P12; Verity, P23; Ethan, P11) came back with different opinions and intentions, for example Kieffer (P12), who shared his intention in getting different mind-set and finding courage from the trip, shared that the GYT experience gave him confidence in finding a more suitable job. This was predicted by Inkson and Myers (2003) who
argue that embarking on such trips may be useful for those who are not certain or indecisive about their career options and also in building self-confidence in terms of deciding on one's career options.

"It certainly makes you think that if you can do that, you shouldn't stop yourself doing any other job that perhaps before you would have been less confident doing... My job now is completely different to what I did before I left so I think that has changed me." (Kieffer, P12)

Similarly, Verity (P23) changed her employment and fulfilled her long-lost ambition for career and continuing education. Furthermore, she became more goal-oriented:

"Now I am more like, well you are going to do your job but you are going to do it really well, set that goal of what you want to achieve... automatically things will come with that and they have. I have been more recognized and been given more responsibility [at the work place], I have been allowed to be more creative... and they respect my expertise...I am allowing myself to be more ambitious... I am thinking of going back and doing some sort of evening education, diploma, certificate, degree, whatever it may be and to be more focused about it." (Verity, P23)

According to Verity (P23), her change was a result of both timing "timing is right within myself" and her experience during her GYT helped her to realise that "if I want to move forward in life,... I need to make change in my life." Clearly, making changes is part of the gappers' self-development plan, which in some cases is intentional. This raises another interesting question about whether one's outcome of learning is closely related to one's stage of life, one's own predisposition for learning and one's immediate surroundings (i.e. learning environment) (See also Chapter Three, Eight and Nine).

Ethan (P11), who needed to see a life coach intensively prior to the trip because of what he described as his disheartening job, returned and found a new job that suited him. He described the change between his old job and his new job to be "a massive difference." He felt better in his new job, in which he described as follows:

"On a daily basis I am doing something that is more aligned to my values around trying to be a positive impact on the world and try and help people and make the world a better place." (Ethan, P11)

The significant moment of change for Ethan (P11) may not have occurred only during the trip, but also before the trip as indicated in his statement below. Nevertheless, clearly Ethan was able to evaluate his values and understand what his values were in order to be able to find a job
that matched with them. Ethan’s (P11) statement below points out the possibility that embarking on GYT, in one way or another may also have healing potentials to the gappers, rather than merely a break. Bagnoli (2009) argues that travel can heal by allowing an inner search of self-discovery and renewal.

“I did quit because I wanted to go travelling, but I had been trying to build up the courage to quit for about six months before that and in the six months I had been going to see this life coach.” (Ethan, P11)

A few gappers interviewed were still at their educational stage, but were starting to think about their upcoming first graduate career. For them, taking up a training/internship opportunity during GYT could serve as a bridge between their study and future career. As explained by Melissa (P13):

“I was in need of experience and in need of putting my study into context ... You are in a work environment which is completely different from just being in the university.” (Melissa, P13)

Furthermore, Melissa (P13) also explained that the experience could be beneficial as it serves as a ‘proof’ that qualifies her in the field. This was also the case for other gappers interviewed; in fact, Ulrich (P14) explained below that his experience working abroad had the potential for increasing his employability. These findings are in line with the study of Jones (2004) and Inkson and Myers (2003) who suggest that some GYT experiences can serve as a tool that helps gappers toward employability.

“A lot of employers value that time spent in America so if I sent out application forms on paper at least, I look pretty good so I am able to get interviews.” (Ulrich, P14)

Unlike a few gappers who evidently intended their GYT as a transition opportunity to the workplace, Charlotte’s (P15) choice for working in disabled summer camp was reported to be originated as a personal quest, rather than a deliberate decision for career advancement. Nevertheless, she explained that the experience turned out to be “a big eye opener”, in which she described:

“[the experience] has made me more interested in what I want to do for my career... I would like to train as a clinical psychologist specifically in relation to developmental disabilities... I think without my experience over the summer then I wouldn’t quiet be able to do that.” (Charlotte, P15)
The experience at the camp has served as a route to Charlotte’s (P15) next job:

"There is no doubt that I wouldn’t have got the placement that I just got if I hadn’t got that job over the summer... They told me they were really impressed because I had experience with people with disabilities before I was 20, and that’s quite rare they thought, so that’s why I got the job.” (Charlotte, P15)

The general findings of this study suggest that undertaking a traineeship whether it is directly related or not to one’s study/career has positive impact on the gappers’ experience as it adds knowledge and also enables them to gain new skills. In fact, Holmlund et al. (2008) also document that post-university investment in skills during a gap year could provide gappers with higher earning potential, if the GYT included work experience. Felicity (P18) who did internships in two completely different fields articulated this: “I got an insight into what work life was like”. It was also reported that gappers gained an understanding of the working environment (e.g. the work ethics and professionalism, the employability requirement, the politics within the organisation, the industry, the labour market within various national and international boundaries, etc.). Indeed, the impact could be profound and may expand beyond the professional space, moving into the personal and as indicated earlier there is close exchange between personal and professional development of the gappers.

"It is some kind of revelation about the field... some kind of opening up your idea of what it actually means to be there and to work there firstly. Secondly, on personal level it also means a much better idea about my strengths and weaknesses in a professional kind of environment.” (Melissa, P13).

It is apparent from the interviews with the gappers that their trips provide them with time and opportunities to experience, observe and reflect on their future careers. Both for Melissa (P13) and Charlotte (P15) above, the experience helped them to learn about the reality of their chosen field of work. It was also apparent that they had become more aware of their choices, which Leary and Tangney (2003) argue is a critical factor in supporting identity work. The knowledge that they have alternatives available to them has empowered them immensely in deciding their future path, including their career. For example, after working various types of job (e.g. indoor, outdoor, working for others vs. working for himself, manual vs. deskwork), Perry (P1) has become more critical in choosing his path: “Do I really want to do this sort of life?” and suggests that “[the experience] really made me think.” This was also the case for Whitney (P19) who re-evaluated her decision on working with children, and for Jessica (P3) and Rebecca (P5) who considered moving to another country for their career. This is in line with Jones’
(2004:53) suggestions that GYT may provide “the opportunity to try out different occupations and make informed career choices.”

Based on the above, it could be inferred that what gappers do as activities, whether intended or not, could play an important part for their study/career choices. It could also be argued that if these activities are planned well and also performed well, they are potentially beneficial for the future. If so, these findings are in support of earlier suggestions by the United Kingdom Parliament (2000) and Jones (2004) that structured and well-planned activities during their GYT have their merits. Nevertheless, the findings of this current study, as discussed throughout also maintain possibilities that unintentional and unstructured activities may also have their own merits. They may simply provide different rewards to the gappers, and it might be that the value of these rewards is entirely based on the gappers themselves, on their openness to experience (i.e. personality) and their ability to learn from that experience (i.e. reflection, etc.). Hence, regardless of whether their working/training abroad experience was directly related or not, and was anticipated or not, it could be argued that the benefits are potentially of great magnitude both professionally and personally. There is also an interesting inquiry within the literature whether similar experiences abroad and locally make a difference – yet no study has thus far answered and researched this area of inquiry. Yves (P21)’s conviction supports this view:

“If I hadn’t been travelling then it is entirely possible that I would be in the same job now but I think that my outlook is different than before... Before I was more content with what I am doing; now I do find myself thinking about possible other jobs that I could be doing.” (Yves, P21)

Clearly, the gappers’ narratives confirm that GYT benefits provide gappers not only with the skills that enhance their employability, but also with career directions. Nevertheless, Jones (2004: 54) reminds us that the employability benefits of GYT are more applicable for graduate employment, but these advantages are diminishing for other employment.

7.5. LIFESTYLE BALANCE

Having a balanced lifestyle is a theme that resonates often throughout the data for this study and appeared to be close to the heart of the young gappers. All gappers interviewed indicated that they were feeling under pressure and overwhelmed by the amount of responsibility that they had at home, at school or at work and by society in general. The accounts shared by the
following gappers illustrate their search for a balanced lifestyle. This, according to Wetherell (2010), is identity work which represents itself as one’s quest on how to live.

Rebecca (P5) shared her desire for a balanced life and how she was not able to find it at home but felt that she had gained a new understanding after her trip:

"[I want to] swap the amount of work and the amount of leisure time and kind of having more of a leisure time and less of the work time... So I think my year out... was like a finding out if that’s possible and where it’s possible and what kind ways to manage that sort of leisure time increase... so it’s necessary now that we know that work isn’t essential to living..." (Rebecca, P5)

In accord with Rebecca’s reasoning, Verity (P23) expressed how her priority in life had changed with regards to her work life:

"Obviously we need to work to live, but it used to be sometimes that I lived to work. So that has switched... I am generally just much happier in my job which means that reflects in my life and as much as I love my job I will still work to live and not to live to work... I know the travelling has had an impact on that because I probably would have stayed in a rut." (Verity, P23)

While the balancing act in the case of Rebecca (P5) and Verity (P23) above is between work and lifestyle, the case of Melissa (P13) involves her attempting to find a balance between study and lifestyle:

"I realised that my life in Brussels was not the life I had in the UK.... Before I went to Brussels, I think I was just too focused on what I am doing in the university, not seeing life outside university as well... After, I am more aware of the importance of my experiences and what you make of them, and more determined to explore different things... The actual life in Brussels just makes everything complete for me, otherwise it would have been still complete in the sense of studying, but not in the sense of experience." (Melissa, P13)

It could be argued that Melissa (P13) had gained a broader perspective (as opposed to being ‘too focused’) which had an impact on her perspective on life, and her identity as a student. As previously discussed in the above section (Section 7.3.), Dylan (P4) also explored his options for his study and hence future career, with a bias towards enhancing his lifestyle and leisure time.
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“I met a lot of people travelling who did different things and have a good level of job satisfaction and life satisfaction...since I have been travelling I have been thinking a lot about, like I want to find a balance between a job and my leisure activity because I don’t want to live to work... I don’t want a job that is going to take over my whole life or to be driven massively in my job.” (Dylan, P4)

As can be witnessed from the gappers’ quotations above, the ethos of whether one “lives to work, or works to live” is a major concern for young people today. As Giddens (1991) argues, choosing a lifestyle is an inevitable and innate part of being an individual. Giddens (1991) also describes lifestyle not only as involving activities outside work, but also those which take place at work, and hence the gappers discussions above on living to work or working to live is clear evidence of the identity work done by the gappers. Hence, GYT arguably is not only a leisure pursuit but also an opportunity for gappers to claim/practice their identity, as well as for them to build their characters, explore their choices and gain some sense of direction in life. Through these experiences, gappers appear to have a more holistic perspective of their lives.

The above accounts suggest that some gappers embarked into GYT partly to search for a life balance, as well as new possibilities, whereas some take up this quest during or as a result of the trip, while for some they found the answers during their trip. As discussed earlier (see Chapter Six) on their relationship with others, especially in relationships with locals and wider society), young gappers assessed their options by comparing themselves with others and comparing their home societies with societies of the country they visited. While they were feeling pressured to conform to their home social contexts, the young people reported that they are able to see their situations more clearly and objectively during and as a result of their trip, and hence obtained the ability and courage to make decisions for themselves. This according to Muller and O’Cass (2001) is due to the availability of space for a gapper to perform identity work. As a result of their experiences, gappers tended to question the way they think, and the way their society is organised, challenging some of their previous assumptions and come up with their own beliefs on how to live their life.

In reviewing the three aspects of future direction: study, career and lifestyle management in this chapter, it is apparent that the three aspects of life management are intertwined with each other. In fact, it could be argued that there is a dynamic between the study/work aspects and lifestyle, in which a balance between them is continuously negotiated. While their study and work decision may influence their lifestyle, the opposite is also true: the young gappers’
decisions about lifestyles often are the deciding factors for the rest of their future plans. The patterns of changing priorities were articulated loudly by the gappers interviewed. Once again, Stokes and Wyn's (2007) conviction that lifestyle and leisure prove to take a central focus that may influence study and work choices for today's young people appears to hold some truth and is established in the findings in this study. Furthermore, Dwyer et al. (2005) argue that the core of increased emphasis on the lifestyle balance for modern young adults lies on the increased priority given to and intention of having time and space for developing oneself for the future.

7.6. CONCLUSION

The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the young gappers think about their future during and as a result of their trip. Some gappers who were not certain about their study direction eventually became more certain about their future plans; similar views were shared by gappers about their careers. Awareness on the importance of education and ambitions for further education are part of the outcome of and reflection on the GYT experience for gappers, which resulted in behavioural, attitudinal and motivational changes towards their education. Those who expressed discontent with their previous job shared and discussed their discontentment with each other which gave them motivation and confidence to try making changes in their career and in creating a work-life balance. Lifestyle balance is a theme that resonates frequently in the gappers' accounts. Gappers acknowledged both its importance and their past mistakes of not keeping a balance; they also shared that through their GYT experience they had some assurance that lifestyle balance is possible. As a result, gappers were encouraged to initiate a more balanced lifestyle, started to plan their future more carefully and have more holistic rather than narrow view of life (i.e. of only focusing on study/work).

The research in this area shows that identity is formed through past experiences, behaviours and memories (Locke, 1690) and that life planning is a sign of construction of self-identity (Giddens, 1991). While the previous two chapters of this current study discuss and highlight how the gappers learn by comparing and contrasting themselves with others, and their previous and their current selves, in this chapter the gappers' narratives indicate that they are looking towards the future by looking at their past. This provides an illustration of a time continuum in the mind of the gappers as they discuss their identities, which was illustrated within
the integrated framework in Figure 6. This also indicates that they are moving forward and are making progress with their transitions.

By reviewing their study direction, the gappers in essence were reviewing their potential identity as a student. It was discussed by some gappers that in asserting their next step as a university student, they had discussed their intention for studying with other gappers who were in similar situations or had gone through the situations. When uncertainties about their study directions turned into confirmation; this was a signal that assertion of their potential identity was confirmed through sharing with others. Once again, sharing is an important element of gappers’ learning and identity construction. In some cases, the assertion may not be a result of simple discussions with others, but a result of a turning point incident during the trip (e.g. in the case of Keanu (P7) who experienced incarceration). It is also possible that the sharing of experience does not resulting in certainty; in the case of Dylan (P4), the opposite is true: hesitation about taking a law degree was resulted. In either case, by reviewing and creating their plans for the future the gappers were processing their present identity and projecting it into their future identity.

The career gappers in this study described that they had experienced some sorts of dissatisfactions with their career life before embarking into their trips. The transformative learning theory by Mezirow (1991) and also the transition theory by Fisher (2005) and Adams et al. (1976) consider crisis as the beginning of the learning and transition experience, which suggests that these gappers embarked into a transition process that potentially results in personal transformation. These career gappers attempted to explore their occupational identities by releasing their old identities which allowed them to have a more objective view. They did this by either sharing their predicaments with others or by trying out new occupational identities during the trip, or both. As a result, they gain a clearer view of themselves, hence could plan the next step for their careers.

Living a balanced life is an essential component to the transitional success for young people today (Stokes and Wyn, 2007). This was clearly expressed by the gappers’ comments in this chapter: having a balanced life is of foremost importance for them. The gappers discussed the three life management areas (study, career and lifestyle) as closely related and having an impact on each other. Some gappers reported themselves as intentionally thinking about the future during the trip, while it was incidental for others. Nevertheless, they generally claimed to
have become more focused about their long-term goals as they saw GYT as an opportunity for ‘trial and error’ when making lifestyle choices. The gappers also suggest that the decision in undertaking the trip itself could also be equally important to the learning experience during the trip itself.

As suggested by the transitions theorists (e.g. Cooper, 1990; Evans et al., 1998; Fisher, 2005), life planning, goal setting and managing lifestyles are a few ways of managing transitions; in fact, these are the ways used by the gappers in this study to manage the directions for their study, their career or their lifestyle balance, which are also ways they used to negotiate their identities during their transitions. From all of the discussions above, it could also be argued therefore, that GYT is not just merely a ‘big trip’, but to some extent it is also a crisis prevention or intervention during a key transitional period of the gappers’ lives, as much as it is an enhancement to their transitional process (see also discussion in Section 3.6.).

Previous studies have not covered this area of discussion in much details, except that it provides an indication that outcomes of such travel is often related to career advancement (e.g. Inkson and Myers, 2003; Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005). The closest possible outcome related to life management is decision making as indicated in the study by Pearce and Foster (2007) and Scarinci and Pearce (2012), nevertheless little has been explored on what exactly is meant by decision making and choice as a learning outcome. The gappers in this study provided clarifications and explanations on how travel could enhance their life in terms of potential study and career advancement. It also clearly confirms the suggestions from transition /education literatures’ on the importance of life balance in the life of young gappers today (e.g. Stokes and Wyn, 2007); yet this has not been identified in travel and learning literatures as potential learning outcome.
CHAPTER EIGHT
HOW THE GAPERS LEARN:
EXPERIENTIAL AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PERSPECTIVES

8.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the gappers’ learning process from the perspectives of Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory and Mezirow’s (1991) Transformative Learning Theory. First, the gappers’ stories were analysed in terms of the four-stage experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Then, they were analysed in terms of the 10-phases of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). The chapter then concludes by summarizing the important key findings on the learning process of the gappers from the perspectives of these two theories.

8.2. FROM THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY PERSPECTIVE

The learning experience of the gappers portrays a complex, continuously changing learning process involving various cultural, social and economic factors which vary widely from the settings that gappers were used to in their home environment. Based on the gappers’ narratives, Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle (i.e. Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE)) was generally applicable although the gappers engaged in different ways with the four stages. The empirical data suggests that the theory of experiential learning is applicable in explaining the learning experience of the gappers in this study.

Stage 1: Concrete Experience (CE)

In sharing their GYT stories, the gappers illustrated rich variety of concrete experiences from sightseeing, relaxing, training, working as an au-pair or teacher to volunteering influenced by various travel factors (duration, destinations, modes, accommodations,
companions, activities and arrangements) as discussed within the literature review (see Appendix 1). The data suggest that each concrete experience within the trip is unique: "in every country there were significant experiences because it was either about the people that we met or, we did something special... your experiences are individual and unique" (Nicole, P22). While their concrete experiences are important from the perspective of leisure and enjoyment, not all concrete experiences were equally important to gappers' learning. Some concrete experiences were more significant, influential, and transformative than others (see also Section 8.3. below) and helped them grow and develop. Ethan (P11) illustrated this point by explaining the concrete experience which he deemed to be important for learning.

"Something where if something happens and you don't just go, oh great that has happened! And you forget about it, it is something that's because you remember it and think about it and you reflect on it and you tell other people the story; it's something that kind of sticks with you. And because it sticks with you and stays in your consciousness it may make it more of an active kind of process..." (Ethan, P11)

He then added:

"Because that experience is in my consciousness it is something that keeps influencing me, not something that just happened and then gets forgotten... it's just if you find yourself in a situation which may be has some similarity or relationship to an experience that you have had before then you tend to relate." (Ethan, P11)

It becomes clear that concrete experience represents the important first step of learning. Nevertheless, the data suggests that their previous experiences (i.e. prior to their trip) are also part of their learning process which implies that various Experiential Learning Theory processes happen simultaneously in the life of the gappers. In fact, many of the gappers' reflections and discussions focus on their life in general in relation to what they have experienced in life generally rather than the specific concrete experiences during the GYT itself. As will be discussed in the next step, the gappers tended to reflect on their previous life experiences during their GYT trip and may only made sense of their GYT experience later on when they had had time and space to reflect on it and themselves. It is also worth mentioning that the gappers tended to focus on their concrete experiences of and with others (i.e. socialising, interactions and encounters with others, e.g. companions, other travellers, locals,
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society, etc.) (see also Chapter Six). Furthermore, the gappers also highlighted the value of the ‘concreteness’ of the experience as they involved all aspects of their senses:

“[it is] like a double experience... I’m physically actually there, and it’s ‘wow’ even more impressive... I can smell it, I can hear it, I can see it, I can touch it so it’s far more in detail and you experience it yourself...” (Verity, P23)

Stage 2: Reflective Observation (RO)

While having a concrete experience is important, the gappers also highlighted the role of reflective observation as an integral part of their trip: “[it] is quite an important part, quite a big part of travelling...” (Dylan, P4) and most gappers discussed ‘reflection’ without invitation during the interviews. In fact, they explained that their reflection is an ‘organic’ process, whereby they do not actively, intentionally, or constantly try to reflect (Ethan, P11; Dylan, P4), on the other hand, “it was just a process that happened organically... without knowing it” (Nicole, P22), which tends to occur during the trip due to the availability of time and space (“you get a lot of time to think... (Dylan, P4); “a year to reflect on it without anyone influencing me at all” (Perry’s, P1)), hence there is a sense of freedom to reflect:

“Some time to be at peace... because in India your friends and family are the biggest influence on you.” (Verity, P23)

“It’s just having space from all of the other things that distract you... so you are just free to reflect.” (Nicole, P22)

When asked what the objects of their reflections were, they tended to focus their reflections on themselves, for example their past (i.e. their lives back home) and their future (i.e. their next steps in life). They often reviewed the life issues that they had not previously looked into more closely and in-depth whereby they reflected deeply about their life and who they were, on what was important to them, how they behaved, and how they had changed. In this process, they explained that they had an increased understanding and awareness about themselves, and grew and developed as a result.

“I think it was more evaluating my own life, what’s important to me, what’s not important to me and thinking what will I do?” (Verity, P23)

“Like the people, the experiences, and how it’s sort of changed me and how I acted in certain situations and whether I would have acted differently... on reflection now, I was quite immature when I was there, not like vastly but I
would probably do things differently if I was to repeat the experience.” (Charlotte, P15)

“What was important in life and what mattered and afterwards I got to know myself better and what I want out of life and what I need to do to get there.” (Nicole, P22).

The findings of this study provide an understanding that while reflecting on the past, there is also tendency for gappers to look forward and plan for their future, which in Experiential Learning Theory terms is part of an abstract conceptualisation process (AC – Phase 3 of Experiential Learning Theory Cycle) (see below). Furthermore, gappers reflected not only on their thoughts and behaviours, but they also reflected and became aware of their emotions as part of their learning experience (e.g. “... how I feel about people and my friends, and just sort of think things over in your head and analyse how you are feeling” (Dylan, P4)). Indeed, emotions play an important role on the gappers’ learning, in the concrete experience and the reflective observation phases alike.

While they reflected on their life back home during the trip, their narratives suggest that a short period is often required to pass to allow proper reflection on their GYT to occur. Hence, the gappers tend to reflect on their GYT experience more deeply after the trip when they returned home. This could also be explained by the fact that the GYT experience itself is happening in real time in which experiencing (Phase 1) becomes the main focus during the trip.

“I don’t think you realised it whilst it’s happening. I think you realise it when you get back.” (Daisy, P17)

Another important note about the gappers’ reflective observation process is that their reflective observations are often prompted by their conversations with others about their GYT experiences such as during the interview process of this study itself (see also Research Methodology Section on Reflectivity – Section 4.5.6.3.). If this is the case, sharing their concrete experiences with others appears to be an important factor in gappers’ learning (see also Section 8.3. on Transformative Learning below) which suggests that reflective observation indeed is an interpersonal process as well as an intrapersonal one. One gapper also commented: “It improves the way you process your surroundings as opposed to just taking it...“ (Dylan, P4) which implies that the more they reflect the better they are at reflection, and hence the learning process itself is enhanced.
Stage 3: Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)

During the interviews, the gappers perceived abstract conceptualisation as a process that is not necessarily easy to describe, pinpoint or comprehend (e.g. "I can’t really describe how it has changed my view but you just thinking differently afterwards" (Giovanni, P2), takes time to process (i.e. “It didn’t just happen like that in an instant, it happened over the whole period” (Whitney, P19), nevertheless has strong influence on their thinking process and often results in changes (e.g. perspective transformation see Mezirow, 1991): “I have become more philosophical now, I think about situations more...you start looking at things in different ways...” (Yves, P21). Indeed, the gapper stories suggest that the stage of abstract conceptualisation could be one of the most labour-intensive and challenging processes of experiential learning.

