

**THE INFLUENCE OF TRAIT MINDFULNESS ON THE ACCULTURATION
PROCESS IN STUDY ABROAD: AN EXAMINATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL
ADAPTATION IN THE INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL
SUPPORT**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current research was to explore the influence of trait mindfulness on intercultural communication by examining skilled support seeking from host nationals among study abroad students. The research aimed to extend the study abroad literature by assessing the processes involved during cross-cultural adaptation and determining what factors lead to successful study abroad experiences in terms of state of emotional well-being.

Four hundred students who participated in study abroad programs at the University of Delaware completed an online questionnaire measuring their levels of trait mindfulness, affective competence, relationships established with host nationals, skilled support seeking, perceived social support, and feelings of loneliness. Results suggest that to a certain degree trait mindfulness can help to facilitate greater support seeking from host nationals among study abroad students, and as a result, mitigate their feelings of loneliness while abroad and lead to successful overseas experiences. Notably, the results also reveal that program duration plays a larger role than mindfulness in predicting relationship formation with host nationals. This provides support for the on-going concern in study abroad research regarding benefits gained from short-term vs. long-term study abroad programs.

The model in this research incorporates trait mindfulness as an influencing variable on the ability to communicate with individuals of different cultural backgrounds, thus providing initial support for the role of trait mindfulness in the field of intercultural communication. The current research helps to fill the gap in study abroad literature of evaluating the processes instead of only focusing on outcomes of study abroad participation, and also provides an avenue for future research in intercultural communication.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Each year more American college students choose to venture overseas for what they hope will be an enriching and rewarding study abroad experience. During the 2007-2008 academic year alone there was an 8.5% increase in the number of American students who studied abroad (total # 262,416), while over the past two decades study abroad participation has tripled (Institute for International Education, 2009). This evident increase is a result of a number of contributing factors, including more comprehensive offerings of programs and students' desire to be more marketable to employers (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009; Institute for International Education, 2005; Penington & Wildermuth, 2005). With the demand for international awareness on the rise, American universities are recognizing the importance of being global and are instilling the notion of "global citizenship" as a part of their educational outcomes for students (e.g., see Dolby, 2008; Goucher College; University of Delaware Global Initiative; University of Maryland Strategic Plan). In an increasingly pluralistic society where students are now expected to interact with people of diverse cultural backgrounds in a multitude of settings, students' decisions to study abroad are justified. "They need to think and act in terms of living in a world in which they meet, work, and live with others with very different cultural backgrounds, habits, perspectives, customs, religious beliefs, and aspirations" (Braskamp et al., 2009, p. 101).

To meet the demand of growing study abroad participation, universities are offering greater number of short-term programs (usually ranging from one to six weeks during winter or summer sessions) allowing students more opportunities to go abroad who are unable to participate in the traditional semester or year-long program (Institute for International Education,

2009; Spencer & Tuma, 2002). Substantial study abroad research has focused on the outcomes of short-term programs in determining whether they offer similar benefits as long-term programs. Some studies indicate that students on short-term programs do in fact acquire greater skills, such as intercultural competence (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003; Pitts, 2009), while other studies suggest the opposite (Jackson, 2008). This difference in program duration poses a concern in determining what competencies students are gaining from their overseas experiences and how meaningful they are.

However, on the whole, several studies have demonstrated that student sojourner experiences do result in significant benefits and positive outcomes, including greater academic skills, enhanced global perspectives, and increased intercultural competence (Dwyer, 2004; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Milstein, 2005; Penington & Wildermuth, 2005; Redden, 2010; William, 2005, 2008). While there are numerous rewards of study abroad, students face many challenges when embarking into unfamiliar territory. An integral part of the study abroad, or sojourner experience, is learning how to adapt to a new culture. Besides from learning basic survival functions, such as how to go to the market to buy food, one of the major challenges of the process is communicating with people of the host culture and making friends, or in other words, forming a social support network during the time abroad. While these types of circumstances arise frequently domestically (e.g., entering a new environment when starting as a freshman in college), learning how to adapt becomes more salient and poses challenges at a different level when in the context of being in another country. As students find themselves isolated and distant from their usual social support system, this social isolation can precipitate feelings of loneliness and in turn can negatively impact the sojourner experience. The function of adaptation becomes of greater concern due to cultural barriers (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). A major concern with

study abroad is handling culture shock and not knowing how to handle the new environment and as a result becoming homesick. Loneliness and emotional distress are a part of homesickness and lead to negative study abroad experiences (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006; Van Der Meid, 2003;).