The gappers’ stories also suggest that the RO and AC phases are often linked closely. For example, in describing her learning process Melissa (P13) made personal reflective observations and evaluations on her strengths and weaknesses based on her concrete experience, while at the same time conceptualised her reflective observations and projected them in terms of what she should do for the future:

“I have a better idea. The first thing I realised is that I like doing research and I spend a good amount of time and effort to do good research. So that is a strength... I realised that one weakness on my side has been ... I was supposed to ask for more support if I didn’t see that I have enough support. I was simply not considering it as an option... there are many opportunities but you must be aware of them constantly and you must know in what ways to use your potential actually.... An awful lots of things become exposed about yourself... feedback is important, reflection is important... and the next step is ‘what happens next?’ ‘How will I change this in another type of context?’ Firstly, it comes through some sort of awareness of what has happened and then you have got to think of how you will change it when you are in a different type of environment... and you already know more about yourself... I have got to simply say to myself: ‘this is how I will do it’... I will not need to hesitate so much, because it destroys my final results... You simply have to figure out the things in advance and plan them in advance and then used certain resources and then come up with the final.” (Melissa, P13)

As illustrated in the case of Melissa (P13) above, reflecting, abstracting and planning seem to be simultaneous processes. This is further confirmed by Dylan’s (P4) explanation below which suggests that the process of abstract conceptualisation may not occur
immediately, but until there is a need for it. When a new situation arises, the gappers tend to reflect on, abstract from and plan for what to do next.

"It was a long trip. I was constantly learning new things, sort of what situations might make me happy and how I might react in a certain situation but then you almost forget what you learnt when you are trying to think about it out of context that when you are remembering it when you are in the same situation but then it sort of brings back your knowledge of how you feel or how you act or something, so it is hard to pin point exactly what things I have learnt about myself." (Dylan, P4)

In other words, gappers tend to conceptualize their previous concrete experience when a new concrete experience requires them to recall and make sense of similar previous concrete experiences (i.e. when they are re-living and or remembering their previous experiences).

**Stage 4: Active Experimentation (AE)**

As discussed at the previous stage, re-experiencing is an important part of learning. When the gappers' new concrete experience is similar to something they have previously encountered, they tend to recall the context through feelings and reactions (e.g. see also Dylan (P4) quotes above) which initiate their reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation process in order to decide on how to act in the new situation, as explained by Ethan (P11):

"If you find yourself in a situation which may be has some similarity or relationship to an experience that you have had before then you tend to relate." (Ethan, P11)

In this sense, the stage four of Experiential Learning Theory (i.e. Active Experimentation) is done through re-experiencing similar learning contexts. Ethan (P11) illustrates on how recollection of feelings and actions become the connecting factors between the past and the current concrete experience, which provide links between the abstract conceptualisation and experimentation stages:

"If you take me on the one hand being on the receiving end from their generosity, if I am back here [in England] and somebody says something, I can think back and think that is exactly where I was when I was in that situation, what did that person do for me, and can I do the same here as... it's not quite as conscious as that but I think that is the way it works." (Ethan, P11)

Clearly, the gappers' ability to actively experiment (Stage 4) depends largely on their ability to conceptualise and relate between old and new contexts (i.e. previous and current...
concrete experience) in Stage 3. As explained by Verity (P23), the ability of gappers to contextualise their concrete experiences is crucial, and so is being able to transfer this ability between various contexts (e.g. from GYT experience to situations at work, from an internship experience to university life, etc.) in determining a successful application of the learning process:

"It's just applying what you've learnt but in a different situation... as you grow older you take that with you and you take elements of certain things with you and apply it somewhere else... whereas now it puts it into perspective for instance at work..." (Verity, P23)

As Melissa (P13) highlights below, Active Experimentation as the final stage of Experiential Learning Theory holds a particular importance in completing the experiential learning process:

"I had the chance to apply from what I have learnt... it is important as how I will make use of all this past experience in a new kind of context." (Melissa, P13)

She once again highlights that experimentation is possible when one is aware of re-experiencing similar concrete experiences as well as being able to make connection:

"It is a lot about how you are applying them, but unless you are in that kind of situation you are not so aware of these things." (Melissa, P13)

Indeed, unless the gappers are fully aware, have the abilities and are willing to experiment, the experiential learning cycle may not be completed. The gappers' narratives suggest that while some stages of Experiential Learning Theory have been completed, others are still in progress. For example, Anna-Rose (P16) without intention had offended a local (the owner of a laundry centre in Malaysia) by questioning him about her ripped sarong, she was still in the process of abstract conceptualisation and was trying to understand herself and her motives in defending herself and her principles so strongly, and contemplated what she should have done in that instance. Since similar concrete experience had not occurred, the opportunity for experimentation had not arisen.
8.3. FROM THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY PERSPECTIVE

The findings suggest that not all of the phases described by Mezirow (1991) are represented in all gappers’ accounts and the precise correspondence to the phases as described by Mezirow (1991) varies. Furthermore, these phases were not necessarily experienced in sequence by the gappers and some of the ten phases were empirically more evident on than others. The application of each phase will be discussed in this section.

Phase 1: Disorienting dilemma

At various degrees, some sorts of dilemma (i.e. confusion, disorientation, etc.) have been experienced by many gappers. Nevertheless, the occurrence of the dilemma itself does not necessarily happen during the trip (e.g. as in the cases of McKenzie (P25) on breaking up with travel companion: “We made a mutual decision to not see much of each other just to give a bit of space... I felt quite upset and depressed at the time.”). It could also be a pre-existing situation in the gappers’ life in advance of the trip (e.g. being unhappy at work as in the case of Verity (P23); dropping out from university as in the case of Felicity (P18)) or occurring at the end of the trip itself as a result of shock in returning home (e.g. not liking her home and work environments and missing the children and her experience in Africa as in the case of Anna-Rose (P16)):

“Some of the children I think about and I wonder what they are doing there and hope that they are ok and I just sort of imagine being there and sometimes I think I would have been doing this now! Because now sometimes I am obviously stressed with university it is just nice to go back and think about being more carefree”. (Anna-Rose, P16).

In a few cases, the dilemma is resolved (e.g. Ethan (P11) found a fulfilling job: “Making that decision to go [travelling] was like a real cut... I am free from that job and people... [now] I am doing something that is more aligned to my values around trying to be a positive impact.”), while for others the situation remained unresolved at the time of the interviews. For example, Gabriel (P27) continued to be unhappy and expressed a desire to return to Australia in order to fit in his identity:

“I was happy throughout the whole thing, I didn’t feel homesick at all... it was a nice idea that I was going back but I was more upset about leaving Australia...
than I was happy about going home... I am now planning to go back [to Australia]... I have come back [to England] and now people accuse me of being an arrogant character". (Gabriel, P27)

In any case, the gappers' stories confirmed that dilemma often acts as catalyst for change as illustrated by Verity (P23) and Felicity (P18), which in both of their cases lead them to travelling:

"It was so significant for me to take a career break because I wasn't really happy at work; I didn't really know what I was going to do and which direction to go into, and I thought oh I am going to immerse myself into somewhere totally different." (Verity, P23)

"I was in a really weird situation after I left Uni[versity], I was really upset and everything and I just thought I wish I had a different outlook on life and when I went to these countries it kind of enhanced my outlook a bit more" (Felicity, P18)

Nevertheless, a few gappers appeared to not have experienced any predicament (i.e. no dilemma), although they also experienced changes. For example, in the case of Ella (P9) she did not experience any issues before, during or after the trip, however has experienced changes in perspective which led her to move from Korea to England. It is implied that, although dilemma may dramatically induce changes, it is not a necessary condition for the gappers to change. Even if there were changes of perspectives, they did not appear to have the negative connotations often associated with a major dilemma or crisis.

**Phase 2: Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame**

The data suggests that the gappers' reflective observation involved deep self-examination. In some cases, Mezirow's (1991) suggestion that the examination is associated with feelings of guilt or shame holds some truth in this study. For example, in the case of Gavin (P10) he felt guilty and shameful in coming from a well-off family. Taking the trip and volunteering in India for him was part of his exploration of these feelings which had already started before the trip:

"My girlfriend used to live in East London and then she moved to Essex and her parents have split up and she is not very well off and stuff like this and I felt like sort I had not been through any of that... I felt that I had it easy; they had to put up with more crap... I hadn't through anything like that at all before, like stuff was you know like I couldn't necessarily cope with... I just
 felt a bit guilty that I had not had to deal with anything, but this was a reason I wanted to go here.” (Gavin, P10)

Similarly, Keanu (P7) who spent time in jail in Hawaii also examined himself due to feelings of guilt and shame about his actions. In particular, he expressed how he felt about his guilt on how he had estranged himself from his family and treated them badly:

“Everyone was coming together to support me so it was really good. I felt that I didn’t really deserve it, to be honest because I was a bit of an ******* to them and for them to come all the way to Hawaii to come and see me and support me was... it was lifting but at the same time I felt really bad about it all, about stuff that had happened in the past.”(Keanu, P7)

However, the association with feelings of guilt or shame are not present in all cases of gappers. Quite the contrary, the negative feelings (e.g. guilt or shame) may be replaced by other feelings, even positive feelings. For example, Giovanni (P2) talked about happiness as a major part of his experience at the Camp in the US which he claimed caused changes in his life through a redefinition of the meaning of fun (see also earlier chapters of findings):

“I was so happy. I was thinking about this the other day like I think for me personally there has only been a few times in my life when I’ve been able to like go to sleep with a complete smile on my face worrying about nothing and that’s what in my mind is just like a pure happiness.” (Giovanni, P2)

Similarly, Ella (P9) also referred to happiness experienced during her trip in her self-examination, and reported that this was the reason that she decided to change her life and move to UK. Throughout her interview, she commented how she found happiness during her trip:

“I was just happy to meet other people from other countries...I was just in a small country before ... I was happy with just the small things in my country but now I want to learn more about other things... I want to meet more people and I want to make my life happier” (Ella, P9)

Hence, it is important to note here that emotions, both positive and negative, are a large part of the gappers’ learning experience. A few emotions reported include guilt, shame, anger, sadness, fear, boredom, confusion, and happiness, among others. As Giovanni (P2) commented, emotions experienced are likely to vary at various times during the trip: “During summer, I think I probably went through every emotion I can think of at some point.”
Phase 3: A critical assessment of assumptions

Many gappers felt that during and as a result of their trips their assumptions had changed whereby they started to question certain things or principles that they used to assume as true. For example, in the case of Melissa (P13), she explained that what she experienced during her internship during GYT was not what she previously imagined a working environment to be like, as opposed to studying and living a university life:

"It is giving me a lot of ideas about the area of work connected to the subject and also about my personal qualities and what I have brought to that working environment and how I can improve it". (Melissa, P13)

Based on this new understanding, she had the opportunity to review her assumptions and take a new perspective and approach (see also her comments on the previous finding chapters):

"It really makes you evaluate yourself through what is happening actually in the work environment and with the people you're communicating with because how is that different from the university? Very different because unless you're very active in the university... in the work environment it is just different because you communicate quite a lot more and it's more intense. You have more things to do sometimes less time for more things you have to do. So, it has made me realise some of the challenges." (Melissa, P13)

Similarly, Yves (P21) who had a fear of moving out and finding a new job, illustrated how his experience during his time abroad had brought him to a new assumption that these goals are within his reach:

"Having done travelling, a lot of things that before would seem like a big mission to do are actually quite easy to sort out. Because every time I compare it to an experience that I had while I was travelling I think, well actually this thing that I am thinking of doing isn't actually that hard to do because I did something similar back then. Things like moving out, when I was in Australia I had to find myself my own accommodation, coming back it seems fairly straightforward. It wasn't as big as hurdle as it was before I left ...Before I left I think I was living quite enclosed, and then when you go to other countries and see people younger than me doing more than me and doing it easily, you think, well hang on a minute, the stuff that I found difficult I shouldn't have found difficult at all...these things that back then seemed like, like opening bank accounts, and applying for jobs, going for interviews, going to look at houses which before would be quite daunting... [now] I don't think that I would be worried, I would be a lot more "ok, I can live with that". (Yves, P21)
In the case of McKenzie (P25), he reflected on his earlier view of solo travelling. Following a break down in the relationship with his travel companion, he stated that going solo and meeting others by himself was fairly rewarding and is no longer a hard and frightening task:

“At first, it was hard to deal with but afterwards it gave me a lot more freedom and it changed the shape of the trip and it made it more enjoyable for me to actually see things and do things and to meet new people. It is quite easy to meet new people when you are travelling about yourself as opposed to when you are with a companion I think.” (McKenzie, P25)

In analysing their previous assumptions, the gappers often assessed their deeper values, beliefs and identity in relation to what they had experienced. These comparisons have some resemblance to reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation in the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984). Hence as Mezirow (1991) argues, critical reflective observations are the key ingredients in the transformative perspective.

**Phase 4: Recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change**

There is strong evidence on the importance of sharing with others in the gappers’ accounts. The importance of others in the gappers’ experience has been noted in the previous finding Chapter Six on Relationship Building. Nevertheless, sharing with, listening to, and providing feedback with others on each other’s experiences are reported to be of particular significance for the gappers’ learning experience. A classic example was provided by Verity (P23) stating that when she shared her discontentment about her job being associated with long hours, feeling underpaid and lacking recognition, she received confirmations about her feelings by others who had similar experience of discontentment about their job:

“A lot of people went ‘yeah, yeah, yeah, I see where you are going I am in a very similar situation. So we were able to let our guard down and think about really where we were in life.” (Verity, P23)

Although Mezirow (1991) in particular discussed sharing one’s discontentment, similar to the earlier note in Phase 2 the findings of this study suggest that the gappers shared both negative and positive emotions, as well as confusion. Finally, it was echoed by the
gappers that the sharing process is not necessarily done with others who have similar experiences, but also with others who have different experiences and backgrounds in such that they learn from both of these similarities and differences, e.g. as illustrated in the first Phase 2 above where Gavin (P2) went to travel and volunteer in India to challenge himself because of his privileged upbringing:

“I had it easy in a sort of way, sort of naive... I meet people that have been through hardship and stuff and we talk about it... I sort of felt, I don’t know... very inferior to them, like I wasn’t deserving...” (Gavin, P10)

Thus, although it is clearly noted by some gappers that those who experienced similar changes provided more confirmation and support they also gained an understanding of themselves through discussions with others who had different backgrounds and experiences, as was in the case of Gavin (P10) above. Finally, Rebecca (P5) explained that sharing her thoughts and discussing with others clearly made a difference in her life. She explained how she made the decision on what to do next after her trip:

“It is mainly from my own experiences but also from talking to other people and what they have done and what they were doing when we met them so that was quite good, kind of grabbed ideas from different people, a good way of collecting ideas.” (Rebecca, P5)

**Phase 5: Exploration of options of new roles, relationships and actions**

To many gappers, taking GYT and the experience of GYT itself are acts of exploring various options. For example, some gappers used these opportunities to explore their career options through traineeships (e.g. Charlotte, P15), volunteering (e.g. Anna-Rose, P16), and working abroad (e.g. Yves, P21). In the case of Charlotte (P15), she felt that she had a better idea about potentially embarking on a teaching career as a result of her volunteering as a teacher in Tanzania, which she claimed would not be the same unless she experienced it first-hand.

“It was very eye-opening, like most of my family like my mum and my dad are involved in the teaching profession, yes my dad is a teacher and my mum works in a special needs school. So, I had heard a lot about teaching when I was younger. But it is very different when you actually do it, to keep control of the classroom, I thought it would be difficult but I didn’t realise just how difficult it would be. Especially when we had to teach young classes, like much, much younger it is almost impossible.” (Charlotte, P15)
Furthermore, Charlotte (P15) explained that she explored not only the role of a teacher in that experience but also experienced the responsibility of her role as an adult in her relationships with her students:

"I had worked in a full time job just for a couple of months to earn some money but this was like a job where the kids depended on me and where the head teachers were expecting a certain level of stuff. I had people to answer to and I didn't really have that responsibility before as so it makes you sort of buck your ideas up a bit because you had to put the effort in" (Charlotte, P15)

Some also travelled with the aim of ultimately moving to the new destinations, e.g. Rebecca (P5) and Gabriel (P27). As Gabriel (P27) shared below:

"The reason I stayed in Sydney for so long was because I was intending to see how liveable it was and that is why I did spend some time living and having a job rather than acting like a tourist because I did want to see what it would be like day to day.... I always did go with the intention of moving out there, potentially, later... It just confirmed one of the possible routes, I had several paths in front of me, I could stay in England or I could go to Canada or to America. And in that year, I went and I looked at Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, New Zealand as a whole, Vancouver, British Columbia as a whole and France, all the intentions was to see the live-ability." (Gabriel, P27)

Although originally not intended, the gappers admitted that their experiences had given them the opportunities to explore new relationships (e.g. with people they did not normally socialise with before their trip), new activities they had never done before, etc. For example, both Rebecca (P5) and McKenzie (P25) experienced breakdowns with their travel partners indicating that they had contemplated their options, e.g., going home early, staying with family, travelling solo, etc. They both also indicated that their experiences pushed them to explore new activities and travel routes other than those in their original plan. Nevertheless, on other cases these explorations were done at home upon their return (e.g. choosing their subsequent jobs/subjects to study, re-evaluating their relationships, etc.). Verity (P23)'s insights below provide an explanation about how she explored changing actions on her previous relationships:

"... you find out who stays in touch with you, who doesn't, who takes it for granted, who doesn't keep you posted about things... It probably goes hand-in-hand with the whole re-evaluating about yourself, about your friendships, and what your friendships and your loyalties are about... I started thinking..."
while I was travelling oh they didn’t treat me nice then, they weren’t loyal to
me so why should it go the other way around and that is where it sparked off.”
(Verity, P23).

Phase 6: Planning of a course of action

This phase is not necessarily one that was particularly evident in the gappers’ accounts
during the interviews. First, the data suggest that in some cases Phase 5 and 6 may go hand in
hand: gappers often considered their options and made plans simultaneously. For example,
Ethan (P11) had a good tour experience which he explained: “a whole day of solid enjoyment
was quite a novel experience” as he had previously always rationed his travelling days. His
narrative below illustrates how he simultaneously explored his options and planned his next
course of action based on this experience:

“Up until that point, when you are travelling you are trying to ration your
money... you end up almost in this kind of rationing pattern of thought that if
you have got a week in a certain place and there are five things that you want
to do we will try and spread them across those five or six days... I guess for me
it was questioning why do you always ration everything and try and spread the
bits of fun across a week or two weeks, when you are somewhere, why not just
try and fit in as much as you possibly can everyday and get the most that you
can out of every day that you are there. So it kind of highlighted that you can
do that and sometimes it is good to do that.... and then we went into that [re:
way of thinking], that was kind of on our way towards leaving Australia and
when we went to Asia. Obviously we had about four months or so to go
overland through Thailand to all those other countries to Japan and there were
a lot of things that we wanted to do and if we had still been in the mentality
that we were when were in Australia we would have probably thought well
there is five things to do why do we try and do three of them because we don’t
want to rush but instead we were off the mentality where there are five things
to do let’s go into all of them... Yes, it was kind of like a bit of a turning point...
that four months in Asia was a lot more tiring than the six months in Australia
but I felt that we got a lot more into that time and got a lot more then out of
that time as well.... You’ve earned the right to be tired and you feel kind of
fulfilled as well.” (Ethan, P11)

Second, the main reason for Phase 5 and 6 to go hand in hand may be the gappers have
undertaken their course of action into their lives by the time of the interviews as was also in
the case of Ethan (P11) above. By the time of the interviews, the gappers had obtained new
jobs (e.g. Ethan (P11), Kiefer (P12), Verity (P23)), entered into their education period (e.g.
Naomi (P24), Felicity (P21)), advanced their relationship situations (e.g. Whitney (P21),
McKenzie (P25)), etc. Therefore, although the gappers indicated that they were planning their actions as they tried out or explored their options the planning of a course of action phase was not discussed at a great length. It also appeared that this phase of planning was an integrative component of the Reflective Observation (RO) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) process (Cycle 2 and 3; Experiential Learning Theory) in which, as the gappers reflected, they also conceptualised and planned what they would do next. Similarly, the gappers' expressions when explaining Cycle 3 of their Experiential Learning was also limited (see Section 8.2.).

For the reasons mentioned above, only a few gappers voiced their plans clearly during the interviews. In some cases, the gappers may have explored their options but may not necessarily have been ready to make any plans of action. For example, Rebecca (P5) who used her GYT as her way to explore her options to move abroad when the time came explained:

"I think I wasn't sure what I wanted. I was a bit indecisive, I knew that I did want to travel but I had no idea where I could start, what I would do, what the possibilities were, but after experiencing it and coming back, now I know what my options are, what I can do." (Rebecca, P5)

In the case of Gabriel (P27), he also used his GYT trip to explore his options for moving abroad as previously illustrated by his comments in Phase 5. While exploring all of his options, he also projected his future plans. GYT often became the means as much as the cause and effect of long-term future planning in many gappers' lives.

"I have always dreamed about moving to from England for a while and as I say I do want to come back to England eventually, in 15 years or maybe 10 years or so but I would like to go and make a life out there first, and who knows if it's going really well out there I will stay out there, and if it's going really well then who knows maybe I could have a company that is in both parts of the world. We will see because if it doesn't go well then I can always move back here.... I think what it [re: GYT] did it just confirmed that Australia is the place to be." (Gabriel, P27)

Phase 7: Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

Similarly to Phase 5 above, Phase 7 is often represented within the GYT experience itself. For example, many gappers undertook traineeships and volunteered in order to put what they had learned into practice (e.g. Ulrich, P14), to get some fieldwork experience (e.g. Melissa, P13), to have a feeling of working in the fields (e.g. Whitney, P19), etc. Charlotte
explained how she acquired new knowledge and skills that she felt necessary for her future career. She explained her ambition:

"I would like to train as a clinical psychologist specifically in relation to developmental disabilities." (Charlotte, P15)

Therefore she was interested in having an experience at the disabled camp:

"The job we had to do at camp was caring for them, like we would have to get them up, dressed, breakfasted, take them to various activities like sports, music and stuff throughout the day and then basically do the same when they go to bed and stuff." (Charlotte, P15)

And as a result she felt more capable, competent and confident in her abilities (see also Charlotte (P15) notes on Phase 9), hence it could be argued that the process of knowledge and skills acquisition (Phase 7) often goes hand in hand with the process of building competence and self-confidence (Phase 9), whether this synchronism is intended or not.

Similarly, the trip itself often represents a gain in knowledge and skills, e.g. learning facts about various destinations (e.g. Dylan, P4: "these places were all they were so interesting because they are very different culturally to the UK"), learning how to live independently without immediate parental support (e.g. Gavin, P10: "I did go over there to learn but different kind of stuff like how to live by myself...I have always wanted to live somewhere else"), learning how to take care of oneself (e.g. Perry, P1: "...cooking wasn't new to me, cleaning up wasn't new to me so it kind of prepared me for uni[versity] quite well, prepared me for living on my own") and others (e.g. Charlotte, P15: "I had to learn a good amount of respect for other people because when you are in like a care job you are responsible for very intimate hygiene for other people"; see also Section 5.2.3. in Chapter Five), learning how to deal with surprises and setbacks (e.g. Rebecca, P5: ‘broken car’ ‘stolen bag’ ‘being lost’), learning how to socialize with others (e.g. Yves, P21: "I was hoping that it would improve my people skills... I look back and I think I did quite well there, I managed to meet people and chat to them without a lot of problems and I have kept in touch with quite a few of them"; see also Section 6.4 in Chapter Six), etc., which as previously discussed was considered important by many gappers.

While the gappers gained various knowledge and skills during their trips - be they planned or unintentional, there is little evidence within the data that the gappers intentionally acquired specific new knowledge and skills after their trips for later implementation, with a
few exceptions of those who went for internships or had some generic desire to learn. In fact, it appears that these acquisitions were part of the organic process of the GYT itself. In any case, the knowledge and skills acquired during the trip were reported to be beneficial in the gappers’ life back home.

Phase 8: Provisionally trying out new roles

The gappers tried out their new roles both during their trips as well as when they returned home. Many gappers felt that they learned by undertaking new roles during their trips, mainly as independent travellers, as well as other roles such as being a teacher (e.g. Kiefer, P12), a disability care taker (e.g. Charlotte, P15), a nanny (e.g. Whitney, P19), an employee or trainee (Melissa, P13; Felicity, P18), taking a leadership role among younger travellers (e.g. Gabriel, P27) or at the camp (Giovanni, P2), etc. As discussed in the previous chapters, by undertaking these activities the gappers gained new understandings about the roles they undertook, and more importantly they provided gappers with further insights into how the new roles influenced their values, beliefs and identities, as well as building their confidence (discussed in the next step). For example, Whitney (P19) stated that by being an au-pair for a wealthy family and witnessing how the children grew up, she realised the importance of her role as a nanny (i.e. a responsible adult) and was also reminded that she valued friends and family over wealth. She explained that her role as a nanny has brought about changes on how she played her role as a child at home (see also Section 5.2.3. and 5.2.5. Chapter Five) and impacted on her view of her relationship with her mother:

“It made me aware of how much mothers must struggle and how much there is to do... I am certainly more helpful to my own mum, me and my sister must have been little terrors, to understand how difficult children can be it makes you far more appreciative of people who are in authority over you.” (Whitney, P19)

Similarly, from her experience of volunteering as a teacher, Charlotte (P15) learnt the significance of the role she played in her students’ well-being and hence saw the importance of professionalism. Upon returning home, the gappers also returned to their new roles (e.g. getting the new jobs, becoming students, or old roles, e.g. as a child, etc.) Their narratives suggest that looking at broader possibilities that were different to their previous roles had an impact on how they saw themselves. For example, Verity (P23) explained that taking a break
from the role of employee and discussed her work issues with fellow gappers gave her a new perspective at work:

"I always go "yes, that is fine, yes I will do it, yes I will stay longer, yes I will work at the weekend" and they were taking liberties basically whereas now I am in a different workplace and I am probably still saying yes, not as much, but here I get a thank you and a well done and an e-mail to recognize that, a better wage, just people smiling at you more just being appreciative of what you do and that's just changes so much." (Verity, P23)

Clearly, this phase is once again part of the concrete experience itself (Stage 1 of Experiential Learning Theory) for the gappers.

Phase 9: Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

As previously discussed, the gappers built competence and confidence through doing by experiencing and re-experiencing. Hence it could be argued that Phase 9 occurs simultaneously along with Phase 7 and 8, rather than as separate steps. As the gappers experience their new roles, they gain new knowledge and skills and hence build competence and confidence in themselves and their abilities. This confirms Mezirow's (1991) contention that the competence and confidence built are directly related to the specific roles and relationships which occur. For example, by teaching English in China, Kiefer (P12) who did not originally believe in his ability to stand up and speak in front of others, reported that he did not only build his competence but also his confidence, which helped him in his future career:

"In China, I took up teaching and that's certainly helped me build up my confidence as before I left England I certainly wouldn't want to teach 30 people that I hadn't met before, ... and you gradually build up your confidence and you are more happy to teach whoever you see." (Kiefer, P12)

Similarly, Charlotte (P15) who volunteered in taking care of disabled adults at the camp during her GYT built her competence and confidence, which resulted in her being accepted for clinical job at the age of 20 (see also her narratives on Phase 7). She stated:

"Now I am very capable of that work and I am trained to work with people with certain types of disabilities and I can use a lot of medical equipment that I didn't use before, so I think at the end I felt quite confident." (Charlotte, P15)
She also affirmed the link between experiencing and building confidence by stating:

"Doing this experience just re-affirm who you were, what you are capable of and your confidence each time you do it, it gets more set in you." (Charlotte, P15)

In terms of competence, a number of gappers gained a lot of skills and knowledge as discussed in Phase 7. When the skills and knowledge are considered as necessary, they continue to build the competence that will benefit them for the future. For example, Ella (P9) who had basic English at the beginning of her trip, decided to take an English course and returned to learn further:

"At the beginning, I really couldn't speak English at all, there was a reason to study English there. It was like when I met people I could communicate a bit but I wanted to communicate more about our things so it made me I had to study English here [for] the seriousness of the conversation in English." (Ella, P9)

Phase 10: A reintegration of new assumption into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

The application of the reintegration phase varies largely for each gapper. To some the application may occur at a faster rate than others, for whom the integration may take longer. A few examples have been illustrated throughout Chapter Five to Chapter Seven, as well as in this current chapter, in which some applications took place during the trip itself, others would take place upon return to the home country, while some were in progress at the time of interview. In the example of Yves (P21), some integration of the new assumption took place although the integration was not necessarily complete:

"Before I left I was living at home and was in the same job, although I have come back into the same company, I am now doing different job. One of the things that I said to myself when I went away was that when I come back that I want to move out of home and I sort of came back with goals whereas before I was just plodding along without really doing anything. So I think in that respect it has made me more focussed." (Yves, P21)

Nicole (P22) explained how her materialism diminished during the trip and this also impacted on her need for possessions upon returning home:

"So for me in India,... it was like a culture shock and initially you are quite moved by the poverty but then when you start to see behind that and
understand a bit more actually these people live very simply but very happy. When I got home we had to live out of a bag for five months and didn’t really need a lot of material goods and possessions and so had really simplified our lives. Here you are used to a lot of luxuries and you don’t actually need a lot of that to be happy.” (Nicole, P22)

Integrating the new assumptions or changes learnt from the trip may not be straightforward, since the gappers’ environments during and after the trip were dynamic, i.e. the changing environment during the trips and changing circumstances after the trip (e.g. going to the university as a new student or returning student). Nevertheless, in some cases these dynamic circumstances may make integration of new assumptions easier. Gabriel (P2) provided an example on how he was integrating what he had learnt about his sociability into his life:

“Mainly it’s good timing because came back from the US and then three weeks later university started which is obviously going to be a very social place... so the social level never had to drop again... I guess that the timing was really good.” (Gabriel, P2)

8.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the gappers’ learning process was reviewed from the perspective of both Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991). It was discussed that both theories have some applicability on the gappers’ learning process, nevertheless variations are apparent. Nevertheless, the use of both theories complements each other for a more thorough comprehension of GYT Learning (GYTL).

The evident from the gappers’ stories highlighted the importance of Concrete Experience (CE) and Reflective Observation (RO) as suggested by Kolb (1984). Furthermore, the Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) stage appear to be an important stage for their learning in which the gappers are trying to make sense of their concrete experiences and their reflection of them. Unless the gappers are able to conceptualise their experiences and reflections, they are likely to go through the new experience in the same way without making any major changes; the gappers are only able to move into the Active Experimentation (AE) stage fully if they had gone through the Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) properly. On the other hand, re-experiencing similar experiences often provoke the need for Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) process to occur. It was also found that along with cognitions, emotion is an important part of their learning processes, which helps to link past concrete experience to the current one. Clearly, the
The transformative learning theory by Mezirow (1991) is also highly applicable to the GYT experience despite of the relevance of the ten steps may vary largely for each individual gapper and each individual experience. First, the sequence of the phases is not perfectly aligned with the actual process of the gappers’ learning (i.e. the steps do not necessarily run in sequence and some phases may occur simultaneously with other phases). Second, the significance of each phase varies in comparisons (i.e. not all steps are applicable to each gappers’ experience, e.g. some phases are eliminated). Third, variations exist within one or more phases (i.e. emotions felt are negative and positive rather than merely negative). Furthermore, some of TL phases appear to have some resemblance to the Experiential Learning Theory cycle.

As discussed in-depth in Section 3.2.2., the application of learning theories into travel literature, in particular to GYT experience is scarce. Therefore, the above theoretical evaluation of the gappers’ learning process from both experiential learning and transformative learning theories is an important foundation in understanding the actual step-by-step process of GYTL. This will be discussed in further details in Chapter Nine.
Chapter Nine - Gap Year Travel Learning (GYTL) Process

CHAPTER NINE

HOW THE GAPPERS LEARN:

GAP YEAR TRAVEL LEARNING (GYTL) PROCESS

9.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reveals the gappers' learning process step-by-step, using the combined and integrated perspectives of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory and Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory. It starts by reviewing the formation of the six steps of GYTL process. Then, each step is discussed in further details followed by a discussion of the concept application before a summary is offered in conclusion to the chapter.

9.2. GAP YEAR TRAVEL LEARNING (GYTL) PROCESS

It is evident from Chapter Eight that some stages of Experiential Learning Theory and some phases of Transformative Learning Theory are more directly applicable than others and the order in which these learning stages or phases occur is not necessarily as suggested by the two theorists. Nevertheless, the two theories are complementary to each other in illustrating the process of GYTL that the gappers went through. Table 13 offers a synthesis of the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991) as they apply to the GYTL process on the basis of the findings of this study. The table offers a six-stage model of the GYTL process.

The table was derived by the four stages of the Experiential Learning Theory and the ten steps of Transformative Learning Theory. These stages and phases are presented on the left side row of the table illustrating how they contribute to each of the six steps of GYTL process through the shaded area. As can be seen from Table 13, the contribution each stage and phase to the steps of GYTL process vary largely. This will be discussed in more detailed in Section 9.3. to 9.8. below.
Table 13. Six Steps of Gap Year Travel Learning (GYTL) Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 Experiencing</th>
<th>Step 2 Internal: Self-Reflecting</th>
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9.3. **STEP 1: EXPERIENCING**

Experiencing is Step 1 of GYT Learning process since all gappers’ narratives suggest that Concrete Experience (CE) is an important component of their learning. As discussed in Section 8.2., experience represents both their actual GYT experience (i.e. travelling, volunteering, meeting others, getting sick, etc.) and the experience they had before embarking to their GYT (i.e. studying for A-levels, living at home, planning for the trip, working at the previous job, etc.). Their experience is the central point of their learning, i.e. the subject of their examination in relation to the self (see Step 2 of GYTL), what they discuss and share with others (Step 3), what they are trying to comprehend fully (Step 4) which in turn helps them to change and adapt to the new situations (Step 5 and 6), etc. Brayden (P8) explained why experiencing is a particularly important first step of learning:

"You always hear what life is like in Africa that you never know until you go for yourself.... I am assuming it’s true that you don’t know the depth of it until you go... all the little things that you never realise, everything that you don’t see. It makes your picture of life in a different country with a different culture more complete... and it’s that kind of thing all the small things that you never see that gives you a better understanding.” (Brayden, P8).

The findings also suggest that experiencing represents both the beginning and the end of the gappers’ learning process, therefore making the GYTL process a cycle. This cyclical nature of learning is recognised in the Experiential Learning Cycle, but not in Transformative Learning Phases. While Mezirow (1991) argues that a disorienting dilemma needs to precede learning and hence was placed as Phase 1 in Transformative Learning, the findings of this study suggest that this is not the case. Although disorienting dilemma is often an important part of their learning, not all gappers experienced disorienting dilemma in advance of their trip (i.e. the first step of their learning) and those who did not report of experiencing any disorienting dilemma still exhibit that they have learned and changed. Furthermore, it also appeared that profound new experiences (i.e. extraordinary and unusual experiences) may have similar role or impact to disorienting dilemma in causing GYT learning to occur.

Those gappers who experienced a disorienting dilemma indicate that dilemma may occur before, during or after their trip. The following stories by Dylan (P4) and McKenzie (P25) illustrate these points. In the case of Dylan (P4), a disorienting dilemma came as a result
of his GYTL (i.e. he became a little uncertain and started to question whether his original plan to study Law is the right choice), which he then needed to resolve upon his return from GYT.

"I am pretty much the same person just probably slightly less hard-working [laughs]... Before I went travelling... I thought that it was quite important to have a job of a quite a high status, a job that is well respected, in that sort of way. But since I have been travelling I have been thinking a lot... I don't want the most important thing in my life to be my work I want it to be my friends, family and my happiness basically. So now I am thinking that maybe I want to go into something slightly less different." (Dylan, P4)

Through his narrative below, McKenzie (P25) explained that his dilemma occurred during the trip when he experienced a breakdown in his relationship with his travel companion and was forced to make a decision on whether to continue the trip by himself or to return home.

"We argued a fair bit and it was more the way we split paths like in she decided to go off on her own way because a mutual friend of ours flew out to travel with us... and they decided to go travelling without me. At the time it was very difficult for me to hear, so I was not really sure about travelling by myself or to understand how they can make that decision and I wouldn't have had a say about myself at all... So obviously because of that I felt quite upset and depressed at the time, I didn't really speak to them very much and I left and went back to the hostel and subsequently came down with the flu,... for that period of time I was very depressed for about a week and contemplating perhaps flying home as well with the remainder of my money." (McKenzie, P25)

As can be seen from the case of Dylan (P4) and McKenzie (P25), disorienting dilemma if occurs is likely to take place immediately after the experience and before reflection. In essence, this first phase of Transformative Learning Theory (i.e. disorienting dilemma) is an intermediate step between Step 1 and Step 2 (see illustration in Figure 9 and 10 in Section 10.3.3.).

Furthermore, it was found that experiencing during GYT may also represent an active experimentation process (Experiential Learning Theory – Phase 4) for the gappers. This is mainly due to the nature of the GYT activities itself, e.g. the gappers’ activities are often experiences that are completely novel to them and that short period of GYT often accelerates the speed of the learning process. The gappers’ experiences also represented a few phases of learning, i.e. GYT experience may also involve the gappers’ efforts in trying out new
opportunities, gaining knowledge and skills (e.g. volunteering, teaching, etc.) and becoming more competent and confidence, which are Phases 7, 8 and 9 of Transformative Learning.

The experience of Ulrich (P14), for instance, provides evidence of this process. He went to the U.S. to obtain some professional experience on a training programme at a luxury hotel. As a business management student, this experience is an opportunity to learn about a new field for him as the hospitality is not his major study nor has it been the industry that he previously worked in. Among the new knowledge and skills he learned were socialising, cultural adaptation, customer service and article writing. As a result, he explained that he becomes more certain about his ability to get into a managerial role one day. His narratives painted an increased sense of confidence:

"You become good at it... it [the career opportunity] is appealing to me and I would like to go back there one day... it's all about employability for me, trying to make yourself more attractive to other employers to see that you are more likely to kind of break away from what everyone else is doing do something which is unique." (Ulrich, P14)

9.4. STEP 2: INTERNAL DIALOGUING - SELF-REFLECTING

According to the gappers' narratives, the next two steps of their learning focus on examining themselves - the first involves self-reflection (Step 2) and the second involves discussing their experiences and reflecting on them with others (Step 3). As discussed in the previous findings chapters, their self-reflexivity is mainly enhanced by the availability of time and space during GYT. Reflection has been reported by all gappers interviewed, and was also highlighted in their narratives as a very important part of their GYT by them.

This Step 2 of GYT Learning represents Kolb's (1984) second stage of Experiential Learning Theory (i.e. Reflective Observation (RO)). The gappers' active observation of their surroundings during the trip deepen their reflection of their previous experiences at home as they then have two different subjects to compare and contrast, i.e. their previous experience back home and their new experience at hand. Due to the geographical and cultural distance, their perceptions of the differences on their experiences are reported by the gappers as significant.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Six (see Section 6.5.), Rebecca (P5) compared and contrasted her perceptions about work at home in the UK and abroad before and after her
travel, in which she noted that there was more pressure of having to work in order to live in the UK whereas her experience during GYT showed that combining work and leisure is an option. Her reflection prompted her to think more deeply about work-life balance and how she could manage this:

"It's like a conflict going in my head... at the moment it's just like struggling all the time to try and keep it going... [perhaps] the end of my struggles is when I go and live abroad." (Rebecca, P5)

Her narrative above also provides an example that the reflection of the gappers may also to lead to confusion and disorientation in the first instance, which is often a symptom of a disorienting dilemma as a result of GYT. As discussed in Step 1, it also appeared that although the occurrence of disorienting dilemma is not within a fixed step of the GYT Learning process, the narratives of the gappers suggest that if it occurs disorienting dilemma usually happens between Step 1 and Step 2 (i.e. embedded between the actual experience and before the gappers’ reflection process).

Similarly, when they returned home from their GYT, the gappers were also comparing and contrasting their GYT experience and their new experience returning home (see also Section 8.3.). Anna-Rose (P16) and Connor (P20) shared their reflections:

"I think of Africa differently now... I don't think I have ever really thought about it before, I just thought of the fact that people were less privileged, and they do have proper systems and towns... there are a lot similarities as well that I didn't realise about, like the Post Office and the library and the bank but the difference is that there is kind of corruption behind the door...in the past my boyfriend wants me to go to a festival with him but the tickets have sold out so I would have spent nearly twice the amount to get a ticket so now I just think like all that money could send five children to school." (Anna-Rose, P16)

"You go to India, you see on the street people with leprosy no legs and no arms they are still smiling. They are begging for money but they've got a smile on their face and you see people who've got no money but they are happier than people who are on £100,000 a year in England. Well again, it’s different cultures and how people live out there and what they do and how they go about their daily lives and what they survive on compared to the west and they've not materialistic really compared to people in the west and everything here is driven by money and materialistic culture where things are completely different over there.... Well it makes you sad I mean obviously knowing you come from a country that has enough and there’re people out there in the world living like that ant there's nothing you can do about it I suppose.” (Connor, P20)
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During the reflection process, the gappers continue to reflect on their experiences (i.e. comparing their experiences) until they arrived at the next stage where they are ready to discuss these reflections with others (Step 3). These reflections at times presented themselves in the form of inner-conflicts (i.e. disorienting dilemma as discussed above), in which the gappers try to reconcile the differences to arrive at a successful conclusion later on during the abstraction step (Step 4).

The fact that they have experienced new surroundings and have met new people abroad first-hand means that the gappers had the opportunity to involve themselves in situation which evoked both their emotions and cognitions. As stated earlier by Dylan (P4) in Chapter Six: “my feelings were changed by people around me.” In the previous finding chapters (Chapter Five to Chapter Eight), it was also discussed that the gappers have discussed the influence of emotions in their learning outcomes and learning process.

Phase 4 of Transformative Learning Theory (i.e. recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change) is represented in this step of GYTL. Nevertheless, unlike what Mezirow (1991) originally suggested, this study found that this process is not always accompanied by discontent or negative feelings such as guilt or shame. Indeed, the gappers shared both positive and negative emotions and content and discontent experiences with others. These have been discussed earlier in this chapter (See Section 8.2 and Section 8.3).

9.5. STEP 3: EXTERNAL DIALOGUING - DISCUSSING WITH OTHERS

The Step 3 of GYTL is examining oneself through discussion with others. This is an important step which has been ignored in Experiential Learning Theory but has been clearly recognized in Transformative Learning Theory (i.e. Phase 4 - recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change). As discussed in Step 2, the gappers are not only sharing negative emotions and experiences but also positive ones. Furthermore, the gappers’ narratives attested to the fact that learning does not necessarily come from sharing with others who have similar experiences, but from those who have different experiences as well. In fact GYT provides the gappers with wide opportunities to meet and mingle with others who they did not usually
encounter in their country of origin, hence allowing them to share with others who come from different backgrounds and experience too. As illustrated by some of the gappers earlier, the people they met come from all cultural, social, economic and educational background. For instance, Perry (P1) was convinced to go to the university by the gappers who he met during the trip were university graduates; Giovanni's (P2) perception about fun and happiness changed through encounters with co-workers who exhibited carefree attitudes; Dylan (P4) met people from different cultural background who evoke his passion for culture; and Gavin (P10) who learnt other people's difficult economic situations. As discussed and illustrated in Chapter Three (Section 3.3.; Figure 5), emotions are not only important elements of learning, but are also an integrated part of their transition process.

While it is implied that learners reflect and observe their surroundings in Kolb's (1984) Phase 2 (i.e. from Reflective Observation), the importance of their discussion with others is not represented in Experiential Learning Theory. In fact, it is one of the criticisms of the theory (i.e. its experience and reflection "occurs in isolation" and not considering "interaction with other humans and the environment" (Miettinen, 2002: 37); see also Section 3.2.4.2.). The findings of this study clearly suggest that reflection is not complete without any integration with the learner's surroundings (e.g. interactions with other gappers with whom they work/travel, reflection on the different environments, etc.).

Step 2 (i.e. examining oneself through self-reflecting) and Step 3 (i.e. examining oneself through discussing with others) of GYTL are closely connected to each other, and are different types of dialogue. In most cases, the gappers reported that they have reflected on themselves before they share their experiences with others; in other words the gappers need to have the ability to self-reflect first in order to be able and ready to share these experiences with others and to make sense and relate on the experiences of others. On the other hand, in their narratives some of the gappers also explained that interactions and discussions with others are what provoked their inner reflection. For example, in the case of Keanu (P7) who stated that he reflected about his way of living after his encounters with in-mates during his serving time (see also Section 7.3.):

"Over there they [the in-mates] taught to me a lots about seniority, you have to respect people that are older than you and that's the way you kind of develop a discipline that way... they told me if you are not up to it then
make the best of your last chance, like your last chance to get out, so it was a good lesson for me, I learnt a lot." (Keanu, P7)

It became clear throughout the gappers’ narratives that Step 2 and Step 3 work reiteratively as a two-step process that helps the gappers in understanding themselves through sharing and listening experiences with others. For instance, Gavin (P10) shared that part of the reasons for embarking to GYT after reflecting on the background differences between him and his girlfriend (i.e. that he has lived a much more privileged life with no financial and family problems compared to her): “I’ve always been a bit more well off than my friends... so I wanted to go somewhere and live just the same as what the people there live like” (Gavin, P10). During his teaching volunteering activities in India, he met and discussed his feelings and experiences with others, one of which is his teaching mate who also experience difficulties like his girlfriend did which helped him to reflect further and make sense of his life and the lives of others around him. As illustrated in Gavin’s (P10) story, Step 2 and Step 3 are mutually conducive, in which one step is not complete nor does it generate the desired result without the other.

By preparing the gappers to become more aware of themselves (e.g. their life experiences, emotions and way of thinking, etc.) from their exchanges with others, the examination steps (Steps 2 and 3) are foundations to the next important step of abstracting (i.e. Step 4 of GYTL). Step 4 is one step forward that requires them to make sense of their emotions, experience and reflections further at a higher level.

9.6. STEP 4: ABSTRACTING

Abstracting is an important step (Step 4 of GYTL) that proved to be both challenging for the gappers, but also represented a significant leap in their learning. Abstracting represented the most thought-intensive (i.e. cognitive) part of the cycle. It was found that not all gappers were able to immediately complete the abstraction step in GYTL. In particular, this is the case when they experienced a major shift that challenges their understanding about the world and/or how it works (i.e. their original assumptions were being challenged). In Section 8.2., an example of Anna-Rose (P16) was given; she found it difficult to synthesize her experience about offending a local by unconsciously appeared to accuse him in her approach about her ripped sarong, and what it meant about her attitude on the need for being
right. During the interview, she clearly still exhibited unresolved feelings and thoughts about this incident and has not arrived to a conclusion about the experience:

"I was just asking, I wasn't even asking for my money back or sort of anything, I was just, I don't even know what I wanted, I don't know if I wanted an apology or just so them to realise, I don't know what I wanted and that's what I think was significant. I blindly went there for something but I didn't really know what I was asking for. I think I just wanted an apology or something... it just got him angry and upset me and it didn't resolve the situation..." (Anna-Rose, P16).