While there has been a considerable increase in study abroad research, much of the extant literature focuses on the outcomes rather than the process and fails to capture the factors that help facilitate successful study abroad experiences (Pitts, 2009). The rapidly increasing population of American study abroad students calls for further research in determining how individuals achieve successful sojourner experiences. Therefore, from the perspective of investigating the communicative processes involved, this study will look at factors that enable American study abroad students to obtain an enriching sojourner experience. Specifically, as loneliness leads to adverse abroad experiences, this study is concerned with investigating how negative feelings are reduced by means of mitigating loneliness. Given the concern of program duration, with comparing short-term and long-term study abroad sojourns and examining the interpersonal communication skills that enable one to form relationships with host nationals, this study proposes that mindfulness as a trait facilitates improved communication skill cross-culturally which in turn effects greater support seeking, thus allowing individuals to perceive greater social support and have decreased feelings of loneliness and isolation while abroad. The greater ability to connect with host nationals and to develop a social support network while abroad may help prevent feelings of loneliness and the negative impacts on one's health during a sojourn.

I will first look at Kim's (2005) integrative communication theory as a theoretical framework that explains how individuals adapt cross-culturally; next, I provide an overview of social support and support seeking and its vital need for sojourner experiences as determined by

perceived support and loneliness; and lastly, employ mindfulness within an empirically testable model in intercultural communication.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Regardless of the destination and length of stay, it is critical for study abroad students to learn to adapt to their new environment in order to function during their time abroad. Kim's (2005) integrative communication theory outlines the process that a sojourner undergoes when adapting to a new environment that is culturally different from his or her home environment. In her theory, Kim (2005) conceptualizes communication as a crucial component to the adaptation process. By means of communicating with the host culture, sojourners are able to adapt to the new environment. In the present study, "sojourner" is defined as "to stay as a temporary resident" (Merriam-Webster) and "stranger" identifies individuals who "enter and resettle in a new culture or subcultural environment" (Kim, 2005, p. 380), which is essentially what a study abroad student does during their overseas experience.

The theory postulates that when entering a new culture, strangers go through the process of acculturation in which they begin to learn the practices of the new culture in order to learn how to function in the new environment. Simultaneously, while new learning is taking place, the individual also undergoes the process of deculturation, in that in order for the new learning to occur, unlearning of some cultural elements from their home culture is necessary (Kim, 2005). Overtime this adaptive process leads toward psychic growth and assimilation: a lifetime goal that "should be thought of as falling at some point on a continuum ranging from minimally adapted to maximally adapted" (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 360). In general, sojourners individually adapt and integrate into the new culture at varying degrees on the continuum.

As the theory asserts, the process of adapting to another culture occurs in the context of communicating with the host culture. This study focuses on the context of interpersonal communication: engaging with the host culture occurs through face-to-face interactions (Gudykunst & Kim 2003). Specifically, this study examines the communicative interactions between study abroad sojourners and host nationals. The theory states that in order to effectively communicate with the host culture one must have adequate host communication competence. Host communication competence are the abilities that allow “strangers to understand the way things are carried out in the host society and the way they themselves need to think, feel, and act in that environment” (Kim, 2005, p. 385). Only by having adequate host communication competence are individuals able to communicate interpersonally with people from the host culture. Consequently, the greater communication one engages in with the host culture, the greater capacity he or she possesses in being able to adapt, thus demonstrating the integral component of communication to the cross-cultural adaptation process.

There are three components of host communication competence in Kim’s (2005) theory. The cognitive dimension of the host communication competence skills involves having knowledge of the host culture and language. Initially when individuals enter a new culture, they may have limited knowledge of the culture because they are unfamiliar with it. One consequence of individuals’ lack of knowledge of the host culture is that stereotypes of that culture frequently dominate individuals’ thoughts and inhibit their ability to communicate with the other culture. However, greater knowledge can contribute to eliminating the use of stereotypes, improving sojourners’ ability to communicate with people of the culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Forgoing pre-conceived notions gives way to opportunities for sojourners to get to know the host nationals to a greater extent and to connect with them on an emotional level,

and thus acquiring greater affective competence, the next dimension of host communication competence.

The current study focuses on the affective dimension. This process stresses both understanding and embodying the emotional orientations of the host culture. Through the willingness to participate in the locals' emotional capacities, individuals will feel less estranged and more able to partake with them in their experiences of emotions (joy, hope, excitement, pain, anger, etc.) (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Ying and Liese indicate that initially "strangers experience a decline in emotional well-being as they find themselves unable to engage fully in the new aesthetic milieu" (as cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 363). Yet, as Gudykunst and Kim (2003) explain, the social activities strangers engage in with the host culture involve varying degrees of affective experiences and that participating in these experiences is important to the cross-cultural adaptation process. Studies (Kim, 1989; Searle & Ward, 1990) support a positive relationship between participation in activities with the host culture in an interpersonal communicative context and cross-cultural adaptation. Possessing a greater ability to comprehend host nationals through an emotional capacity can assist sojourners in being able to become acquainted with the locals and make friends, and therefore feel less socially isolated and less lonely.