While some gappers experience some difficulties during this GYTL step and hence require additional time, other gappers go through this step of abstracting with ease. For example, Ethan (P11) gave an example in which he went through reflection and abstraction process shortly after the experience (see also Section 8.3):

"It was just a fantastic day in itself... it is very rare that you have a whole day from the moment when you get up to pretty much the moment when you go to bed which you never feel like you stop having fun, being entertained, doing something that you rarely really enjoying it... [in the past] when you are travelling you try to ration so that it lasts as long as possible... you end up almost in this kind of rationing pattern of thought... [After that trip], from thinking 'let's space everything out and do it in a sort of more timely way', it was just let's go and do everything that we can... that kind of carried on for me." (Ethan, P11).

Based on the above illustrations, this GYTL step is closely related to the Phase 3 of Transformative Learning Theory (i.e. a critical assessment of one's assumptions). Failure to critically evaluate their experiences and challenge their previous way of doing things (i.e. abstraction) result in the gappers' inability to continue their learning to the next steps; hence the gappers remain to only experience (Step 1), self-reflect (Step 2) and discuss their experiences with others (Step 3) without integrating any significant changes into their life. On the other hand, successful abstraction assists the gappers to progress to Step 5 and 6 – changing and adaptation, allowing them to integrate their learning in the future.

This fourth step of GYTL corresponds to Stage 3 Abstract Conceptualisation (AC) of Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). As discussed above, this step (Step 4 of GYT Learning) also embraces the critical assessment of assumption phase of Transformative Learning. Furthermore, this step also encompasses Phase 5 (i.e. exploration of options of new
roles, relationships and actions) and Phase 6 (i.e. planning of a course of action) suggested by Mezirow (1991). As the gappers abstracted their experiences, reflections and discussions with others, they often are also exploring all alternatives scenarios or solutions in their mind and how they will implement these new potential changes into their life. The integration of these two Phases (Phase 5 and 6) of Transformative Learning is apparent in the gappers’ narratives where the abstraction process is successful. For example, as Melissa (P13) part of her abstraction of her experience at her training place, she cognitively made plans and explorations on her alternatives in solving the situation in the future:

“How to proceed if you see that there is a problem in what you are doing? Because going back over some of the things I did during internship, I was thinking that ok I have done that in a certain way and I was silent about things that were problematic for me. Why was I silent? I was supposed to alert someone, at least even if a solution was not going to be found quickly, I was supposed to talk to someone. So thing like that really makes you evaluate yourself through what is happening actually in the work environment and with people you are communicating with... I have got to upgrade myself to a certain level so that I don't end up in situations where I am hugely disappointed with myself.” (Melissa, P13)

In brief, this Step 4 of GYTL, abstracting, is the step in which the gappers questioned and made changes in the gappers mind, which serves as a push factor for the gappers next learning steps (Step 5 and 6 of GYT Learning, i.e. changing and adapting).

9.7. STEP 5: CHANGING

As the gappers passed through abstracting (Step 4), they often experience a turning point in their learning to a higher level of learning. The transition between Step 4 to Step 5 in the GYTL represents a change process in which the gappers are beginning to undergo a deeper transformation. The Step 5 of GYTL, changing, is a learning step in which the gappers are moving from illustrating the changes in their mind (i.e. abstracting – Step 4) into the changes in real-life actions (i.e. changing – Step 5). The following narrative of Naomi (P24) illustrates how her abstraction helped her to make some changes in her life:

“During this whole travel, I learnt to control my temper, my anger then I learned to be more patient... Initially there was some conflict, yes, no, yes, no, you know that your mind always says: ‘Why should I choose when I know what
I am doing is right?' and your heart says ‘No, you love your father, change for him’. Every religion says if you’ve hurt someone’s heart it is the biggest sin you can commit... ultimately if you are getting too bad tempered and angry you are hurting yourself because your blood pressure is always high... I already lost many things because of my stress and my habit of taking everything too seriously; I have lost many things... I really wanted to change especially after seeing these people around me [during the trip] ... how they manage their life, how tough is their life compared to my life, how supporting my parents are... Looking at these things made me really think – look at them and how simple they are and how complex you make your life, change, you need to change... That was – should I change, or shouldn’t I change?” (Naomi, P24)

“This is the thing, I used to get very short tempered and with every third person I used to have a fight... I would want to react immediately, even if I thought that what I was saying was wrong... my roommates would always surrender in front of me and I said I can’t do this and I won’t do this and they said you are stubborn and you won’t listen to us and they said okay we will go along with you but after that, now for example, my roommate she called and said okay I want to go to the city... I said okay, and she said ‘You said okay? No arguments? No different ideas?’ And I said: ‘If it will make you happy to come with me to the city. I will go to city’ and she said: ‘You have changed, Naomi! [Naomi laughed].” (Naomi, P24)

This step (Step 5 of GYTL) incorporates some elements of Experiential Learning Theory and those of Transformative Learning Theory. First of all, this step embraces Stage 4 of Experiential Learning Theory as it is clear that at this step the gappers’ active experimentation (AE) process has begun. In the beginning of the step of changing, gappers are still experimenting on the changes that are most appropriate for them (i.e. what to be change, how much change to be made, in what circumstances the change should be applied for, etc.). For example in the case of Naomi (P24) above, she explained that the changes she made by the time of the interview was still early application:

“No, but I still need to improve more,... I know that I need to change a bit more I am still doing a few things that are not right to everyone, so I am going to change more, a little bit more.” (Naomi, P24)

Furthermore, in this step four of the Transformative Learning phases are present although their integrations are not as originally prescribed by Mezirow (1991) (i.e. Phase 6 to 9 do not occur in linear fashion). As the gappers go through this step of changing, the gappers are making real changes by trying out new things (i.e. Phase 8 of Transformative Learning Theory- provisionally trying out new roles). Felicity (P18), for example, who dropped out
from the university and was discouraged due to her dislikes of the subject (i.e. Anthropology) returned from GYT and decided to try to replay her role as a student with a new subject (i.e. media and journalism), which she considered and debated among other new potential subjects such as sociology and advertising.

In addition, learning in GYT may happen at a high speed due to the nature of GYT itself as discussed in Step 1 of GYTL (i.e. experiencing) above. At the same time, their narratives suggest that that the gappers are gaining their knowledge and skills, building their competence and self-confidence as they are experiencing these changes. In other words, the Phase 7 and 9 of Transformative Learning (i.e. Phase 7 - acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; Phase 9 - building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships) are often integrated in this stage.

Finally, the gappers also continued to make sense and plan to continuously improve on the changes they are making. This suggests that Phase 6 (i.e. planning of a course of action) of the Transformative Learning Theory is an integrated part of this GYTL Step. It also suggests that Step 4 of GYTL (i.e. abstracting) and Step 5 of GYTL (i.e. changing) is an interactive process, until the gappers arrive to the next step of GYTL - adaptation.

Charlotte (P15), for example (see also Section 7.4.), planned her second trip to a disabled camp in the US both as a GYT experience and experimental practice for her career. While the experience served as a trial-run for her, in this trip she also tried a new role of a care-taker for the disables. These experiences also provided her with more knowledge and skills and an addition to her CV for her desired occupation as clinical psychologist. Upon her return, she was offered a placement of opportunity to work in a learning disability unit as a result of her GYT experience. Her experience also helped her in planning for her next career step. As she explained:

"I regained a sense of confidence again and it helped me with university as well because it gave me a bit more direction to what I wanted to do and that confidence came from being in that sort of environment. .. It showed that I am a capable person and a determined person and I can be quite compassionate, I have never thought of myself as someone who could lead people in a professional environment because I have never had to before." (Charlotte, P15).
9.8. STEP 6: ADAPTING

The final step in the proposed model of GYTL is Step 6, adapting; this final step is related to Step 5 (i.e. changing). Nevertheless, it is important to have a separate step which accounts for the gappers’ final adaptation. In the beginning of this stage, three phases of Transformative Learning (i.e. Phase 7-9) still play roles in transitioning from Step 5 (i.e. changing) to Step 6, assisting the gappers to arrive at a more firm adaptation. The gappers would be still trying out their new roles (Phase 8 of Transformative Learning), gaining knowledge and skills (Phase 7 of Transformative Learning) in building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships (Phase 9 of Transformative Learning) as in the previous stages, but the outcomes of their learning have become much more integrated in their day-to-day life. For example, for Giovanni (P2) adaptation for the changes he desired for his sociability was a smooth process. He explained that right before his GYT, “it was quite a solitary time for me as well... and during that time I was getting less social as a person” (Giovanni, P2); nevertheless upon his returned he was able to adapt to his new environment with ease which he argued was helped by the circumstances of his return to the university (see also Section 8.3.):

“...straight after I got back from America all my friends were here and then straight to university.... I have been able to carry on being sociable, having a love for life, want to be around other people and that I have been able to carry on because of the situation which is as much luck as coincidence.” (Giovanni, P2)

Mezirow (1991) recognized the need for adaptation process in its Transformative Learning Theory (i.e. Phase 10 – a reintegration of new assumption into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective). Indeed, the last phase of Transformative Learning (Phase 10) is an important step of GYTL, suggesting that GYTL is not complete with the total adaptation (i.e. reintegration) of the learning outcomes of GYT into the gapper’s life. As Melissa (P13) highlighted the importance of this step for her as otherwise she deemed that her learning process was incomplete:

“Why it is complete is because I had the chance to apply what I have learnt here [back home], apply[ing] it to a particular project and this is why I say it is complete for me because it comes with the application of it.” (Melissa, P13)
For this reason, it is necessary to have this as a separate step in itself in the GYT Learning process.

When the gappers finally ‘arrive’ at this stage, they are no longer going through the process of changes and experimentation, but have felt comfortable in the changes they made and adapted well with the new experiences. In other words, their learning adaptation has become a habit or an effortless experience, which then slowly become the first step of GYT learning again. In most cases of the gappers, this adaptation process occur when they return home after allowing the gappers sometimes to implement the changes they need into their life as is in the case of Giovanni (P2) and Melissa (P13) above; nevertheless there are a few exception for example as is in the case of Ethan (P11) as discussed in Step 4 of GYTL above.

Finally, from Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory Perspective this step of adaptation (Step 6) in GYTL is only implied in Stage 4 (Active Experimentation). Nevertheless, the gappers’ narratives also suggest that in GYTL, the active experimentation (AE) stage is often blurred with the concrete experience itself (CE). As previously discussed, this is mainly because during the trips the gappers tend to experiment speedily and make necessary changes during their GYT experience itself. Hence, it could be argued that when this occurs, the gappers are merely making temporary changes to their life during the trip. While these temporary changes are positive, changes that are more permanent and permeate fully into the gappers’ life are desired in GYTL.

9.9. APPLICATION OF GYTL PROCESS

An important final point to emphasize here is that these six steps of GYTL are emerged from the data interpreted through, and synthesized from, the ELT and transformative learning frameworks. Also important is to highlight once again that these six steps represent a general model of what the gappers went through in their learning process, with some gappers going through all steps (Step 1 to 6) for their learning and other gappers only go through a few steps of GYTL. In some cases, the gappers reported that they only went through the earlier steps of GYTL (Step 1 to 3). On this basis it also appears that GYTL may occur in two ways: through the short circuited of learning (Step 1 to 3), and the long circuited of learning (Step 1 to 6).
This study acknowledges that while some gappers showed that they went through these GYTL steps, not all gappers learnt at the same speed and capacity. For instance, Brayden (P8) explained that one of the factor that impact the gappers' learning may be the motivation, the gappers' previous experience in travelling and the geographical and cultural distance experienced. In his trip to Africa, he explained that his reason for travelling was mainly to experience adventure: "I kind of enjoyed that adrenalin rush that it gave me... I just enjoy a feeling that I get from it so I do it again and again", whereas in his earlier trips was chosen because they were relatively safe trips for his learning: "It was fun, but it wasn't seeing the world, it was like the world you already knew just slightly different." He explained further:

"The first one, the European one, was like dipping your toe in the water to see how warm it is. I didn't have a lot of confidence at that point; you know a group of friends altogether... It was safe, that one was... In Europe, you can claim that you have travelled and seen the world and you have been outside of the United Kingdom, but you have not really experienced a culture that is your own, which is the main difference... The USA and New Zealand, that was more long distance travel... but by then because the country spoke English I went with a couple of friends who themselves don't like stepping out of their comfort zone... to me it was more like a holiday... I could do anything I wanted and I always felt perfectly safe, it wasn't like Africa where you would walk around and keep your hand to near your pocket in case someone tried to pickpocket you." (Brayden, P8).

On similar discussion but different argument, Dylan (P4) explained that his first trip abroad was the most influential one and has impacts on the subsequent trips:

"When I went to France, it was actually the first time I had been anywhere on my own and I didn't know anyone at all... living in a country with a different language, everything was new... I think that changed me quite a lot... that is why I probably wanted to go to South America." (Dylan, P4).

Brayden's (P8) and Dylan's (P4) explanations confirmed that various trips may have various degree of influence on the gappers. It can be concluded that learning may occur differently between the first trip and their subsequent trips for different gappers. Different trips may incur different learning processes as well as outcomes. All in all, according to Brayden (P8) the important of GYTL experience is on its impacts on the gappers' life: " it depends how much it affects you and whether you change your outlook on life."
9.10. CONCLUSION

While Chapter Eight reviewed the gappers’ learning process separately, first from the perspective of Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and second from the perspective of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), this chapter offers a detailed step-by-step discussion of GYTL process. It was concluded in Chapter Eight that both theories are highly applicable to the gappers’ learning process. Nevertheless the merits of the applications of these two theories are limited when applied separately. In this chapter, both theoretical perspectives are combined and are applied integratively in order to arrive at a better comprehension and illustration of the actual GYTL process.

Based on this foundation, the gappers’ learning steps are best illustrated in six steps: 1) Experiencing, 2) Internal Dialoguing: Self-Reflection, 3) External Dialoguing: Discussion with others, 4) Abstracting, 5) Changing and 6) Adapting. The GYTL starts with the experience itself, whether the experience happens during the GYT or before the trip itself. The two following steps are important reiterative processes, in which the gappers examine themselves internally and externally through conversations with others. Abstracting is clearly a turning point in their learning; if they are able to successfully pass this stage, the gappers will go to the next step of changing and adapting. Changes and adaptations are soon camouflaged into new experiences themselves, starting a new cycle of learning for the gappers. These findings offer a new theoretical model of GYTL Process, in which its application has also been discussed prior to concluding this chapter. As discussed at length in Section 3.2.2., previous literature has not offered any theory-driven nor empirically based work that offers step-by-step process of how learning occurs during travel.
PART V.

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

10.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to provide an overview and integrative summary of the research undertaken for the thesis. It starts by revisiting the research purpose. Then, it highlights the key findings and the research contributions this study provides, followed by the practical implications of this research. The limitations of the study are discussed, and directions for future research are suggested. Finally, the researcher offers a reflective account on the journey of her PhD.

10.2. REVISITING RESEARCH PURPOSE

Aim

The main aim of the study is to understand the outcomes and the processes of learning during GYT in order to investigate whether and how the GYT experience facilitates personal growth and self-development.

Research Questions

Based on the above aim, and based on the assertion that learning occurs during GYT and it facilitates personal growth and self-development, this study proposed the following three research questions:

- **Research Question 1 (Preliminary Study)**
  What is Gap Year Travel (GYT)?

- **Research Question 2 (Main Study)**
  What are the outcomes of GYT Learning (GYTL)? (i.e. *what the gappers learned*)

- **Research Question 3 (Main Study)**
  What are the processes of GYT Learning (GYTL)? (i.e. *how the gappers learned*)
### Chapter Ten - Conclusion

10.3. KEY FINDINGS AND MAIN RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: Gap Year Travel (GYT) Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;an extended period of time (usually one year, but ranges between 3-24 months) taken off as a break from an individual’s everyday life at home, used to travel and perform various activities while abroad, with anticipation of unusual experiences during the trip and future educational, professional or/and personal benefits upon returning.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Research Question 2: Outcomes of GYT Learning (GYTL)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A1. Self Understanding (Building Characters)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence: “Before the trip I was insecure,... after my experience in China I become more confident.” (Jessica, P3)</td>
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<td>Independence: “That was probably the big thing for my independence...if I messed up I was on my own.” (Gabriel, P27)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility: “I realised that I had to be responsible in a way that beneficial to the children and not for myself...” (Whitney, P19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-mindedness: “I have become more open to situations... more adaptable...” (Felicity, P18)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A2. Self Understanding (Gaining Life Skills)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management: “I need to do more things in less time and to actually challenge myself with that...” (Melissa, P13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Management: “We needed to manage our money better... if you needed to you could live on very little.” (Charlotte, P15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-being Management: “I had a bit of tension and a bit of stress... it was almost like recovering to prepare me to go on...” (Chloe, P6)</td>
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<td><strong>B. Relationship Building</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family: “It makes you appreciate your family a lot more, and the thing they actually do for you...” (Perry, P1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends and Other Gappers: “The people I’ve met and the friends we’ve made had different attitudes and approaches on life, and I think they’ve shaped my own personality a little bit.” (Rebecca, P5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locals and Society: “It was like a melting pot of different people from different cultures... so that’s where I developed my love for new cultures.” (Dylan, P4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Life Management</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Direction: “I think it has made me a bit more driven towards getting a degree.” (Gavin, P10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Direction: “My job now is completely different to what I did before I left so I think that has changed me.” (Kieffer, P12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle Balance: “Since I have been travelling I have been thinking a lot about, like I want to find a balance between a job and my leisure activity...” (Dylan, P4)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Research Question 3: Processes of GYT Learning (GYTL)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1) Experiencing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“That experience is in my consciousness it is something that keeps influencing me...” (Ethan, P11)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2) Internal Dialogue: Self-Reflecting</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“...it was more evaluating my own life, what’s important to me, what’s not important to me and thinking what will I do?” (Verity, P23)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3) External Dialogue: Discussing with Others</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“When people tell you a story, often people will tell you a story back because of something similar or something else that has happened to them that they can relate to and you can share experiences through that.” (Perry, P1)</td>
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<td><strong>4) Abstracting</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“For me it was questioning why do you always ration everything... why not just try and fit in as much as you possibly can...” (Ethan, P11)</td>
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<td><strong>5) Changing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“You just suddenly found yourself doing things that you didn’t think that you would be able to do before.” (Charlotte, P15)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6) Adapting</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“You had to learn to deal with it and I think that was good because I hadn’t learnt to deal with people like that before... learning to adapt and not getting on with someone but still having to do your job and do your job well and still be polite and remain professional” (Charlotte, P15)</td>
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Table 14. Example Quotes
Table 14 provides an overview of the main findings and contributions along with sample quotes from participants. The subsequent sections discuss each of the research questions in turn.

10.3.1. What is Gap Year Travel (GYT)?

In spite of the growing public and academic interests in GYT since 1990s, the literature review revealed that the phenomenon has received very little attention in academic research. There are only a few studies dedicated to this subject area. To date the amount of research in the area is limited to a small number of journal articles (circa 20) and reports, in which none of them has touched upon the concept of learning in any depth. This study is the first research which marries the phenomenon of GYT and the theories of learning, researching the young gappers in transition from the perspectives of GYT learning in terms of outcomes and learning processes.

Upon a review of the historical background of GYT and the limited availability of definitions on GYT, it was decided that a preliminary study was necessary in order to arrive at a definition of GYT as a basis for a study of learning that occurs within GYT. Through a review of literature and the preliminary study, the first research question (i.e. What is Gap Year Travel (GYT)?) was answered and a clear definition of GYT offered in Chapter Two, and became the basis of this study:

"an extended period of time (usually one year, but ranges between 3 – 24 months) taken off as a break from an individual’s everyday life at home, used to travel and perform various activities while abroad, with anticipation of unusual experiences during the trip and future educational, professional or/and personal benefits upon returning."

The arrival at a definition originated from the review of other definitions available in the literature. Jones (2004) contributed to the debate by stating ‘a time out’ is an important criterion of GYT; these ‘times out’ may be a time out from formal education, training or workplace. Mintel (2005) also suggested the word ‘break’ and ‘delay further education or employment.’ This is represented as ‘taken off as a break from an individual’s everyday life at home’ in the definition used in this study. It was decided that detailed explanations of time out or delay from formal education, training or workplace/employment were not needed for this study. While it represents the various life stages of the gappers, all possible situations of the gappers are already represented without further elaboration, hence ‘an individual’s everyday life at home’ was used in this definition instead. As Simpson (2005) argued, GYT is now no longer reserved for a break between school and university but can also be used to refer to other life stages. The use of ‘an
individual's life at home' and 'unusual experiences during the trip' is also drawn from Simpson's (2005) contribution highlighting the importance of 'extraordinary' in the definitions of GYT. They give meaning to both mundane vs. extraordinary that she originally highlighted in her definition.

In terms of purpose, Mintel’s (2005) definition states 'to travel' as the main motivation for GYT, whereas Jones' (2004) definition states that 'better career prospects' is the main motivation following travel. This study acknowledges both motivations for travel by stating ‘used to travel and perform various activities while abroad, with anticipation of unusual experiences during the trip and future educational, professional or/and personal benefits upon returning’ in its definition. This definition also embraces Heath’s (2007) definition that suggests that gappers include diverse range of activities including paid and unpaid work, leisure and travel by stating 'perform various activities while abroad'. Providing detailed explanations within the definitions (i.e. paid and unpaid work, leisure and travel) was regarded as potentially limiting since the numbers of activities the gappers undertake during the GYT vary largely. This was also supported by Jones’ (2005) study which suggested seven main types of activities (see Section 2.7.2.) Indeed, specifying the types of activities within the definition may potentially be limiting. Hence a broader definition is used: ‘perform various activities while abroad.’

In terms of timing, the definition of this study specifies the time as ‘an extended period of time (usually one year, but ranges between 3-24 months)’. While the definition takes into account the time frame suggested by Jones (2004): ‘any period of time between three and 24 months), this definition underlines the importance that GYT needs to be an extended trip rather than merely a defined length period of trip. It also highlighted that one year is the perceived norm, as was suggested by the findings of the preliminary study (see Section 4.4. in Chapter Four) but acknowledging that it may range largely from three months durations (as suggested by Jones (2004), i.e. three months is the duration of summer break and the boundaries of short holidays) to 24 months which is the boundaries asserted by Lyons (2007) as way of living (e.g. immigration purposes). Heath’s (2007) definition of 15 months is also included into the definition for this study.

Although the above definition clarified what GYT is for the purposes of the research, the findings of the preliminary study (see Section 4.4.2.) also suggest that GYT is defined by other factors that are related to the GYT experience (i.e. travel duration, travel mode, travel
accommodation, travel destinations, travel arrangements, travel activities, travel companions) and more importantly they are influenced by the gappers themselves (i.e. who the gappers are in terms of their background, personality, up-bringing etc.) and the outcomes of these experiences (i.e. what educational, professional or/and personal benefits upon returning). Moreover, the above factors were investigated further through critical examination of the literature in addition to the confirmation from the preliminary study findings. They were then used, along with the gappers' demographic information, in order to examine in-depth their learning experiences and the outcomes these led to.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1) Experiencing
2) Internal Dialoguing: Self-Reflection
3) External Dialoguing: Discussing with Others
4) Abstracting
5) Changing
6) Adapting

**LEARNING PROCESSES**

- GYT Learning
  - (10 Phases)
  - Translative Learning Theory
  - (4 Stages)
  - Experiential Learning Theory

**Figure 8.** Summary of Learning Outcomes and Processes of GYT Learning (GYTL)
Based on these findings, this study provides a contribution to the GYT literature, as it not only offers a more refined definition of GYT but also advances our understanding of GYT beyond previous conceptualizations.

The key findings of the next two research questions – Research Questions 2 and 3 - will be reviewed below, along with a summary of their research contribution. Figure 8 offers this overview of the main findings in relation to the outcome and processes of GYT Learning.

10.3.2. What are the outcomes of GYT Learning (GYTL)?

As mentioned earlier, while a few scholars have made any attempts to examine or touch upon the benefits of travel experiences (15 studies as documented by Stone and Petrick, 2013), these studies mainly focus on studying abroad, with only a few exceptions of Mouton (2012) who interviewed festival goers and elder hostel participants, and Pearce and Foster (2007) who studied individual backpackers. Only limited studies to date have made the benefits of GYT as one of their focuses (e.g. Jones, 2004), and in particular the processes of GYTL in terms of a robust body of learning theory (i.e. ELT and TL) have not been previously researched. To date, there is only one study investigated the volunteer tourism activities (e.g. Coghlan and Gooch, 2011) and its impact on tourism organisation, not of the gappers and their learning experiences; even so, their study was merely conceptual and was not based on empirical evidence nor learning theories (see also Section 3.2.2.). Furthermore, while volunteering is part of GYT activities, it is not the only experience represented in the thesis since it also looked at the GYT experience from a variety of perspectives.

The second research question has been addressed in Chapters Five to Chapter Seven. In brief, the main outcomes of GYT learning are in terms of gappers’ self-understanding, relationship building and life management abilities (see Figure 8). The gappers interviewed became more confident, independent, responsible and open-minded as a result of their trips and enhanced their ability to manage their time, finance and well-being. They built awareness for their relationships with others: their family, friends and other gappers, and locals and society. At the same time, they started to plan and manage their life, and in particular their studies, career and lifestyle. The underlying concepts of youth transition and identity work, which is closely linked to learning, were clearly echoed in the gappers’ narratives.
Self Understanding. First and foremost, gappers in this study reported that they learned about and improved themselves during and as a result of their trip. Loker-Murphy and Pearce’s (1995) study recorded similar findings. They suggest that travel could be an important learning process as individuals are becoming an adult, and such trip could be ‘a preliminary stage of learning.’ In the case of the young gappers in this study, they have gradually changed and become more mature and grown up through their experiences. Young gappers had the opportunity to be re-acquainted with themselves and hence became self-aware, as well as able to discover, develop and be accepting of themselves. The literature suggests that this could be the influence of travelling by oneself; as such experience may enhance one’s ability to live with oneself (Danziger, 1997).

Building Characters. Evidence of gappers’ self-growth and personal development found in this study is mainly identified in the form of confidence, independence, responsibility and open-mindedness. The gappers argued that they become more confident as a result of their trip, and their confidence can take the form of social confidence, business confidence or simply confidence in managing life by themselves and to cope with their lives.

While being independent is aimed for by some gappers (as also noted in the study of King (2011) and Nieman (2010)), often this develops organically as participants were on their own for the first time having to cope with challenging new situations. From the gappers’ accounts, it could be implied that there is a relationship between gaining independence and travelling independently from their parents for the first time. This intention of young people to place distance between themselves and parents or influential figures in order to experience autonomy and gain personal independence is also documented by Ansell (2008).

Along with confidence and independence, many gappers indicated that they had learnt what being responsible means as a result of their trip. The gappers’ sense of responsibility often emerged as them being responsible for others during their trip, especially those more vulnerable then they. Furthermore, many gappers expressed that they had become more open-minded towards other people, activities and ideas; and more sociable and less judgemental towards other people which they argued increased their awareness of and adaptability to different cultures, societies and circumstances. It could also be inferred from their stories that by having more varied experiences they in turn become more open to new experiences.

Moreover, the reviews of the gappers’ accounts of the personal qualities they had gained suggest interrelationships between the development of one of the personal attributes to others, and that the development of one may impact on the others. While in a number of GYT studies
(e.g. King, 2011; Jones, 2004; Nieman, 2010), the relationships between the developments of these personal attributes have been implied but they have not been discussed. A plausible explanation, according to Leary et al. (2003) is that these attributes are equally important and integrated signs of identity construction during the transition towards mature adulthood. King (2011) also comments that the terms used by the gappers (e.g. confidence, maturity and independence) may indicate identity work in progress, especially at the age bracket of transition to adulthood.

The study of Inkson and Myers (2003), which touched upon the outcome of the overseas experience (OE), found that travellers gained in self-confidence. Other studies also indicate that travellers gain generic life skills and specific life skills (e.g. career or education related) (e.g. Inkson and Myers, 2003; Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005) but as discussed in Section 3.2.2. and Section 5.4. these previous literature are limited in either that they are done in different context (e.g. study abroad), different location (e.g. New Zealand or Africa), merely as qualitative study (i.e. questionnaire/survey) or combinations of these. In this current study, the first two attributes (e.g. confidence and independence) are the most reported and often planned for as intended outcomes of GYT. This is in line with the earlier conclusion made based on Knowles' (1984) andragogical theory that suggests planned or intended outcomes of GYT (i.e. motivations) are likely to result in achievement of these outcomes (see also: Mintel, 2004b; Pearce and Lee, 2005). Furthermore, the gappers in this study also reported that they become confident socially and professionally after their period of travel. Previous studies do not provide any specifics in this area, however it is noted that travel may induce benefits around development of social values as well as improvements in the education and career areas of an individual's life (e.g. Inkson and Myers, 2003; Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005).

As discussed above, this study also found that travelling independently without parental support for the first time often breeds independence. Moreover, gappers are also reported to become more responsible for themselves and others as a result of the experiences of being responsible for others during their period of GYT (e.g. taking care of disabled elders or children). Findings in relation to the sense of independence and responsibility held by gappers have not been previously investigated by other scholars. Finally, gappers have also become more open minded (i.e. tolerance, flexible and adaptable) towards others (people, ideas, cultures, situations, surroundings, etc.).

The self is clearly the main focus of the outcomes of the gappers' development, which also suggests that all efforts and development is central to the construction of a gapper's personal...
identity. It is clearly echoed throughout the findings that the gappers do not only experience a self that is different to the self at home, but they also actively exercise their new identities during GYT which results in a new or renewed self-identity for some gappers. In some cases, it could be argued that the need or desire to exercise a new identity was already present prior to their trip for some gappers. Nevertheless, their stories suggest that it is during their trip that these identity works take place, which often also lead to a process of individuation (i.e. the process of realisation that one is distinct from others). These learning processes were shared by the gappers from the beginning until the end of their trips, which often represents the transition and maturation process an individual goes through as a young adult.

Gaining Life Skills. Besides building their characters, gappers claimed that their trips had helped them to gain a number of life skills. In particular, the gappers discussed the importance of managing their time, money and health; they reported that it is a particularly important learning curve for those who travel independently for the first time. These findings have been touched upon briefly in previous studies (e.g. Desforges, 2000; Hottola, 2004), however have not been reviewed in detail. Indeed, in this study the young gappers’ stories suggest that they have learned how to manage their resources as they move towards adulthood.

A number of gappers interviewed in this study compared the value of time with the value of money, which gave them a sense of awareness of the importance of time and their ability to manage it. As a result, gappers adjusted their attitude favourably towards time as they valued time more than they did before and also tried to manage their time more effectively. They reported that they tried to make the most of their time and multi-task. In this way, their time management skills developed from when they planned their trips, practised during their trips and impacted upon their behaviour until the trips came to an end.

Similarly, gappers also learned about financial management as they planned for their trip, whereby GYT is considered as an exchange between money, time and experience by the gappers. Although within the travel literature focusing specifically on GYT or general backpacking only planning and timing of the trip itself are discussed (e.g. Hottola, 2005; Inkson and Myers, 2003; Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005), rather than the development of an individual as the result of these factors; the findings of this study revealed that gappers became aware that they had inadequate time management which created difficulties for them during the trip. Nevertheless, this experience in turn becomes the gappers’ source of learning and may impact on gappers’ attitude towards money after the trip.
Furthermore, some gappers suggested that their experiences helped them to gain a holistic perspective of money and its importance in their lives. As the result of travelling, the gappers also become more aware of the importance of maintaining their well-being. The findings of the current study suggest that while health management is not the most important matter for gappers, and only becomes prominent if health issues arise, those experiencing health difficulties become more aware of the value of health as a result of any health issues which occurred.

The health issues experienced by gappers include physical and psychological (emotional) health. Physical dysfunction occurred due to shock at being immersed in a completely new environment (e.g. weather and living standards), which often was accompanied by psychological shock, whereas the main reasons for psychological issues appeared to be emotional distress or homesickness. The gappers who experienced these challenges argue that the friendships offered by others surrounding them assist in helping them to overcome any psychological issues. They explained that having fellow travellers to talk to and share their feelings with helped them to work through their emotional difficulties, which in effect helped them through their general health issues too.

**Relationship-Management.** The gappers' relationships with others during their trips had a strong influence on gappers' self-development, as they become the catalyst for the gappers' reflections on themselves and their relationships. This is in line with previous literature which suggests that travellers tend to have strong connections with other travellers (e.g. Hottola, 2004). Although an argument has been made that these relationships do have an impact on their personal growth (Alexander, Bakir and Wickens, 2010), there has not been any discussion about the impact of these relationships on the travellers themselves.

Being apart from their families enhanced gappers' awareness of the process of becoming mature as a young adult, and also GYT provided gappers with some space for them to see their relationships with their family objectively. The findings once again suggest that this is particularly significant for those who travelled for the first time. A few studies have discussed the young people's transition to adulthood (e.g. Dwyer and Wyn, 2001; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2007; Stokes and Wyn, 2007; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1988), also in relation to travel (e.g. Johan, 2009; Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Shulman et al., 2006). Nevertheless, previous studies in the area of GYT have not discussed these findings in any detail; especially the relationships between gappers and their parents. Furthermore, the gappers' interviewed for this present research voiced that reflecting on their relationship with their families often created positive emotions, which in turn lead to positive changes in their relationships with their
families. Those gappers' meeting with family and/or relatives in the destinations were provided
with support and a feeling of connectedness.

Friendship is frequently noted as a key component of the gappers' accounts. During the
trip gappers built strong bonds and shared experiences and emotions with those around them,
especially with other gappers who reported to have a particularly strong influence on their fellow
gappers. As the gappers suggested, they felt connected to those of the same age, same interests,
same experiences, etc. These are in line with the literature which suggests that travellers tend to
make connections with other travellers rather than with the locals (e.g. Hottola, 2004; Richards
and Wilson, 2004; Young et al., 2010). Nevertheless, gappers also reported that they learned
from others who are different than them (e.g. hold different views, have different social or
economic background). During their trips, gappers learned to relate to others on their own,
without the societal pressure that exerts itself on them when at home. Clearly, GYT provides
gappers with some space and time away from not only the mundane ordinarys, but also social
pressure.

While ability to socialise with others was an intended learning outcome for some
gappers, this was not true for all gappers interviewed. This aspect about the gappers' intention to
socialise as a learning outcome of their trips has not been a subject of inquiry by previous
literature. However, this current study has found that the gappers' efforts to adjust to new
relationships during GYT induced their social learning. Despite some difficulties at the
beginning, gappers tended to overcome these challenges. Furthermore, they often related their
sense of self with their relationships with others and the world around them. This is another area
that has not been covered within the travel literature, although friendships have been researched
extensively in other areas such as sociology and psychology.

A large part of travel research literature covers in-depth discussions on the relationships
between travellers and host countries – the local people and societies (e.g. Maoz, 2006a; Richards
and Wilson, 2004; Young et al., 2010). This study has found that travelling through
foreign cultures requires a high level of adjustment to those cultures; however, once the first step
has been made, gappers become accustomed to and start feeling comfortable within different
environments. This is in line with previous finding that adjustment is necessary throughout travel
especially in foreign land (e.g. Hottola, 2004). It has also been noted within the literature that
cultural and social exchange impacts on both travellers and hosts alike, which is also found in
this study that in turn, the diversity of people and destinations that gappers visited or met have
had a high influence on the gappers.
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**Life-Management.** Gappers’ narratives clearly indicate that during their GYT they started a longer term vision about how they should manage their future, immediate or long-term. During the interviews, they discussed their directions for study and career as well as their lifestyle. In fact, the three subjects were found to be closely related and impacted upon one another.

Prior to GYT, some gappers were not certain about their study directions and used their experiences and interactions during the trip to explore their options prior to deciding the final direction for their study. Awareness of the importance of education and ambitions for further education are part of the gappers’ outcome of experience and reflection during GYT, where some gappers’ behaviour, attitude and motivation towards their education have changed. These findings are the contraries to the suggestions made by Goldsmith (2010) and Barrow (2007) that GYT may bring negative effects such as confusion and crisis about their next academic direction; nevertheless they are consistent with Birch and Miller’s (2007) argument that taking GYT could result in more determination in achieving academic excellence.

Nearly all career gappers in this study expressed discontentment with their previous job prior to their trips. This is in line with the literature’s suggestion that many travellers are often at a juncture before the beginning of their trip (e.g. Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Maoz, 2006b; Sorensen, 2003). The gappers shared and discussed their discontentment with each other which gave them motivation and confidence to try making changes in their lives, mainly relating to their career direction. In many cases, gappers reported to become more focused on their career and long term goals, e.g. some of the gappers changed their employments upon their returns. It was also suggested by gappers that decisions in undertaking the trip could also be of equal importance and of equal worth in terms of learning experience compared with the actual experience during the trip itself.

While some gappers intended to tailor their GYT for career advancement/employability, for other gappers these advancements happen incidentally. Gappers undertaking traineeships/internships during their GYT found the experience to be a bridge between their studies and their career and that their GYT experiences, especially those that are related to internship/gaining new skills, enhanced their employability. In any case, GYT was reported to be a ‘trial and error’ and ‘eye opening’ experience for gappers in creating meaningful direction in their lives. These findings are in support of Jones’ (2004) and Inkson and Myers’ (2003) findings that the experience that the gappers had during GYT can act as leverage towards employability.
Lifestyle balance is a theme that resonates frequently in gappers’ accounts. Gappers reported that they knew the balance between work, study and life was important, yet had unbalanced life before their trip. In fact, the decision to embark on GYT in the first place was often part of seeking a balanced lifestyle. Yet the GYT experience itself gave gappers some assurance that a balanced lifestyle is possible. As a result, gappers were encouraged to initiate a more balanced lifestyle, started to plan their lifestyle in advance and have a more holistic rather than narrow view of life (i.e. only focusing on study/work). Clearly, the arguments put forward by scholars (e.g. Shildrick and Mc Donald, 2007; Stokes and Wyn, 2007; Dwyer et al., 2005) suggesting that young people today value lifestyle that balance between work, study and leisure hold some truth.

All in all, the findings of this study clearly indicate that the gappers learned about themselves and reflected on their identities in relation to others as a result of their experiences. While previous studies have indicated that travel is often linked to identity construction (e.g. Desforges, 2000; White and White, 2004), this has not been discussed in the specific case of GYT at great length especially in the consideration of the specific context of learning and transition towards adulthood/higher education/work. In this study, it was found that the learning that occurs during GYT are linked to the gappers’ as young adults in an important period of transition, for example the outcomes of their learning are indications of the gappers becoming more mature as grown adults. It is also interesting to note that the gappers’ learning came mainly from their relationships with other gappers, i.e. sharing and communicating about their lives with others during the trip and also on their reflection on their relationships with loved ones back home. Indeed, reflection and sharing are the two most noted forms of learning occurring during GYT. Although their narratives revealed that they also learned from their interactions with the locals, what they learned from locals was not as significant as what they learned from their peers (i.e. the gappers do not indicate nor discuss much of the learning outcomes in relation to their interactions with the locals). Nevertheless, it is important to note that they learn from both similarities and differences between themselves and others. By doing so, they learn about their options and possibilities in terms of their future plans and how they see themselves in the future.

The findings of this study provide a contribution to our knowledge of the outcome of GYTL. First, it provides an understanding of the GYT experience which links holistically to the self, the others and the life of the gappers (i.e. the main outcomes of GYTL are self-understanding, relationship building and life management abilities). As discussed above,
previous studies found that GYT offers benefits to the gappers in terms of character building and exploring future potential (e.g. Jones, 2004; King, 2011), they have not discussed, for example, the outcome of relationship building with others. Also, the limited research available in the area mainly focused on or questioning the gappers’ relationships and the authenticity of their relationships with the locals (e.g. Cohen, 2003; Duffy, 2002; Maoz, 2006a; McGregor, 2000; Richards and Wilson, 2004; Young et al., 2010). This study provided strong evidence that relating to others of their home countries and with fellow travellers is also an important part of the process and influences the outcome of the GYT experience so much so that it appears to be at the core of their learning through sharing knowledge, emotions and experience and challenging/encouraging others towards change.

This study also confirms the findings of other scholars that GYT hold the potential for facilitating personal growth and self-development, e.g. this study substantiates Jones’ (2004) argument that GYT provides clarifications for the gappers’ future directions for education and work. Nevertheless, this study is the first to provide empirical evidence from direct interviews with the young gappers in the Western countries; for example, the study by Jones (2004) relied mainly on the use of data presented on GYT company websites and interviews of GYT company providers and the study by Nieman (2010) focused on South African students as the sample of her research.

Finally, before concluding the discussion of findings relating to the second research question it is important to note that as previously discussed within the literature review, learning outcomes as well as learning processes are impacted by a number of other factors, including various aspects of personality, personal background (i.e. education, previous social network, previous travel, etc.) and travel factors (e.g. destinations, duration, mode, activities, companions, accommodations and arrangements) hence these need to be taken into consideration when evaluating the findings of what and how the gappers learned. For instance, a further review on one of the travel factors – travel destinations – may prove to be useful in the future.

The participants’ destinations covered all continents of the world, including major cities and remote areas and villages within their destinations. There were twelve trips around the world (i.e. more than one regional area), while the remainder of the trips focused on either one country or one regional area. While destinations do not necessarily relate to specific aspects of learning for all gappers interviewed, the findings suggest that the destinations of the participants may
have influence on what and how the gappers learnt. For instance, there is an indication that destinations with further cultural distance are likely to heighten impacts on the gappers’ learning than those destinations of closer cultural proximity. For example, many European gappers explained that their trips to Asia and Africa have made them questioned their original assumptions due to the way the society at the destination works in a way that is socially and culturally different than their home cultural reference. This has impact on how the gappers view themselves in terms of national, ethnic and gender identity for example leading to them questioning their relationship with themselves, others and society.

As a result, it could be inferred that there is a tendency that their learning may involve a higher level of abstraction (i.e. challenging previous assumptions) in that instance, whereas the learning reported as a result of travelling to destinations with closer or similar cultural system (i.e. North America, Australia and within Europe) tended to be more practical and focused on the individual habits and skills (e.g. learning being independent by doing domestic chores, practicing house and job hunting, professionalism at work, etc.). Nevertheless, the findings on the relationships between destinations and the gappers’ learning (i.e. outcomes and processes) is not yet conclusive in this study as this was not its main focus (i.e. not the research question), yet future investigation will be useful to develop this line of inquiry.

10.3.3. What are the processes of GYT Learning (GYTL)?

Finally, the last research question (i.e. What are the processes of GYT Learning (GYTL)?) has been addressed in Chapter Eight and Nine. As addressed in Section 3.2.2. of the literature review chapter (Chapter Three), the travel and learning literature hitherto have shortcomings of 1) lacking empirical evidence, 2) lacking the use of appropriate learning theories, 2) using purely inductive or deductive approach; hence literature in the area are acutely deficient in their theory-driven empirical work. This study addresses the limitations of these previous studies by using learning theories as well as empirical data in providing primary evidence on the processes of GYTL.

Based on the examinations of the gappers’ experiences during the data collection processes, two of four learning theories originally discussed in the literature review were found to be most relevant to GYTL. For this reason The Experiential Learning Theory and
Transformative Learning Theory were reviewed in detail in Chapter Three and were used as a template for the interview transcripts (see Chapter Four).

The Experiential Learning Theory stages and Transformative Learning phases as prescribed by Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1991) proved to be applicable to GYTL although some stages and phases may vary for each individual gapper and/or experience. The two learning theories are found to be useful in understanding the gappers’ learning processes. The learning that occurred during GYT tends to be simultaneous and interactive, which highlights both the experiential and the cyclical nature of Experiential Learning Theory. Nevertheless, the gappers’ learning process as illustrated in their narratives appears to be more complex than the four stages of experiential learning process as depicted by Kolb (1984). The transformative learning process mode offered a more detailed means to analyse the gappers’ actual learning steps. Nevertheless, the ten phases of Transformative Learning Theory are not comprehensive in illustrating the direct application of the gappers’ learning process neither. For these reasons, the six steps of GYTL process were created as a result of a synthesis of Kolb’s (1984) and Mezirow’s (1991) models as they apply in the context of GYT. The academic contributions of this study are mainly in the application of learning theories to the GYT experience and the use of these to propose a special case of GYTL.

**Experiential Learning Theory.** Since its conception, Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory has been widely utilised in research in education and management (e.g. Baker, Jensen and Kolb, 2005; Holman, Pavlica and Thorpe, 1997; Mainemelis, Boyatzis and Kolb, 2002 and Reynolds, 2009), yet it has not been applied widely in tourism studies and in the case of GYT in particular. The findings of this study suggest that the gappers’ learning during GYT mainly focuses on concrete experience (Stage 1) and reflective observation (Stage 2), and that abstract conceptualisation (Stage 3) appeared to be the most challenging yet the most crucial step that allow gappers to progress to next stage. Also, Stage 3 does not necessarily occur until there is a crucial need for it when the new experience (Stage 4) that is similar to the previous experience occurs, making abstract conceptualisation a necessary process of learning. Nevertheless, the nature of GYT may accelerate the gappers’ need for abstraction (Stage 3), or on the other hand, make the gappers skip abstraction (Stage 3) all together.

The intensity of the trip itself (i.e. the gappers are constantly on the move between destinations, activities, etc.) places an emphasis on experiencing and also reflecting (e.g. when
chatting with others, during the long bus ride, etc.). This nature of the trip also means that the gappers are moving swiftly from one new experience to another, not allowing nor making the abstract conceptualisation (Stage 3) necessary or possible. According to a strict reading of the Kolb model without abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation does not easily occur. In a few cases, for example where the gappers remained within the same activities for a longer period of time (e.g. training, teaching, volunteering, working, etc.), the processes of abstract conceptualisation (Stage 3) appeared to occur at a faster rate; this is mainly because the gappers are repeating similar activities on daily basis and when there are discrepancies between realities and expectations they feel the need to make changes (e.g. unhappy of how they are being treated (Charlotte, P15), displeased with the progress of their training (Melissa, P13), forced to change due to jail time (Keanu, P7), etc.). In this sense, the gappers feel that they need to make a change as they had new experience and only then did the necessary abstract conceptualisation (Stage 3) take place.

Furthermore, it was found that in many instances during GYT, the two stages - Stage 4 (active experimentation) and Stage 1 (concrete experience) - often occur simultaneously due to the speed of the occurrences of these experiences or when no conscious efforts are made for improvements (i.e. experiences are repeated without conscious decision for active experimentation). When this happens, the two stages could represent one similar step, in which the gappers re-experience a similar learning context whereby no or very little improvements have been made. Nevertheless, they are completely separate when the gappers make clear efforts for improvements. In other words, when the abstract conceptualisation (Stage 3) does not occur, Stage 4 of active experimentation is skipped returning to Stage 1, e.g. during their training/volunteering the gappers tend to re-experiencing similar working situation unless when they make changes to their working situation whereby active experimentation takes place.

Transformative Learning Theory. In addition to adding to our understanding of the application of Experiential Learning Theory to GYT, the application of Transformative Learning theory to this study also offered a contribution to our understandings of how the gappers learn in terms of a well-established theory of learning. The empirical findings of this study suggest that the learning process that the gappers went through did not necessarily follow the linear process suggested by Mezirow (1991) for a number of reasons.