The third dimension, operational competence, is the behavioral ability of knowing how to act appropriately during encounters with host nationals and being able to function in the host culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Knowing how to behave in line with the host cultural norms "requires a capacity to act and react appropriately in various social situations in addition to the relevant cognitive and affective abilities" (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 363). Gudykunst and Kim (2003) further explain that behaving in the appropriate socially accepted manners of a host

culture becomes easier after an individual has adapted to the new culture. “Well-adapted strangers can perform the required social roles in accordance with the host cultural norms without having to formulate a mental plan of action. As they internalize many of the culturally patterned behaviors, they are able to achieve harmonious interpersonal synchronization in their interactions with the natives.” (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 364).

The three components of host communication competence are interrelated and play a large role in helping sojourners adapt to their new environment by allowing them to cope with the challenges they encounter, connect to host nationals on an emotional level, and help them to function in the host culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Of these challenges, one of the more significant burdens that sojourners face during the adaptation process is the loss of their support system. When strangers enter a new culture they are without their support system and thus must begin to meet people and form new relationships to establish a new social support system. Forming these new relationships becomes more challenging in a new culture because of a domain that is “highly uncertain and stressful” in and of itself (Kim, 2005, p. 386). The various contacts (informal and formal) that sojourners form and maintain while abroad serve as a source for them to turn to when in search for social support. The next section will discuss how adequate affective competence is key in order to obtain social support from host nationals while abroad.

Affective Competence and Social Support

One area in which affective competence would be particularly valuable is eliciting social support when undergoing emotional distress. By gaining competency in the affective dimension, a sojourner acquires the necessary skills to accurately display and share his or her emotional state of distress in a culturally appropriate manner. In addition, through their attainment of affective

competence, sojourners learn the appropriate behaviors of how to solicit emotional support from the host culture. A sojourner who is able to seek social support signifies that he or she has established social ties strong enough to seek help in times of distress.

When entering a new environment, it is innate human tendency to meet and talk to people to form new relationships, or in other words, to form a social support network. “Supporting others is a fundamental form of human interaction, just as central to the human experience as persuading, informing, or entertaining one another” (Burlison & MacGeorge, 2002, p. 374). When events occur in life that are out of the ordinary and atypical, such as moving to a new country, individuals realize to a greater degree the importance and necessity of supportive communication in their lives (Burlison & MacGeorge, 2002). Evidence demonstrates that social support serves a vital function in helping one’s well-being during times of stress (Seeman, 2001), as well as plays a prominent role in individuals’ personal relationships across cultures (Mortenson, 2002; Samter, Whaley, Mortenson, Burlison, 1997).

In order to form social support, individuals engage in support seeking, “a intentional communicative activity that aims at soliciting supportive actions from others” and is “viewed as a way of coping during difficult or stressful situations” (Feng & Burlison, 2006, p. 248). When individuals are in a state of stress or lack emotional well-being, they are in need of support. In the context of study abroad, it is very common for sojourners to become distressed as they are adjusting to a new environment and learning how to adapt, and therefore require support. The sojourners must then actively elicit and obtain support from others; it does not occur without intentional communicative behaviors (Mortenson, Burlison, Feng, & Liu, 2009). Cutrona, Cohen, and Igram note, “support-communicating behaviors do not materialize automatically

without some indication from the stressed individual that he or she is in a state of need'' (as cited in Mortenson et al., 2009, p. 210).

Given the significance of social support in individuals' lives in general, research has examined social support and support seeking across cultures and in the context of cultural adjustment among sojourners. Studies have found that support seeking is important across cultures and gender during times of distress, indicating most everyone requires social support (Mortenson, 2006; Mortenson et al., 2009). Due to the nature of entering a different culture as a stressful event (Kim, 2005), some researchers have described how individuals resort to the resources available to them, primarily social support networks, to assist in coping (Berry, 1997; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988a; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Studies illustrate that social support is important in facilitating positive outcomes during cross-cultural adaptations, such as mitigated stress and enhanced well-being (Adelman 1988; Anderson 1994; Berry, 1997;).