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First, disorienting dilemma is not an absolute condition for learning and changes to occur in GYT as prescribed in transformative learning. Also, the participants do not necessarily start their trip with a dilemma in order for them to experience changes. In some cases, disorienting dilemma occurred during or after their GYT or it did not occur at all. Second, emotion is an important component for GYTL, and the emotions felt during self-examination may vary largely and are not necessarily restricted to guilt or shame as suggested by Mezirow (1991), in fact both positive and negative emotions were expressed by the gappers throughout the process. Third, sharing is repeatedly reported to have significant impact on the gappers’ learning, nevertheless the findings once again pointed out that the emotions that are shared are not necessarily negative but could also be positive, moreover, the findings also suggest that the gappers do not only share with those who have similar experiences but also with those who have different background or experiences. While sharing their own emotions and experiences, they also listen to others and undertake further self-reflections.

Finally and importantly, this study provides evidence that the sequence of the phases offered in transformative learning theory does not perfectly align with the actual process of GYTL. For example, in some cases, some phases are moved (e.g. Phase 1) while on others they were highlighted (e.g. Phases 2, 3 and 4). Also as discussed above, variations exist within one or more phases (e.g. Phases 2 and 4). Furthermore, some phases may occur simultaneously due to the nature and speed of the occurrence of GYT experience (e.g. Phase 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9). This implies that the application of Transformative Learning Theory is not always necessarily concurring with the practical application to the context of GYTL.

Through the discussion above and in Chapter Eight, it was concluded that there are some similarities between experiential learning and transformative learning (i.e. the two theories may overlap), and that some stages or phases are more prominent than others on GYTL. Both theories have their merits, yet there are also shortcomings when the theories are applied to the gappers’ learning process. Bringing together these two theories provides benefits to understanding GYTL that the use of one theory alone could not bring.

This study is the first study that utilises these two learning theories to investigate learning in GYT. In summary, the findings reported in Chapter Nine suggest that GYTL Process is composed of six elements: 1) Experiencing, 2) Internal Dialoguing: Self-Reflecting, 3) External Dialoguing: Discussing with Others, 4) Abstracting, 5) Changing and 6) Adapting (see Figure 8).
Based on the findings, GYTL may also occur as two cycles: GYTL Cycle 1 (see Figure 9 and 10) and GYTL Cycle 2 (see Figure 11). These six steps and the two cycles will now be discussed.

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**Figure 9. GYT Learning (GYTL) Cycle 1**

**Figure 10. GYT Learning (GYTL) Cycle 1 (with occurrence of disorienting dilemma)**

**Gap Year Travel Learning (GYTL) Process.** Experience undeniably is an important part of the GYTL Process; all gappers' narratives suggest that experiencing (Step 1) is the first step of their learning. The experience as subject of the gappers' learning can be either the GYT experience itself or their prior-experience before their trip, and the types of experience vary largely for each gapper. For some gappers, disorienting dilemma may follow their experience; for others disorienting dilemma did not occur (this is illustrated in dotted box in Figure 10). In the next steps of GYTL, the gappers examined themselves through two methods: internal dialogue (i.e. self-reflection (Step 2) and external dialogue (i.e. discussion with others (Step 3)).
These two steps are initiated by the gappers' own reflection on their experiences (Step 2) which include their examinations on their feelings and their thoughts on what happened in the past from their current perspective (i.e. reflecting the past experiences and comparing it to their present understanding). The gappers then discussed their thoughts and emotions with other people around them (Step 3); in most cases, the gappers had these exchanges with other gappers regardless whether they have similar or different experiences and backgrounds. These two steps, the self-examination and examination through others, often occur hand-in-hand.

Upon the completion of Step 2 and Step 3, the next step the gappers went through is abstraction (Step 4). Depending on their circumstances at the time (i.e. are there enough opportunity for me to think more about my experience at the moment?, e.g. how busy the gapper is, etc.) and the significance of the experience on the gappers (i.e. how much does the experience impact the gapper?, e.g. whether the gapper feels ultimate urgency to solve the problem, etc.), the gappers may proceed to Step 4 immediately or they may skip this process until later stage. If the gappers need to urgently solve the problem at hand for immediate application and if the difficulty level of the problem at hand is not too high, the gappers went through Step 4 relatively quickly and easily. If the gappers do not see the need to arrive at a conclusion of their examinations of the particular experiences, there was a tendency to postpone this process and proceed with other experiences hence returning to Step 1, hence creating GYTL Cycle 1 (see Figure 9). This may also be the case if the level of difficulty of the abstraction is relatively high (i.e. it is difficult for the gappers to conclude about their experiences and challenge themselves and their assumptions), which usually is experienced with high level of emotions. In some cases, the gappers needed more time for abstraction which may also lead to partial completion of abstraction (i.e. abstraction is still in progress).

If the gappers are unable to go through the abstraction process at the time and they returned to experiencing (Step 1) again followed by reflection and discussion with others about these experiences (Step 2 and Step 3) without going further to the next level of GYTL, the gappers' learning are limited to the first steps of GYTL only. It is important to note here that the occurrence of disorienting dilemma between Step 1 and Step 2 often prompt the gappers' advancement to Learning Cycle 2. In other words, disorienting dilemma activates the needs for an abstraction, regardless whether abstraction is taking place immediately or if it takes longer to complete. These first steps of GYTL constitute GYTL 1 (illustrated in Figure 9 and 10),
whereby the complete steps of GYTL (Steps 1 – 6) will constitute GYTL 2 (illustrated in Figure 11) which will be discussed in depth below.

![Diagram of GYTL Learning Cycles](image)

**Figure 11. GYT Learning (GYTL) Cycle 1 and 2**

Abstracting (Step 4) appeared to be the most challenging process for the gappers as it requires the gappers to think and feel deeply and thoroughly both at the cognitive and emotional level about their past experience on how it fits into their present circumstances and how they will act differently in the future (i.e. if there are any changes need to be made). Hence, this step links between the gappers’ reflection of the past, their present understanding and their future planning. Effectively, in this step reflecting, abstracting and planning seems to merge and function simultaneously. At times it could be very painful and emotional process if the experiences, emotions or reflections of those experiences are negative. This may be the case, for instance, if a disorienting dilemma occurred. It appeared that experiences that are associated with positive emotions were easier to process.

The gappers’ narratives also suggested that there is a tendency for the gappers to leave abstraction until later stages until there is a need for it. It was suggested that the gappers may turn to abstraction process only if they run into experience that calls for an immediate solution to the problem in hand; if this is the case, they need to swiftly return to self-examination process that help them in reflecting on the experience and may need to discuss these with others in order
to be able to abstract this properly. In other words, the process of Step 1 moving towards Step 2, 3 and 4 were speeded up.

As discussed above, abstraction as GYTL Step 4 is the gappers’ turning point to a higher level of learning, which differentiates GYTL Cycle 1 from GYTL Cycle 2. Upon successful completion of abstraction, the gappers proceed to undergo significant personal change (Step 5). During this process of changing (Step 5), the gappers may still need to go back-and-forth to the abstraction process (Step 4) to ensure that the changes made are in line with what they originally envisioned or desired. Nevertheless, once the changes are made and the gappers are at ease, the adaptation (Step 6) process begins in which the changes are integrated into the gappers and their lives. In turn, the adaptation process will become the experience itself once again.

It is important to note that a number of learning processes may occur simultaneously (e.g. the gappers may reflect on their previous experience during the trip while they are experiencing their GYT), hence the general process of their learning is not necessarily linear, but simultaneous and interactive, and above all complex (see Figure 12).

![Figure 12. GYT Learning (GYTL) Model](image-url)
The six steps of GYTL representing the importance of ‘Action, Dialogue, Cognition and Adjustment’ process of learning (see Figure 12.). Action (i.e. doing) represents experiencing (Step 1) and adjusting (Step 6); both the beginning and the end of GYTL process making it a link of the cycle. Dialogue (i.e. talking) represents both the internal dialogue through self-reflection (Step 2) and the external dialogue through discussing with others (Step 3). Cognition (i.e. thinking) represents the abstraction process (Step 4) which is a turning point of GYTL. Finally, Adjustment (i.e. changing) represents the process of change that gappers undergo (Step 5); this is followed by Action (Doing) that is required in the gappers’ adaptation process (Step 6). In terms of its practical applications the complex model of GYTL depicted in Figure 12 might be reduced to four simple steps (see Figure 13).

![Figure 13. Simplified Model of GYT Learning (GYTL) Process](image)

### 10.3.4. Gap Year Travel Learning (GYTL)

The final contribution this study would like to offer is to propose Gap Year Travel Learning (GYTL) as a unique form of learning, which cannot be achieved by other means at home, in the classroom or at a work place, etc. This is mainly due to the fact that: (1) GYT enhances the gappers’ ability to ‘do, talk, think and change’ more readily than in any other experiences that the gappers may have; (2) GYT can be tailored to the gappers’ individual needs; (3) GYT can accommodate the gappers’ individuality and their various ways of learning allowing all gappers to learn in the way that works for them.
An array of evidence for the gappers' personal growth and self-development was offered in the discussions of the GYTL outcomes (Chapter Five to Chapter Seven) and the discussions of the GYTL process in Chapter Eight and Nine which confirmed further that experiential and transformative learning occurred and may result in a number of unique changes as a result of the GYT experience. Clearly, these findings suggest that indeed GYT experience facilitates personal growth and self-development.

The changes reported by the gappers occurred at all levels. Throughout the findings chapters (Chapter Five to Chapter Nine), this study reported that GYTL occurs at various levels: gaining knowledge and skills as well as changing of behaviours, attitudes, values, beliefs and this contributed to the gappers' reflection on and construction of their identity. For example, the gappers learned some knowledge about the countries visited and gained some travelling skills (e.g. planning) and day-to-day life skills (e.g. cooking) as well as other skills they learned through activities chosen (e.g. teaching). But as discussed, some gappers also reported that they changed their assumptions about the world as a result of their trip and encounters with others. They also reported that they changed their behaviours upon returning home (e.g. helping out around the house), attitudes (e.g. more appreciative of their family), values and beliefs (e.g. prioritize their friends and family, decrease in materialistic values, increase desire for study, etc.). These changes started with changing their old assumptions (i.e. going to school is not necessary, travelling alone is hard, living independently is daunting) to their new assumptions (i.e. having a degree is an important step to one's career, travelling alone or living by oneself is an achievable task). Finally, the gappers also reported how these numerous smaller changes have impacted them more broadly. While some literatures have highlighted the importance of travel in the process of identity construction (e.g. Abram et al., 1997; Cohen 2010ab; Desforges, 2000; Duncan, 2008; Elsrud, 2001; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2006; Maoz, 2008; Neumann, 1992; Richards and King, 2003; Urry, 1995), this study is the first to describe and explain how the changes to the gappers actually occurred from the perspective of learning theory. Furthermore, this study is the first to address the limitations of the previous studies attempted to discover learning in travel and tourism research (see also Section 3.2.2 and Section 10.3.3) by providing evidence based on theories and empirical work.

The above provides a confirmation that besides merely learning at knowledge and skills levels, some gappers also experience learning at deeper level during their GYT; this suggests
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that transformation at higher level may occur (see the GYTL Cycles 1 and 2 in Figure 11). As Mezirow (1991: 167) argued, learning process “getting beyond gaining factual knowledge alone, and involves questioning assumptions, beliefs and values, and considering multiple points of view” are classified as transformative. The findings of this study provide us with evidence that transformation could be resulted from GYTL experience.

As previously discussed in the Research Methodology Chapter (Chapter Four), it is not the intention of this study is to test or develop a ‘grand theory’. Instead, it aims to examine and offer an understanding of learning that occurs during GYT. To conclude based on the above key findings, the concept can be defined as follow:

GYT learning (GYTL) is the processes and outcomes in which the gapper 1) gains new knowledge and skills and 2) questions their previous assumptions, attitudes, behaviours, values, beliefs and identities in order to arrive at new sets of knowledge, skills, assumptions, attitudes, behaviours, values, beliefs and identities that assist them in managing their day-to-day life more effectively and 3) achieves more holistic view of their long term personal growth and self-development potential.

As implied above, this study also contributes to our understanding that the learning processes of the gappers are linked with the outcomes of the learning itself, and that the gappers’ learning process and their identity constructions process as a young adult are also intertwined. In essence, the gappers’ identity construction (i.e. identity learning process) is part of their GYTL. This is to say that when the gappers learn during their trip, they actively construct their identity at the same time. For instance, when they learn to become more self-confident, independent and responsible, they also shape their identity. The gappers do construct these identities through the learning process in which they examine their current identity in relation to others (i.e. through internal and external dialogue) on the basis of their new experiences, which may lead to change and adjustment to their previous identity. These findings enrich the previous literature covering the subject of travel and identity, which have not reviewed identity construction as a collection of smaller components of learning outcomes and that the identity construction indeed is part of GYTL process.

Additionally, this study sheds some new lights that the gappers’ identity constructions may occur incrementally. The changes may take place in the first instance as smaller changes moving to bigger changes (e.g. knowledge or skills to behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, values, etc.)
and building up to more intense changes at identity level. Furthermore, from this study it was understood that the gappers build many aspects of their identities, including gendered, cultural and occupational identities, and that their identity works mainly occur as a result of their experience, explorations of their emotions and socialization with others which are unique parts of GYTL that are not necessarily offered in the other forms of learning such as classroom or workplace learning.

Besides a link between the gappers' learning process and their identity constructions, the data from this study provides a few pointers to the fact that there are further potential relationships between the outcomes and processes of learning. For instance, the process that young gappers went through in building their confidence may be different than the process that they needed to go through in achieving a better direction into their study or career life. Furthermore, each specific learning step may be different for each particular learning outcome, e.g. the abstraction process that the gappers went through in making sense of their relationships with their friends and family may be different from the abstraction process that they went through in making sense their relationship with the locals and society at their travel destination as opposed to those of their home country. Similarly, the way the gappers made their adaptation on each outcome of their learning may be different. For instance, their approach in adapting to a lifestyle balance may be different to their approach in dealing with their relationships with those at home upon their return. A further investigation into these relationships in future study may be useful in explaining similarities and differences in the learning processes for each learning outcome.

All-in-all, this study contributes to the body of knowledge in both tourism studies and learning fields by offering a combined perspective which applies learning theory in the tourism context. The previously ungrounded claimed of the benefits of taking a Gap Year have been explicated and better understood; indeed, at a practical level the findings of this study suggest that the gappers may reap major benefits by undertaking a GYT experience. The previously unexplored terrain of the learning that occurs during and as a result of GYT has been conceptually refined and analysed in this study. The findings of this study also provide us with a new understanding that transformation is a plausible outcome of GYTL experience. In conclusion, the main offering of this study is the introduction of the GYTL concept based on a
robust theoretical foundation and which has both theoretical and practical implications and applications for both academics and stakeholders of GYT industry alike.

10.3.5. Research Contributions in relation to Transition, Mobility and Identity

As a final note, while the main research contribution of this study is in the area of learning (as has just been discussed in Sections 10.3.2 to 10.3.4), the study also offers a better understanding of the various concepts and theories (e.g. mobility, identity, transition and learning) that are integrated into and fundamental to the gappers' learning (this has been explored in Chapter Three).

Through its findings, this study asserts the notion that GYT is a useful form of mobility that serves as a tool to help young people to go through transition from their childhood to their adulthood and ease their transition from school to HE/between work. It does so by allowing them space, time and freedom from what they are used to back home. When the gappers chose to embark on GYT as a temporal form of mobility during their transition period, the GYT experience activates their learning, transition, identity construction processes (i.e. provides them with a learning opportunity to understand, practice and create one's identity during an important part of young gappers' transition process). Hence, the study has contributed to each related concepts and theories.

Mobility. To the researcher's knowledge, mobility has not been discussed in relation to individual learning in GYT. This study adds to the mobility literature by highlighting the importance of timing in young gappers' mobility (i.e. GYT was reported to be particularly important as first major trip during young gappers' transition and in line with the literature during their major-decisions life points), which makes its impact on young people's learning, identity construction and their life more influential. Although the learning outcomes reported appear sometimes to be fairly simplistic in nature, nevertheless it could be argued that its significance cannot be underrated for these young gappers at this transition stage of their life.

Transition. Similar to the literature of mobility, although the theme of transition and personal development has been found in the literature since Grand Tour, recent studies focus mainly on long-term travel from the perspectives of identity and/or mobility but not on learning during GYT as part of the transition process. This study found that gappers' transition cannot be separated not only from a discussion of identity construction but also from discussions about
their learning processes. This study provides examples of GYT as active transition behaviour, which suggest that GYT could serve not only as a time out but also a prevention, intervention and preparation for potential future transition challenges facing young people today.

**Identity.** The findings of this study suggest that young gappers learn about themselves through self-reflection and reflections in relation to others. This resulted in the understanding of the multiplicity of their identities, including their personal self, relational self and social self. The 'identity work' for the young gappers is a project in progress, and while in some cases their identity works are incidental, in most cases these are practices that they actively try-out during the trip. The trip inherently exposed them to many opportunities, obstacles and influences, which allows those who are ready for new learning experience to meet the circumstances that can change them.

Their ‘identity work’ raises fundamental questions about their past, present and the future - who they were, who they are, and who will they be. The process of finding out and discovering appear to raise these questions throughout their GYT; for some it was pronounced at the beginning, while to others during and at the end of the journey. The gappers learn that their journey is a consistently changing process which is affected by the internal (i.e. personal situation), the others (i.e. socials) and the circumstances (i.e. environments). During their travel, they learn about the importance of his/her identity; they practice their new identity by learning how to assert them; and received confirmations as they go along. In the case of GYT, some identity works are proactive, while others are reactive. The gappers went through an emotional journey to understand their (changing) identity; often they are surprised on what they found about themselves which is positive in most cases. Their journeys of identity construction have provided them with options and explorations, a process that they will need to persevere in continuation after their trip.

While mobile lifestyle prevails today, embarking on GYT represents a major effort for mobility on the part of the young gappers. As they travelled geographically (i.e. through space and place), they also travelled psychologically through new social and cultural terrains that helps them in understanding and constructing both their personal and social identities (e.g. occupational roles, gender identity, national identity, etc.). In this case, the gappers could temporarily become a new person in a new landscape which allows them to practice and learn about themselves through trials and errors. The practice of trying the new provides them a new
meaning to the old; the distance and the foreign also provides them with defined meaning of home and familiar.

**Learning.** Previous research has not applied learning theories to GYT hence this study is unique in examining the value of learning of the GYT in terms of the two important learning theories. The findings of this study suggest that both Experiential Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory are considered the most useful theories to explain learning that occur during GYT, these contributions have been explored at a great length in earlier section (Section 10.3.3.). This work complements recent work which looks at learning from a philosophical perspective (e.g. Coghlan and Gooch, 2011; Falk et al., 2011; Stone and Petrick, 2013).

One of the most important insights to highlight here is that learning during GYT is unique in comparison to other learning that gappers’ experience. This is because GYT is not only experiential but is also transformational. This is for two main reasons: (1) GYT involves mobility elements which put the gappers into completely different circumstances of learning, allowing many factors in GYT to create specific GYT environments that acts as learning laboratories, which are highly influential to both their learning processes and their future capacity to learn, (2) GYT allows the gappers to reflect on their life and personal identity more closely, hence it often represents an intensive emotional journey. When the gappers are mobile and are outside of their ‘comfort zone’, the rate of change is likely to be higher as the gappers are learning not only cognitively but also emotionally. The transformative learning theory highlights the important role of emotions, whereas the Experiential Learning Theory mainly focuses on the cognitive and behavioural aspects of learning. In other words, when behaviour, cognition and emotion are combined, there is potential for transformation. This is illustrated and explained in details in Figures 12 and Section 10.3.3.

Indeed, GYT could be an important part of the gappers’ life time learning process, allowing them to transfer both their learning outcomes and their new understanding on how to learn from their GYT to other areas in their life. Figure 14 provides a basic illustration on how this study could provide an original contribution to the body of knowledge to tourism, learning and development, and youth studies literature alike.
10.4. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In conjunction with its contributions to theory, the outcome of this thesis could also provide practical suggestions for gappers, their parents, GYT companies, educational or governmental institutions and workplace alike. The final part of this practical implications section is also dedicated to the industry at large.

First and foremost, this study would prove to be beneficial for the gappers themselves as the participants of the research. The findings of this study could be used to help gappers to plan their trip and learn to develop themselves more effectively during and from their GYT experience. By understanding the premises that their GYT experience could influence their future study, career and life directions positively, they could plan their trip accordingly (e.g. choosing the right activities that may enhance their directions or tested their assumptions about their study, career or life) to ensure that their investments will generate the benefits intended. Moreover, it could assist the gappers in examining their own learning and identity construction process and how they may influence their future learning and/or identity-construction potential (i.e. the gappers could review their own learning processes and whether or not they could make some improvements on how they learn in order to maximise their learning potentials). From a learning perspective, it could also help them in reflecting and making sense of their life and experiences in order to understand themselves, their identities, their options and their
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relationship with others and the world, which in essence create their life perspectives and opportunities. It was also noted that the gappers could benefit by looking into further details on the personal and professional skills they gained as a result of their GYT experience as well as their learning abilities, and carefully utilise these for their career advancement at their workplace.

Secondly, because often the parents of young gappers are closely involved with the preparation of the GYT and are also at the same time directly impacted by the outcomes of the trips, this study could be of benefits to them in assisting the young gappers in planning their trip and understanding the changes that may have occurred upon their return. Having a general understanding on both the potential and the complexity of the GYT experience could provide parents with a greater peace of mind, but also equip them with the abilities to guide their children’s future. It will help them to be more open in relating to gappers’ experiences, which will potentially create better dialogue and more solid relationships between them in the future. Understanding GYTL process will also assist parents in understanding the actual process on how the changes may have occurred and hence, have a better understanding the learning style and learning and career potential of their children. This will undeniably assist parents in providing future guidance on the gapper’s future directions (i.e. their suitability of certain career prospects based on their learning style and potentials, etc.).

Thirdly, GYT companies could benefit from this study as it provides them with academic evidence on the benefits of GYT experience, confirming the claimed benefits of GYT. Companies could also benefit from the illustrated narratives of the young people in this study as case studies, as well as the comprehension on the importance of various travel factors in GYT in order to create travel plans that optimize the potential of GYT. Understanding that each gapper learns differently, and that each gapper’s background has strong influence in the process and outcome of their learning will also help GYT companies to tailor GYT package that is most suitable for each gapper. There is also a potential for a development of a GYTL Manual or Handbook to accompany their trips which might be used to prompt gappers to reflect on their daily experience and to encourage them to think deeply about their learning and its potential outcomes. It will also help in monitoring the gappers’ progress, and providing feedback on the effectiveness of the tailored programme which will inform potentials for future improvements. GYT companies that are able to provide these knowledge on the gappers learning will be sought
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After, as these knowledge gives some levels of assurance to the gappers and their parents on their investment. In essence, this knowledge could potentially enhance the ethical practices of GYT companies in their marketing campaign and advertisement and increase their awareness on the vulnerability of the young people in their transition periods when selling the appropriate GYT packages.

Fourth, this study could provide practical contributions to the educational institutions in anticipating and understanding the experiences of their students. High school institutions, for example, could prepare students who plan to embark into GYT upon graduation by going through their options, the various potential outcomes and educating them on the GYTL process. They could also encourage learning through their GYT experiences by creating special GYTL booklets for their students and through GYTL awareness presentations. On the other hand, this study could also help Higher Education Institutions in anticipating both the needs and potential challenges of GYT students when returning from the trip and in the classroom. Universities and colleges, for example, could recognize and comprehend the background of their students who have embarked into GYT and incorporate this understanding in various ways to help students, e.g. linking classroom examples into their personal experiences. It may also potentially help teachers to understand the behaviours, attitudes and learning styles of the students who have embarked into GYT and those who have not and to further investigate what they could do to encourage their learning accordingly. Universities could also prepare those who are about to embark into their GYT during their study years. Also important is the potential application of this study in helping higher education institutions to prepare their students transitioning into the working environment. As it was found in this study that personal development resulted from the trip could also prepare them in their professional environments, it could be argued that including such extracurricular activities into programs of studies, will enhance employability and students' personal growth. The university could also enhance their knowledge in the field by motivating their academic scholars to research into the area further.

Fifth, this study may also have implications for the workplace. Companies may benefit by having insights on how young gappers perceives their future career aspirations, and also on the dilemmas experienced by those planning to embark on GYT. By exploring this further and applying to their company context, they could generate more effective personal and professional development plans. The managers will also benefits by understanding on how GYT could
potentially revitalize their employees and optimize their contributions upon their return to work. These understandings of the gappers’ learning would also be of benefits by the companies employing gappers (i.e. at a destination during their GYT) or ex-gappers (i.e. in the gappers home countries after their GYT), as it highlights the uniqueness of gappers as part of their workforce. At the end, companies who are aware and able to take proper actions on the needs of the employees’ professional aspirations, personal development and lifestyle balance are likely to become successful in managing their human resources.

The practical implications for the GYT industry are now considered. The main critique facing GYT industry today remains to be its over-commercialisation. While some focus is now given to the individual gapper development (e.g. itinerary tailoring and structured gap year focusing on development, etc.), these are still done with lack of depth (e.g. for advertising purposes with unmeasured and assumptions based GYT benefits upon returning) and focus on profitability seemed to prevail (e.g. the high price of activities including volunteering programmes at poor countries). On this, this study offers opportunity to develop a more robust practice (i.e. proper guidance, monitoring and follow up) across the GYT industry.

For instance, some appropriate education background (e.g. personal coaching and development) not only on travel experience and knowledge may be a necessary integral component to the industry’s employee recruitment and training efforts. This will allow employees to integrate findings from this study as well as other literature into the GYT industry practice with ease (e.g. tailoring offering for pre-university and career gappers based on solid tested conceptual evidence rather merely than practical assumptions).

Moreover, this study also calls the industry to be more critical on itself, e.g. scrutinizing the facts surrounding GYT practice (e.g. ‘gap yeah’ examples of cases which relates to some sexual and drinking behaviours, GYT impacts on people and society at home and abroad) which will aid the industry to be both more purposeful and ethical in its business dealing and applications.

Finally, using an understanding that GYT could act as active transition behaviour from this study, the industry could be more pro-active in making changes into its practice by looking into potential applications on what and how the gappers learn into their programmes and
reviewing their current real cases against the findings of this study. In particular, the applications of GYT learning on the gappers could be used as a monitoring and developmental system.

By doing the above, the gap between the practical and theoretical applications that are currently still missing in the industry can be bridged and minimised. Reviewing and applying the significant of these various outcomes and steps of GYT learning for different products offering, working more closely with gappers and their parents, government and educational institutions, GYT companies representing the industry may have more influence in enhancing individuals and society life and offer a forward-thinking approach from their businesses practices.

10.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has a number of limitations. First, this study is limited due to its exploratory nature, i.e. it is the first study intended to investigate the relationship between GYT phenomenon and learning. It is also the first research to examine GYT in light of various abstract and important concepts (transition, identity and mobility) more broadly rather than focusing on specific practical and concrete issues. In doing so, hopefully an overall picture is arrived at. Yet, in order to address the limitation of this study it is necessary to give a greater focus on these issues further in the future studies by extending the various findings of this study.

Second, this study has utilised a fairly small sample size of 27 young gappers, and one method of inquiry (i.e. interviewing). While it is true that generalisation could not be made based on this sample size, it is also true that a deeper understanding about the topic of learning outcomes and processes of the young gappers has been achieved through the process of theoretical saturations. Furthermore, this study also addressed this limitation through the presentation of thick description (see Geertz, 1973) by providing the full accounts of each gappers complemented by thorough commentary and interpretations derived from rich primary data. Yet a larger sample size and the use of other data collection method (e.g. quantitative study such as survey to complement this qualitative study) could now be used, and may prove beneficial in examining the phenomenon and its relationships further and in making generalisations (see below). Nonetheless, the 27 participants were interviewed in depth on two separate occasions, and the rich data that this yielded has undoubtedly provided unique insights from a very rich data set.
Third, the sample size of this study was aimed at a relatively broad sample of targeted population: UK-based young gappers' age of 17-30 years who embarked on any major overseas travel experience within 3-24 months travel period within the last 24 months. This was done purposely in order to reach the goal for a comprehensive perspective. Nevertheless, follow up studies should concentrate on a more focused sample of the population (e.g. before university versus during university population, population at various cities, etc.) in order to learn further on potential differences found among the young gappers in this study.

Fourth, there was an indication from the emerging data that travel destinations may have some influence on the gappers' learning experience, e.g. the destinations' cultural distance may have different level of impacts on their learning. However, further research need to be conducted to investigate this relationship further, as the data from the current study is limited in that it has not provided conclusive evidence about specific learning patterns as it was not part of the research objectives of this study.

Finally, while this research has made in-depth studies of learning outcomes (the second research question) and learning processes (the third research question), this study did not include a further research question to investigate the relationship between outcome and processes of learning. While some data revealed potential links between the two, more data need to be collected in order to provide robust evidence on these relationships. For instance, the links between specific learning outcomes to specific learning processes could be researched further during this study.

10.6. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis highlighted the need to consider GYT experience from various perspectives (learning, identity, mobility and transition) in order to create a comprehensive and holistic framework. While there continues to be a need to look at the various factors systemically and to examine the relationships among these factors, researchers could also look into each of these various factors in further detail, in particular the various outcomes and processes of GYTL. For example, researchers could investigate the gappers' motivation, impact of each travel factor (e.g. travel destination), any one of the particular findings (i.e. social network and friendships during GYT, the influence of GYT on the gappers' social, cultural and economic capitals) in isolation, and could also explore the associations among these separate parts in more details. Similarly,
researchers could inquire or test whether the learning outcomes of the GYT experience are related to any specific types of learning.

Future studies could address the topics of learning processes and outcomes, and apply them to other contexts, e.g. applying the learning framework used for this study to contexts other than travelling such as understanding the young people’s experiences when they study, work and live abroad (i.e. application to exchange students or expatriates). Also mentioned earlier in the practical application section (Section 10.4.), researcher could explore on how the findings of this thesis (i.e. the learning processes and outcomes of GYT experience) could be of assistance to the educational institutions (i.e. increasing their learning abilities and employability skills) as well as GYT companies (i.e. planning GYT programs for outgoing travellers). Furthermore, research could also be done to investigate the ripple effects of the benefits of GYT experience, by including inputs from other people in the gappers’ life (friends, parents, teachers, etc.).

The following research topics offer potential future research in the subject area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome/Impact:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To measure the long term impact of characters built during GYT on the gappers’ life, e.g. on their future a) study, b) career, and c) social life;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore the inter-relationships between the quality of experience gained during GYT and one’s personal development, and the determinants of a quality experience;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To study the impact of the life skills (time, finance and well-being management) gained during GYT in the long term in their future a) study, b) career and c) social life;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore any potential intervention steps applicable for the enhancement of the GYT experience in order to build the gappers’ characters and for them to gain life skills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To investigate the long term impacts of the gappers’ GYT experience and their learning on their relationships with their a) family, b) friends/other gappers, and c) local/society;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore the impact of GYT experience in the gappers’ decision making processes for their priority in the future (e.g. their lifestyle balance, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To examine the impact of various travel factors on the GYT experience, such as travel destinations, and if there are any potential intervention on these factors can be done in order to positively influence the outcome of these experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore the relationship between the gappers’ motivation, their GYT experience and its outcomes as input, process and output system.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitions/Mobility:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To investigate the role of emotions and social interactions as impacts in the gappers’ transitions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To investigate in-depth the role of the various destinations (from geographical, cultural and economical perspectives) on GYT experience and GYTL;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To explore what types of life crisis or life situations may prompt gappers to embark on GYT;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To examine gappers’ integration (culture-shock) into a new culture/environment and their re-integrations (reverse culture-shock) into their life back home after GYT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning Processes:
- To investigate the role of each of the GYTL steps in further details, including the role of disorienting dilemma in GYTL;
- To investigate whether there is a relationship between each of the GYTL outcome and its learning processes (i.e. does each of the learning outcome has different processes?)
- To investigate the learning styles and processes of the gappers vs. non-gappers, its reasons and its implications;
- To explore potential interventions that could be used to enhance within the GYTL processes in order to maximise their learning outcomes;
- To examine whether differences exist between the learning processes as well as the impacts of the learning outcomes of the gappers vs. non-gappers.

Linkage of Learning Outcomes and Processes:
- Finally, to examine whether linkages, similarities and/or differences exist between the learning processes and the learning outcomes of the gappers.

Future studies could also consider expansion of this middle-theory generation research into verification studies, by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, another study could be dedicated to test the findings generated in this study in a specific context (e.g. testing the application of GYTL to high school to higher education students, etc.). Also, as discussed in the limitations of the study section (Section 10.5.) above follow-up research would benefit from using larger sample size and focusing on different groups of gappers in order to allow further analysis to compare and contrast the findings and make broader generalizations. It is also possible to apply and test the findings of this study to various types of gappers as well, for example career gappers, not just young career gappers and retirement gappers (e.g. to understand their transition process in returning to work or towards their retirement). Finally, the time horizon of this study could also be extended to a longitudinal study that involves pre-, during and post-GYT experience, including the gappers’ experiences in returning and transitioning to their life back home. By exploring these various alternatives for future research theory in the area of GYT and tourism studies could be advanced thus fulfilling the need for enhancing the currently limited literature in the subject.

10.7. REFLECTIVE ACCOUNT OF RESEARCH PROCESS

When considering embarking on a PhD research, I was certain about my choice of research topic: what travel brings to people’s life. Upon a closer look on the literature, I found that many young people embark on GYT during a transition time in their education and career and that their trip may enhance their personal growth and self-development. With this in mind, my research journey started on a part-time basis while I worked as a Research Officer at the
University of Surrey. One year after the start of my study, my transfer meeting took place and the ethical application was approved. The feedback received was positive, with minor feedback. One of the feedback comments was to first clearly define what GYT is. Another feedback item was to focus only on one learning theory rather than using four learning theories. The data collection process began shortly afterwards.

During the data collection process, the researcher also needed to change from using case study research into exclusively interviewing techniques, and also from using the Critical Incident Technique as the main way of questioning to only using it as guidance. This is mainly because after the first two pilot tests of the main study's interviews, it became clear that the rigid use of Critical Incident Technique was not necessary as it did not lead to the answer needed for this study. Because of this, it also became clear that applying case study technique is not necessary as the use of interviewing technique was sufficient.

The data collection process itself was fun, a process that was most enjoyed by and rewarding for the researcher. The interviews occurred smoothly and were completed within less than two months, with surprisingly few challenges. As the interview progressed, the researcher started to build her ability to link the literature and the emerging data, making connections, and thinking as well as questioning critically. Shortly after the data collection took place, the researcher started her full-time lecturing position that inevitably required her to progress her study at a slower speed. For this reason, the data analysis process, writing and re-writing took much longer than was hoped over the last couple of years. Yet, this is also the time which the researcher needed to learn to maintain her full concentration in order to produce critical thinking required, and tested her ability to make an academic contribution to this new and emerging field.

At the beginning, the use of NVivo was considered to help in cutting down the time for analysis; however it was later abandoned as it only distracted the researcher further from concentrating on the data on hand. Quickly enough, the researcher found that the richness of the data could be overwhelming and could produce data that were not directly related to the research questions. At this stage, the researcher’s main lessons were to remain focus and to not be easily distracted from the main purpose of the research. The data analysis and writings remained focused on the three main questions of the study, leaving other emerging areas of research for future development.
Finally, the end is insight. During this long journey, I have learned about the topic, the methodology and the process, but equally important I have learned more about different aspects of myself and my ways of learning and becoming. Each journey is unique; one could only really understand and contemplate on the path once it is fully completed. PhD research without a doubt is a major life project that requires patience, persistence, endurance and commitment. So far, the journey has been worth taking. Each challenge I faced transforms me profoundly – academically and personally.
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References


References


References


References


References


Appendices

Appendix 1. Participants Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 1 – Perry</th>
<th>P1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Destinations</td>
<td>Home (UK) → Australia (Sydney) → New Zealand → Fiji → US (Hawaii, San Francisco) → Canada (Vancouver, Toronto) → US (Niagara Falls, New York) → Home (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>8 months (from October 2007 to June 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train, bus, and local public transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Hostel, family’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Travelling (various sightseeing and leisure activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perry travelled just to have fun. He enjoyed his trips, and had a few opportunities to work in Australia. In the middle of his trip, he had to return home to see a family member who was ill. He later decided to continue his trip as he did not want to miss out on the fun. From his trip, he realized that he would like to have his own business one day and decided to go to University. He also realized that his family is on his top priority list and hopes to settle down soon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 2 – Giovanni</th>
<th>P2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Destinations</td>
<td>Home (UK) → US (Chicago, Missouri, Chicago, Washington D.C., New York) → Home (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>3.5 months (from May to August 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Work accommodation, hotel, hostel, friend’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With a friend from work, with newly made friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Working in camp and travelling (mainly sightseeing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Camp organisation, self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Giovanni was very unhappy at his job. He decided to work in a childrens’ camp in the US. There he rediscovered himself, and started liking himself again. He said he was very happy during that time that he started to be more generous, live in the moment, and appreciate the importance of friends and social contact. He also shared that he is now capable of enjoying himself, and has gained confidence and self-esteem.
### Participant 3 – Jessica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (Germany) → China (Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing) → Home (Germany)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>6 months (from February to August 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Boyfriend’s place, hotel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Self, with boyfriend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Internship and travelling (various activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jessica was often sad and uncertain of who she was and how to behave. Living and working in China made her understand her ethnic background and gave her a sense of belonging. She started to build an understanding of herself and her upbringing. She shared that she is happier now, and has more self-acceptance. She is now able to decide where she would like to live and her future career path.

### Participant 4 – Dylan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Mexico → Belize → Guatemala → El Salvador → Honduras → Nicaragua → Costa Rica → Panama → Colombia → Ecuador → Peru → Bolivia → Chile → Brazil → Argentina → Chile → New Zealand → Australia → Indonesia (Bali, Lombok) → Singapore → Malaysia → Thailand → Laos → Vietnam → Cambodia → Thailand → Bangladesh → Nepal → India → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>1 year (from September 2007 to September 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train, coach, yacht, boat, and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Relatives’ and friend’s house, guest house, hostel, and overnight transportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Solo, then joined by friends and family at various occasions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Travelling (various activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dylan had travelled many times before. His first year out was in France a few years earlier. Yet, this is his first extended round the world trip by himself. People and their lives and culture have most influence for Dylan, in which he builds an understanding of various ways of life and lifestyles options. Seeing different realities of life prompted him to re-evaluate his values and career options.
## Appendices

### Participant 5 – Rebecca

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Singapore → Australia → New Zealand → Australia → Laos → Thailand → Cambodia → Vietnam → China → Taiwan → Hong Kong → Japan → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>1 year (from November 2006 to November 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, coach, car and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Friend’s house, rented house, camping, hostel, local’s home, luxury hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Working and travelling (various activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During this trip, Rebecca worked in Australia and travelled to other countries. The trip gave her a sense of achievement and made her realize the various possibilities open to her. She learnt that she could feel free, happy and satisfied away from expectations of others at home. Visiting a few countries with poor living conditions built her understanding of equality and humanity, while sharing the trip with her boyfriend also made her realise the value of this relationship to her. With a new understanding gained from her trip, Rebecca is planning her future plan and actions, which possibly include living abroad.

### Participant 6 – Chloe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Australia (Sydney, Byron Bay, Surfers Paradise, Brisbane, Fraser Island, Arlie Beach, Sunday Island, Cairns, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney) → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>4 months (from April to July 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, coach, boat and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Hostel, overnight boat and coach, relative’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With one friend, then solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Travelling (sightseeing, sports activities, relaxation) and working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Chloe, this trip symbolises the end and also the beginning of an era – the end of an era of being a student, and a beginning of her career. It also is a first step away from a very strong parents’ influence, in which she feels a freedom to decide. While she gained new study and career aspirations from her trip, she also achieved a sense of achievement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 7 – Keanu</th>
<th>Participant 8 – Brayden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (UK) → US (Hawaii) → Home (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>1 year and 5 months (from October 2005 to February 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flight and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Hostel, hotel and apartment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Travelling (sightseeing and various activities) and working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keanu left his parents when he was 15 and had since lived on his own in a tough part of the city. His decision to embark on the trip was driven by his desire to search for his identity and where he belongs. One significant incident happened and it became a turning-point in his life. He learnt to appreciate his life, be grateful for his family and understand that he needed to change. He then decided to go to university to study hard to achieve what he wants in life.

| **Travel Destinations** | Home (UK) → Netherland (Amsterdam) → Kilimanjaro → Tanzania (Dar Es Salaam) → Zambia → Zimbabwe → Tanzania (Zanzibar) → Nairobi (Kenya) → Amsterdam → Home (UK) |
| **Travel Duration** | 4 months (from May to September 2007) |
| **Travel Mode** | Flight, train, coach, ferry, boat and local public transports |
| **Travel Accommodations** | Hotel, hostel, tent, people’s houses, overnight train, and flat |
| **Travel Companions** | Solo |
| **Main Travel Activities** | Travelling (sightseeing and various activities) |
| **Travel Arrangement** | Gap year company and self-arrangement |

This gap year is not Brayden’s first. He has travelled many times before, and considers travelling as a test. Although he shared that his first trip was the one that changed him the most, he also shared that he continues to gain from his trip because he believes that travelling is a self-defining exercise. By stepping into a whole different world and seeing the things he hadn’t seen before, he learned about self-respect and respect for others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 9 – Ella</th>
<th>P9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (Korea) → Thailand → UK (London, various cities) → Home (Korea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>6 months (from September 2007 to March 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flight, train, coach, car and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Guest house, flat and hostel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Travelling (sightseeing and various activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Gap year company and self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ella was happy, but somehow felt that she wanted to change her life. So she decided to take a gap year to Europe. She soon found out that her trip was “the biggest accident of my life”. She shared her realisation that her life and its meaning have become bigger than before. She decided to go home briefly only to come back to the UK more permanently by studying for a degree in the subject she is more passionate about. She now also has a stronger vision on her future career.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 10 – Gavin</th>
<th>P10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (UK) → India (Calcutta, Darjeeling, South of India) → Australia → Home (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>4.5 months (from February to July 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flight, train and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Family’s Friend, Hotel and Hostel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>With group, then travel with one friend/a few newly made friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Teaching English and Travelling (sightseeing and various activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Gap Year Company and self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gavin always had a very comfortable and convenient life, and felt left out when his friends talked about how hard life could be. He went to India to test himself and to gain an insight into the life of others. Time passed by very slowly, but when it was over he felt a sense of achievement. He shared that he is now more driven, would like to do more in his life, and is more confident that he can cope with any situation.
### Participant 11 – Ethan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Singapore → Australia → New Zealand → Australia → Laos → Thailand → Cambodia → Vietnam → China → Taiwan → Hong Kong → Japan → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>1 year (from November 2006 to November 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, coach and car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Friend’s house, rented house, camping, hostel, local’s home, luxury hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Working and travelling (various activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethan felt that his work was not fulfilling and not meaningful, and needed to make a change. His decision to embark on the trip was the turning-point in his life. During his trip, he met many people who extended kindness and friendship towards him and his companion. Meeting these people, along with having time away to think and refresh himself, helped him to re-evaluate his life. He now has a job he is passionate about, in which part of his job is to help others to see if their occupation is the right one for them.

### Participant 12 – Kiefer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Russia → [Trans Siberian Overland Train] → China → Vietnam → Cambodia → Laos → China → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>1 year 3 months (from April 2006 to August 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train, coach and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Hotel, overnight train, hostel, apartment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With two friends, then meet future wife and stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Travelling (sightseeing and various activities) and teaching English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kiefer described himself as a shy, quite and unmotivated person. When he travelled he met many people, including his future wife. Wanting to stay close to her, he took up teaching English – something he had never imagined doing before. As a result of this chain of events, his confidence was sharply improved and he also became more outgoing and motivated. When he returned home, he decided to move on into different job, started his new life by getting married and moving to a new place.
**Participant 13 – Melissa**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Belgium (Brussels) → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>9 months (from May 2008 to February 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Train, car and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Apartment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Volunteer traineeship and city-sightseeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Hiring company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Being a good student and focusing on her study was the only thing that used to matter to Melissa. But when she embarked on a traineeship in Belgium, she gained not only an understanding of the workplace, but also an exposure to life outside study and work. She started to re-evaluate her life and felt that she needed to change if she wanted to be successful in life.

**Participant 14 – Ulrich**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → US (New York, Palm Beach, Orlando, the Keys, Miami, Cape Canaveral, Las Vegas) → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>1 year (from August 2007 to August 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train, car and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Budget hotel, apartment, friend’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Solo; then with newly met friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Traineeship and travelling (sightseeing and relaxation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Hiring company and self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ulrich took a gap year in order to take time out from learning, test his ability and enhance his employability. During his traineeship, he gained insight into the direction of his career, and also on where he might want to be, and the lifestyle he would like to have. He now applies this new understanding to his life having returned from the trip.
### Participant 15 – Charlotte

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>P15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Trip 1: Home (UK) → Tanzania (Dar Es Salaam, Zanzibar, North Tasmania) → Zambia → Malawi → Tanzania → Zambia → Malawi → Tanzania → Home (UK)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trip 2: Home (UK) → US (New York, Minnesota, Minneapolis, Chicago, Memphis, New Orleans, Washington, New York) → Home (UK)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>8 months (from September 2006 to May 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 months (from May to September 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train, bus, ferry and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Friend’s house, hotel, hostel and host family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With one friend; then with two other friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Teaching and travelling (sightseeing, safari and adventures).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Volunteer company and self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Charlotte worked hard and excelled in her studies, but felt estranged by her friends. During her trip to Tanzania, she experienced first-hand the responsibility of being a teacher and the feeling part of a Tanzanian family. She gained strength and confidence and discovered many of her good qualities. The year after, she decided to challenge herself once again by working in a disabled camp in the US. From this experience, she enhanced her employability and obtained clarity on the direction of her career.

### Participant 16 – Anna-Rose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>P16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home (UK) → Tanzania (Dar Es Salaam, Zanzibar) → South Africa (Johannesburg) → Fiji → Australia (Sydney and Cairns) → Singapore → Malaysia → Thailand (Bangkok) → Hong Kong → China → Hong Kong → Home (UK)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>6 months (from February to August 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, train, bus and local public transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Local accommodation, hostels, friend’s and family’s house, budget hotel/guest house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Teaching and travelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Gap year company and self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anna-Rose volunteered to teach in Tanzania. Living in conditions that were different to what she was accustomed to, while witnessing the passion of life and happiness among people who had less than her had a major impact on how what is important to her in life. During her trip in Malaysia, one incident challenged her outlook which leads her to question the motives for her reaction. She shared that now she is generally more aware and has more meaning in her life and has a wider perspective than she used to.
### Participant 17 – Daisy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Thailand (Bangkok) → Australia (Sydney, Cairns) → New Zealand → Australia (Perth) → Indonesia (Bali) → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>8 months (from January to August 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, Bus, Tour Bus and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Relative’s House, Hostels, Friend’s House, Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With a friend, then solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Travelling (Sightseeing and sports activities, etc.) and Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Daisy wanted to return to Australia to revisit her fond childhood memories of when her family visited the country. This trip symbolises a few important things for her: a period of getting over a past relationship, of growing up from being a teenager to becoming a responsible adult, and of transition to university. She also experienced the contrast of being in the company of others to being on her own. She believes that taking a gap year has made a difference in her life, making her more mature and helps her to cope with her study and social life.