As students find themselves in a new place far away from family and friends, they find themselves in a new position of having to develop a new social support network to help them during their time abroad. Accordingly, the literature reviewed thus far demonstrates an inherent need for social support in order to deal with the difficulties of cross-cultural adaptation and illustrates the importance of seeking and sustaining an adequate social support network while abroad. More importantly, merely knowing that one has friends to turn to (perceived support) ultimately helps to alleviate emotional distress and loneliness, which will be discussed in the next section.

Perceived Support and Loneliness

Over the years researchers have conducted several studies across psychology and communication disciplines on loneliness and its relation to social support (e.g., see Bell & Gonzalez, 1988; Edwards, Rose, Edwards, & Singer, 2008; Newcomb & Bentler, 1986; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001). Peplau and Perlman define loneliness as “a state of emotional distress that arises when a person’s social interactions fall below the levels of quantity and/or quality that he or she desires” (as cited in Edwards et al., 2008, p. 450).

In an early study, Bell and Gonzalez (1988) found substantiating evidence that individuals who perceived a deficit in social support resulted in greater loneliness. In another study, Sheets and Mohr (2009) discovered that perceived social support from friends predicted depression and life dissatisfaction, negative traits associated with loneliness. Pinquart and Sorensen (2001) contend that the quality rather than quantity of social support carries more weight in perceived support. Their study revealed that older adults perceived greater support from their connections with family members rather than associations with friends and neighbors. To this end, as loneliness has been linked to social dissatisfaction (Flora & Segrin, 2000), the social support that an individual perceives that he or she has is directly related to how lonely he or she is.

Many students who study abroad often have a difficult time adjusting to their new environment and students who have an inadequate social support network may face social dissatisfaction and as a result feel lonely. Thus, mitigating feelings of loneliness through perceived support during study abroad can assist students in the acculturation process.

Thus far, this chapter has explained how sojourners can easily become emotionally distressed and feel lonely with the difficulty of adjusting to a new culture. Communicating with

host nationals can help individuals to form a social support network to provide the support they need and affective competency is key in facilitating sojourners to establish relationships with host nationals. However, what helps facilitate sojourners to acquire greater affective competence to form these relationships with and seek support from host nationals? The following section proposes a solution.

Mindfulness

Sojourners in a state of greater emotional well-being are more adequately prepared to face the challenges of adapting to new social and emotional environments. One individual difference that is related to both affective competence and emotional well-being is mindfulness, which I will focus on in this next section.

With varied definitions of mindfulness in the literature, the current study will utilize Baer et al.'s (2008) definition, which is conceptualized into five facets:

Observing includes noticing or attending to internal and external experiences, such as sensations, cognitions, emotions, sights, sounds, and smells. *Describing* refers to labeling internal experiences with words. *Acting with awareness* includes attending to one's activities of the moment and can be contrasted with behaving mechanically while attention is focused elsewhere (often called *automatic pilot*). *Nonjudging of inner experience* refers to taking a nonevaluative stance toward thoughts and feelings.

Nonreactivity to inner experience is the tendency to allow thoughts and feelings to come and go, without getting caught up in or carried away by them. (p. 330)

Given this definition of mindfulness, of foremost importance is to consider how mindfulness applies to communication. If "mindfulness is theorized to have widespread effects

on human functioning” and communication is part of human functioning, then mindfulness influences communication ability (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007, p. 211). This study proposes that two key facets outlined in Baer et al.’s (2008) definition of mindfulness are relevant to intercultural communication and are particularly valuable for cross-cultural adaptation: acting with awareness and nonjudging of inner experience. This section will explain how these facets help to improve communication ability with individuals of another culture that think, live, and communicate differently.

To begin with, acting with awareness can help sojourners to become more attentive of the current situation during an encounter with someone from the host culture. Specifically, having increased awareness can help prevent sojourners from acting on autopilot and employing stereotypes about the other culture. By taking a moment to be aware of the present moment, sojourners may be able to recognize that the reason they may not understand the host national is because they both have drastically different viewpoints due to their different cultural backgrounds.

The next facet, nonjudging of inner experience, can assist sojourners during intercultural encounters in helping them recognize how to forgo acting on their initial thoughts and feelings about an intercultural encounter. Sojourners may feel discouraged at first about their interaction with a host national because they do not understand each other. However, by taking a nonevaluative stance on their thoughts and feelings and taking a moment to recognize why they may be feeling and thinking negatively can help them to understand that their emotions and thoughts might be due to cultural differences.

Some of these initial thoughts and reactions can be based on stereotypes. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) explain that the stereotypes that are prevalent in “strangers’ perception of the host

cultural patterns” hinder the process of adapting to a new culture (p. 362). Mindfulness can facilitate strangers to respond more objectively and without employing their preconceived notions and stereotypes about the culture, resulting in improved cross-cultural adaptation and attenuating the challenges often encountered when communicating with the host culture.