### Participant 18 – Felicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → India (Mumbai) → Home (UK) → Romania (Brasov) → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>3.5 months (from February to May 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Family’s House; Host Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Two Gap Year Internships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement; Organised by Gap Year Company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Felicity started two months of university before she decided that she needed to take a break. She then went to India to stay with her extended family and to be a trainee, and to take an internship in Romania. These experiences gave her an insight into working life, and what she needed to do to achieve something positive in life. She also shared that bonding with her family and understanding her roots has given her a new way of looking at life and an understanding of her priorities. She is more confident now, and feels that she is able to do what she wants. She returned to university and chose the discipline of her own preference.
## Appendices

### Participant 19 – Whitney

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Switzerland (Geneva) → Italy (Florence) → Switzerland (Geneva and other cities) → France (Paris) → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>7 months (from August 2006 to March 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, Train and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Apartment, Friend’s Place and Hostel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Solo, with newly met friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Working and some city sightseeing trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whitney decided to work as an au-pair during her GYT. It turns out that she had a very hectic schedule and intense experience with the children as the parents of the family she worked for were very busy and very career oriented. From her experience, she has re-evaluated the importance of money in life and how it can affect people’s attitudes towards others. She gained financial and time management skills along with an understanding of herself and her future career direction.

### Participant 20 – Connor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (UK) → Thailand → India → Home (UK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>6 months (from November 2007 to April 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, Train, Boat and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Budget Hotel, Hostel, Rented House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>With three friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Vacation and Travelling (including sightseeing, sports, relaxation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connor used to live in India, and only moved back to the UK since high school and university. During his gap year, he decided to take a vacation in Thailand and India. He revisited many things he missed from his childhood in India. He feels that his gap year helped him to grow up and separated him from the crowd. The trip also made him realize that he values his best friends most and that life is full of opportunities, and that he would like to make the most of it. This has given him new insights of where he wants to go and what he wants to do in his life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 21 – Yves</th>
<th>P21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (UK) → Russia → China → Vietnam → Cambodia → Laos → Thailand → Malaysia → Singapore → Australia → New Zealand → Thailand → Home (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>1 year 5 months (from April 2006 to August 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flight, Train, Bus and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Hotel, Hostel, Friend’s Place, Rented Accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>With friends; Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Working and Travelling (including sightseeing, sports, relaxation, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yves used to struggle moving forward in his life and holding conversations with people. During his trip, he witnessed the history of human struggle and how other people live. He also met many people. What he used to believe to be mission impossible now he believes is now attainable. As soon as he returned, he decided to move out of home and get himself a different job. He also felt that he has gained a lot of confidence, independence and goal-orientation among other new positive traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 22 – Nicole</th>
<th>P22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (UK) → Peru → Ecuador → Brazil → Chile → New Zealand → Australia → Singapore → Thailand → Japan → China → India → South Africa → Kenya → Tanzania → Home (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>5 months (from April to September 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flight, Bus and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Camping, Hotel, Overnight Boat, Hostels and Friend’s Place, Lodge/Hut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>With boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Travelling (including sightseeing, natural, animal, historical and local attractions, shopping, relaxation, sports, cooking classes, visiting orphanage, safari, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nicole was uncertain about what was important to her and the direction her life was taking. Although she was quite successful at studying, her longing for taking a gap year had led her to not taking her study seriously. She didn’t graduate and later decided to work. When timing and financial constraints permitted, she decided to travel to see the world. She came back home knowing herself better, knowing what she wanted out of life and how to get it. She then decided to go back to get her degree.
### Participant 23 – Verity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (Belgium) → Hong Kong → Australia (Perth) → New Zealand → Fiji → Hawaii → US (San Francisco) → Home (London)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>5 months (from August 2007 to January 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Flight, Bus and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Budget Hotel and Hostel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Travelling and Sightseeing (incl. natural, historical and water sports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verity was not happy with her job. She felt impatient and restless all the time. When she met people experiencing a similar situation during her trip, she started to evaluate her own life. She realized that she could be happy and start seeing the bigger things in life. Among many positive changes she shared, she gained an understanding of the value of loyalty in both her career and friendships. She was soon able to find new job, and be more aware of who she should be friends with. Finally, she shared that she has now found peace within herself.

### Participant 24 – Naomi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Destinations</th>
<th>Home (Delhi) → India → Home (Delhi)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Duration</td>
<td>3 months (from May to July 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Mode</td>
<td>Train, Bus and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Accommodations</td>
<td>Relative and Friend’s Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Companions</td>
<td>Solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Travel Activities</td>
<td>Visiting local natural and historical attractions and old school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Arrangement</td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When she had to make a few important long-term decisions about her life, Naomi decided to take a trip to make time for herself. She visited a few important places related to her childhood and her time as a student. She said that she has changed a lot from the trip and the trip confirmed that she is on the right path. After the trip, she is able to make decisions for herself, and is able to control her emotions. She shared that her trip has helped her to see that she needed to change.
Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 25 – McKenzie</th>
<th>P25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (Farnham) → Argentina → Chile → Bolivia → Peru → Argentina → Uruguay/Paraguay → Brazil → Mexico → Guatemala → Belize → Mexico → UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>4 months (from April to August 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flights, Bus, Boat and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Hotel and Hostel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>With friend (until Argentina); Solo;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Travelling (sightseeing; natural, city, historical attractions; animal and natural attractions; sports activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

McKenzie described himself as a shy person before the trip. He was fairly disappointed with his trip companion, which made him question the meanings of friendship and loyalty. When he was faced with the decision on whether to go it alone or to discontinue his journey, he discovered his capability to be independent and that he has people skills. Now, he puts his loyal friends on the priority list, and to him travelling alone is no longer a daunting idea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 26 – Vivienne</th>
<th>P26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (Greece) → India (Mumbai; other travel destinations) → Home (Greece) → UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>9 months (from January to March 2008; June to December 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flights and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Apartment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>With fiancé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Trial for residence and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Self-arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Originally, the plan was to settle down in India - to study and to live with her fiancée. Vivienne enjoyed her new daily life in India, but soon found out that her plan to study was not working out. During that time, she experienced the Mumbai bombing which made her question the essence of life and death and an issue of trust. She and her fiancée decided to move to the UK where she could undertake her study. Vivienne considers the year to be a gap year – a year planned to be overseas but caused her to take a different direction in her life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 27 – Gabriel</th>
<th>P27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Destinations</strong></td>
<td>Home (UK) → Australia (Sydney, Brisbane, Cairns) → New Zealand (Auckland, Rotorua, Queenstown, Auckland) → Australia (Sydney) → Home (UK) → Canada (Whistler) → Home → France and Switzerland (Alps) → Home (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Duration</strong></td>
<td>7 months (from November 2006 to June 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Mode</strong></td>
<td>Flights and Local Public Transports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Accommodations</strong></td>
<td>Friends and Family's Home, Hostel, and Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Companions</strong></td>
<td>Solo, with friends (Auckland and Rotorua), with younger brother and brother's friends (Canada, France and Switzerland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Travel Activities</strong></td>
<td>Working (Sydney) and Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Arrangement</strong></td>
<td>Self-Arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gabriel felt that he was stuck with the identity of the 'old Gabriel' who he described as a 'quiet geek' with poor social skills. As soon as he arrived in Australia, he felt uplifted and had a sense of freedom to be who he wants to be. When he returned home and started university, he realized that he had both the skills and the potential which have made him both a social leader and a high-academic achiever. Yet, sometimes he still finds himself uncomfortable among his old friends, and would like to continue finding his own way in life.
Appendix 2. E-mail/Flyer Sample

Have you taken a Gap Year* in the last two years?  
If yes, I would love to hear from you.

I am investigating the experiences that young people have had during their gap year, and am looking for people who are willing to share their experiences with me. Your participation would involve two one-to-one interviews with me at a convenient place and time.

- Are you between the ages of 17-30 years?
- Have you embarked on 3 months + overseas travel experience in the last two years?

If your answer is yes to all of the above questions, you would be ideal to take part of this study.

In appreciation of your time and participation, free refreshments will be provided and your name will be entered into a draw for a chance to win an iPod Shuffle on completion of the second interview.

This project has been reviewed and given a favourable ethical opinion by the University of Surrey Ethics Committee.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact me at njohan@surrey.ac.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Novie Johan  
Postgraduate Research Student  
Faculty of Management and Law  
University of Surrey  
n.johan@surrey.ac.uk  
01483 689652

* Gap Year Travel (GYT) is where someone has an extended period of travel (3 months+) usually before, during, or after university study.
### Appendix 3. List of Universities, Colleges and Education Institutions in South East England

1. Abingdon and Witney College, Abingdon, Oxfordshire
2. Alton College, Alton, Hampshire
3. Amersham and Wycombe College, Amersham, Buckinghamshire
4. Andover College, Andover, Hampshire
5. Aylesbury College, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
6. Balliol College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
7. Bartholomews Tutorial College, Brighton, East Sussex
8. Barton Peveril College, Eastleigh, Hampshire
9. Basingstoke College of Technology, Basingstoke, Hampshire
10. Bexhill College, Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex
11. Bexley College, Belvedere, Kent
12. Bird College, Sidcup, Kent
13. Blackfriars College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
14. Bracknell and Wokingham College, Bracknell, Berkshire
15. Brasenose College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
16. Brighton Hove and Sussex VI Form College, Hove, East Sussex
17. Bromley College of FE and HE, Bromley, Kent
18. Brooklands College, Weybridge, Surrey
19. Buckinghamshire New University, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire
20. Cambridge Tutors College, Croydon, Surrey
21. Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, Kent
22. Canterbury College, Canterbury, Kent
23. Carshalton College, Carshalton, Surrey
24. Central Sussex College, Crawley, West Sussex
25. Chichester College, Chichester, West Sussex
26. City College Brighton and Hove, Brighton, East Sussex
27. Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
28. Croydon College of FE and HE, Croydon, Surrey
29. Dorton College of FE, Sevenoaks, Kent
30. East Berkshire College, Slough, Berkshire
31. East Surrey College, Redhill, Surrey
32. Eastleigh College, Eastleigh, Hampshire
33. European School of Osteopathy, Boxley, Kent
34. Fareham College, Fareham, Hampshire
35. Farnborough College of Technology, Farnborough, Hampshire
36. Farnborough Sixth Form College, Farnborough, Hampshire
37. Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, Kent
38. Guildford College of FE and HE, Guildford, Surrey
39. Guildford School of Acting, Guildford, Surrey
40. Hadlow College, Hadlow, Kent
41. Harris Manchester College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
42. Hastings College, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex
43. Havant College, Havant, Hampshire
44. Henley College, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire
45. Highbury College, Portsmouth, Hampshire
Appendices

46. Hillcroft College, Surbiton, Surrey
47. Impact International College, Reading, Berkshire
48. Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton, Surrey
49. International College of Oriental Medicine, East Grinstead, West Sussex
50. Itchen College, Southampton, Hampshire
51. John Ruskin College, Croydon, Surrey
52. Kingston College, Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey
53. Kingston University, Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey
54. Linacre College Common Room, Oxford, Oxfordshire
55. Mansfield College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
56. Merton College, Morden, Surrey
57. Mid Kent College, Chatham, Kent
58. Milton Keynes College, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire
59. Nash Further Education Centre, Bromley, Kent
60. National Film and TV School, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire
61. NESCOT College Surrey, Epsom, Surrey
62. North West Kent College, Gravesend, Kent
63. Northbrook College Sussex, Worthing, West Sussex
64. Orpington College, Orpington, Kent
66. Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, Oxfordshire
67. Oxford University, Oxford, Oxfordshire
68. Peter Symonds College, Winchester, Hampshire
69. Portsmouth College, Portsmouth, Hampshire
70. Queen Mary's College, Basingstoke, Hampshire
71. Ravensbourne College, Chislehurst, Kent
72. Reading University, Reading, Berkshire
73. Regents Park College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
74. Reigate College, Reigate, Surrey
75. Rose Bruford College, Sidcup, Kent
76. Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, Surrey
77. Ruskin College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
78. Somerville College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
79. South Downs College, Havant, Hampshire
80. South Kent College, Folkestone, Kent
81. Southampton City College, Southampton, Hampshire
82. Southampton Solent University, Southampton, Hampshire
83. St Hilda's College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
84. St John's College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
85. St Vincent College, Gosport, Hampshire
86. Strode's College, Egham, Surrey
87. Sussex Downs College, Eastbourne, East Sussex
88. Taunton's College, Southampton, Hampshire
89. Thanet College, Broadstairs, Kent
90. The College of Richard Collyer, Horsham, West Sussex
91. The Isle of Wight College, Newport, Isle of Wight
92. The Oxford School of Drama, Oxford, Oxfordshire
93. Totton College, Southampton, Hampshire
94. Treloars College, Holybourne, Hampshire
95. Universities at Medway, Chatham Maritime, Kent
96. University College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
97. University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, Surrey
98. University of Brighton, Brighton, East Sussex
99. University of Buckingham, Buckingham, Buckinghamshire
100. University of Chichester, Chichester, West Sussex
101. University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent
103. University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, Hampshire
104. University of Reading, Reading, West Berkshire
105. University of Southampton, Southampton, Hampshire
106. University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey
107. University of Sussex, Brighton, East Sussex
108. University of Winchester, Winchester, Hampshire
109. Varndean Sixth Form College, Brighton, East Sussex
110. Wadham College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
111. Wessex Institute of Technology, Southampton, Hampshire
112. West Kent College, Tonbridge, Kent
113. Wolfson College, Oxford, Oxfordshire
114. Worthing VI Form College, Worthing, West Sussex
Appendices

Appendix 4. Information Sheet for Participants

Information Sheet for Participants

About the study
This study aims to understand your decision to embark on a gap year, and what experiences you had during your trip, and how these impacted on your life after the trip. This research is part of the requirement for my PhD study. Any results obtained will be strictly used for academic purposes only. The outcome of this study has the potential to help other young gappers to understand their experiences and learn more effectively during and from their gap year experience.

A. Eligibility
You are eligible to take part in this study, if you:
1) Have taken a gap year travel (i.e. trip abroad longer than 3 months)
2) Are between the ages of 17-30 years.
3) Are motivated and excited to share your experience with us.

B. Your role
Your role as a participant of this study is an important one, as the success of this study depends on your cooperation and openness to share your gap year travel experience.

About the interview
If you are eligible, and understand the important role you play in this study, I would love to hear all the interesting stories you have, and would like to invite you for two informal interviews of approximately one hour each, at an arranged day and time that is convenient to you. The location of the interviews will be at the University of Surrey, or any other convenient common place. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to ensure the flow of our conversations. You are also invited to bring along any items (e.g. photograph, e-mail, letters, souvenirs, etc.) that may help you to describe your experience and express yourself during the interview. During the interview, complimentary refreshments will be provided, and as a bonus, you will be entered into a draw for a chance to win an iPod Shuffle after completing the second interview. It will be fun, and you will be able to share your experience and gain a lot of understanding from our meetings.

Your rights
As participants of the study, your rights are as follow:
1) All information you provided will be kept anonymous and will be handled with strictest confidential, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). This project has been reviewed and given a favourable ethical opinion by the University of Surrey Ethics Committee.
2) Your participation in this study is voluntary. If at any time and for any reason, you feel that you need to withdraw from this study, you may do so without any penalty or prejudice. You could request for the data obtained to be destroyed and not included in further analysis.
Appendices

3) This study is under supervision of Prof. John Tribe and Prof. Sadler-Smith, Faculty of Management and Law, University of Surrey. In the event of complaints, they may be contacted at j.tribe@surrey.ac.uk and e.sadler-smith@surrey.ac.uk.

Contact information
If you would like to participate, or should you require further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me: Novie Johan, PhD Candidate, Tourism Department, Faculty of Management and Law, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU1 1SP, U.K., n.johan@surrey.ac.uk, 01483 689652.
Many thanks for considering taking part in this study.

Kind regards,

Novie Johan
Appendix 5. Consent Form

Title: Learning in Gap Year Travel (GYT)

Please tick appropriate box

1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the researcher of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I also had the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision, without prejudice and without penalty.

3. I understand that data obtained in this study including my personal data, interview tapes and transcripts are kept anonymous and are held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). I agree that I will not seek to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.

4. I confirm that I have / have not\^\* agreed for the interview to be recorded with the digital audio recorder in this study.
\* Please delete as appropriate

5. I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Signature of participant
Name
Date

Signature of researcher
Name
Date
Appendices

Appendix 6. List of Potential Questions for Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Question</th>
<th>Could you please think of any significant* experiences during your GYT? (Note: * Most memorable, unusual and extraordinary, or extreme) Please tell me more about that experience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Follow-up Questions | • Please tell me exactly what had happened.  
• How significant is this experience to you? (Compared to your other experiences?)  
• Why is this experience important for you?  
• What does x mean to you? What did x mean to you then? What it means to you now?  
• What do you think x is connected to?  
• What is valuable to you about x?  
• How did you feel when x happens?  
• What did you feel about x?  
• What were your thoughts at that time?  
• What did you see, hear, think about, notice, etc. when you recall that experience?  
• How do you think your experience impact you?  
• What will you do differently as the result of this experience?  
• What have you noticed about yourself that is different from before?  
• What are the examples of the changes that this experience has brought into your life?  
• I wonder if you could think of any changes that resulted from your GYT that has effect on your life today.  
• Have your GYT experience changed you in anyway? How have they changed you?  
• Have that experience changed who you are today? How about if the experience didn't happen who are you today?  
• Did you learn anything from this experience? (The world 'learn' is to be used with caution, as the world 'learn' is involved. It should be used only when participant has voluntarily introduced the word learning in the interview.)  
• What do you think has happened?  
• What would x (person) think about this?  
• Supposing you were an outsider, what would you say/think about this?  
• What does this experience means to you (in terms of your other experiences in life)?  
• What else is important to you about these experiences?  
• What is the result of this experience to you?  
• If you think about what you wanted to achieve at the beginning of your trip? How do you feel? Now that you look back at it, what do you see/feel/think about x?  
• In a few words, how would you summarize your GYT experience? What would you say was the overall result of your GYT experience? |

Note: x refers to experience, person, etc. as applicable.
### Appendix 7. Thematic Analysis Process: Inductive Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIAL CODING →</th>
<th>SUBSEQUENT CODING →</th>
<th>FINAL CODING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Importance of Family</td>
<td>• Confidence</td>
<td>• Building Characters (Confidence, Independence, Responsibility, Open-mindedness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Value of Money</td>
<td>• Open-mindedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Finance Management</td>
<td>• Emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Education Direction</td>
<td>• Feelings of Belongingness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Important of Leisure Time</td>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Happiness</td>
<td>2. Relationship with Others</td>
<td>2. Relationship Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Personal Relationship</td>
<td>• Family</td>
<td>• Relationship with Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Self-Discovery</td>
<td>• Friends</td>
<td>• Relationship with Friends and Other Gappers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Life Style</td>
<td>• Personal Relationship</td>
<td>• Relationship with Locals and Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Work-Life Balance</td>
<td>• Others (local/gappers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Identity Search</td>
<td>• Time</td>
<td>• Study Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Patriotic Sense</td>
<td>• Finance</td>
<td>• Career Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Time Management</td>
<td>• Health</td>
<td>• Lifestyle Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Reality of the World</td>
<td>• Life and Work Balance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Family Appreciation</td>
<td>4. Future Direction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Gender Role</td>
<td>• Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Health</td>
<td>• Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Independence</td>
<td>• Life Style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Self-Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Making New Friends, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8. Thematic Analysis Process: Deductive Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential Learning Theory</th>
<th>Transformative Learning Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Stage 1: Concrete Experience</td>
<td>• Phase 1: Disorienting Dilemma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stage 2: Reflective Observation</td>
<td>• Phase 2: Self-Examination with feelings of Guilt or Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stage 3: Abstract Conceptualisation</td>
<td>• Phase 3: A Critical Assessment of Assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stage 4: Active Experimentation</td>
<td>• Phase 4: Recognition that one’s discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Phase 5: Explorations of Options of New Roles, Relationships and Actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Phase 6: Planning of a course of Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Phase 7: Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Phase 8: Provisionally trying out new roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Phase 9: Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Phase 10: A reintegration of new assumption into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 9. Confirmation Letter of Ethical Approval

15 December 2008

Novie Johan
FML

Dear Novie

Learning in Gap Year Travel (GYT)
EC/2008/97/FML

On behalf of the Ethics Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the submitted protocol and supporting documentation.

Date of confirmation of ethical opinion: 12 December 2008.

The list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the project</td>
<td>12 Dec 08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed protocol</td>
<td>12 Dec 08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheet for participants</td>
<td>12 Dec 08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail/flyer</td>
<td>12 Dec 08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent form</td>
<td>12 Dec 08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview schedule</td>
<td>12 Dec 08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocol Submission Proforma: Insurance</td>
<td>12 Dec 08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This opinion is given on the understanding that you will comply with the University's Ethical Guidelines for Teaching and Research, and with the conditions set out as follows:

- The only requirement would be that provision is made for the possibility that the student had a traumatic experience during their gap year (e.g. assault) which might be elicited by the interview. Provision should deal with how distress in the interview would be handled, and having available a list of helplines which the participant could access (and maybe the student counselling number). This would take account for the nature of gap year travel which can involve difficult and traumatic events as well as the positive aspects.
Appendices

If the project includes distribution of a survey or questionnaire to members of the University community, researchers are asked to include a statement advising that the project has been reviewed by the University’s Ethics Committee.

I would be grateful if you would confirm, in writing, your acceptance of the conditions above.

The Committee should be notified of any amendments to the protocol, any adverse reactions suffered by research participants, and if the study is terminated earlier than expected, with reasons.

You are asked to note that a further submission to the Ethics Committee will be required in the event that the study is not completed within five years of the above date.

Please inform me when the research has been completed.

Yours sincerely

Aimee Cox (Miss)
Secretary, University Ethics Committee
Registry

cc: Professor T Desombre, Chairman, Ethic Committee
Appendix 10. Acceptance Letter of Ethical Approval

22 December 2008

Ethics Committee
University of Surrey

Dear University of Surrey Ethics Committee:

Thank you for confirming the ethical opinion for my study: *Learning in Gap Year Travel (GYT) EC/200S/97/FML*

I am writing to confirm the acceptance of the conditions outlined, requesting that provision is made for the possibility that the student had a traumatic experience during their gap year. The participants will be reminded that their participation and responses in the study are voluntary, and that they are able to discontinue their participation at anytime without incurring any penalties. Furthermore, a list of accessible help lines will be provided (attached). The researcher will ensure that each participant is well and in a good health before concluding the interview, followed by a proper follow-up.

The committee will be notified when the research has been completed, or should there be any amendments to the protocol, any adverse reactions suffered by research participants, and if the study is terminated earlier than expected.

Thank you once again.

Kind regards,

Novie Johan
PhD Researcher, Tourism Department
Faculty of Management and Law

cc: Prof. John Tribe, Professor of Tourism, Faculty of Management and Law
Prof. Eugene Sadler-Smith, Professor of Management Development and Organisational Behaviour, Faculty of Management and Law
UK Help lines

University Counselling Centre
Ground Floor Building 23
University Court, University of Surrey
Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH
Tel: +44 (0)1483 68 9498
Email: k.norman@surrey.ac.uk or counselling-centre@surrey.ac.uk

Childline
Free Helpline: 0800 1111
Web: www.childline.org.uk
Free 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK

Get Connected
Free Helpline: 0808 808 4994
Email: help@getconnected.org.uk
Web: www.getconnected.org.uk
A free service including a ‘web chat’ facility for young people advising on how to get the best help

NCH Children’s Charities
Helpline: 0845 762 6579
Web: www.nch.org.uk
Supports vulnerable children, young people and families

Samaritans
Helpline: 08457 90 90 90
Email: jo@samaritans.org
Web: www.samaritans.org
24-hour emergency telephone helpline

Youth Access
Tel. 020 8772 9900 web: www.youthaccess.org.uk
Information on youth counselling