Furthermore, increased awareness and nonjudging of inner experience can assist sojourners to be able to understand the host culture on an emotional level. As discussed earlier, forgoing stereotypes can help sojourners to communicate and become acquainted with host nationals as it minimizes the gap in communication between cultures. In other words, increased awareness and nonjudging of inner experience help individuals to let go of some of their preconceived notions about others and to be more attentive during their communicational encounters. Subsequently, sojourners gain access to the host culture’s emotional orientations, which produces greater affective competency and allows for improved communication. In this way, mindfulness influences greater capacity for effectiveness in the affective dimension, enabling sojourners to engage in successful communication with host nationals to form friendships and social support and as a result, diminish feelings of loneliness.

The resulting implication in the context of sojourner experiences is that trait mindfulness can help when communicating with strangers of the host culture to reduce the stressors of the potentially taxing situation of forming a social support network. Other research on mindfulness supports the notion that mindfulness aids in mollifying stressful situations (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

To further substantiate the benefits and effects of trait mindfulness on communication, Barnes et al. (2007) discuss multiple studies that indicate mindfulness results in improved communication, including reduced bellicosity and conflict. In another study, Brown, Ryan and Creswell (2007) address the use of mindfulness in reducing stress levels during conflicts in

interpersonal relationships. The results show that those with a higher level of mindfulness produced positive outcomes and improved perception of the other and relationship. One of the contributing factors to these results is the ability of mindfulness to allow individuals to be “less susceptible to negative mood states” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 225). In addition, the study also “supported the importance of bringing a mindful state into challenging exchanges, in that mindfulness was related to better communication quality” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 225).

Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, and Orsillo (2007) discuss the notion that the mindful awareness condition exhibits a greater capacity of perspective-taking, or the ability to take others’ perspectives. Block-Lerner et al. (2007) suggest that “increased awareness and sensitivity would likely lead to heightened appreciation of how one’s own actions impact others” (p. 509).

Moreover, Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) suggest that mindfulness can help individuals during intercultural encounters to realize and understand that individuals have different perspectives, thought-processes, and way of functioning. They suggest that mindfulness facilitates greater cultural awareness and sensitivity. They purport that during intercultural encounters there is a stronger likelihood of successful cross-cultural interaction when individuals are aware and attentive of the situation, of their and the other’s perspectives, and of their impact on the situation and the other. As trait mindfulness helps individuals to have the ability to be aware of others’ perspectives, individuals will be more adequately able to prevent cultural biases from impinging upon their communication with the host culture, which would alleviate potential intense and stressful cross-cultural encounters (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

Overall, trait mindfulness influences how well one can cope, or the degree of coping efficacy, and it influences one's ability to understand others' perspectives, or to have increased perspective-taking ability. These are both key factors of trait mindfulness that can help sojourners have greater success in communicating with the host culture.

To date, scant research has incorporated mindfulness in examining how it affects one's ability to form social support networks and thus facilitate cross-cultural adaptation as well as mitigate loneliness. While researchers in intercultural communication have recently recognized the value of mindfulness (Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory of Effective Communication, 2005; Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory, 2005;), no known empirical studies have been conducted to test the theoretical and practical significance of mindfulness in intercultural communication. Therefore, given the relevance of the applicability of mindfulness to intercultural communication, the literature would benefit from a model that incorporates trait mindfulness.

Proposed Model and Hypotheses

The focus of the present study is to examine the process of what facilitates study abroad students to be able to successfully adapt cross-culturally in the interpersonal communicative context of forming social support networks while abroad. The following theoretical model incorporates mindfulness as an antecedent variable in predicting one's ability to develop relationships with the host culture and seek social support to allay feelings of loneliness.

Cross-cultural adaptation is an important process because it is the method in which sojourners learn to live in a foreign environment and manage the daily cultural challenges that they encounter. Kim's (2005) theory allows us to examine the mechanisms of acculturation and

how these processes are related to a sojourner's emotional well-being when adapting to the new environment. Kim (2005) theorizes that adequate host communication competence yields the ability to get along with host nationals through communicating with them interpersonally. As demonstrated in the literature review above, trait mindfulness helps to improve sojourners' communication with people of a different culture by facilitating greater coping efficacy, greater perspective-taking, and thus generating further understanding of cultural differences.

In turn, with focusing on the affective dimension, individuals exhibiting greater degrees of trait mindfulness will demonstrate greater affective competency. By means of handling stressful situations well and being able to understand others' perspectives while forgoing stereotypes as a result of trait mindfulness, sojourners are better able to attain affective competency. They are able to understand the emotional orientations of the host culture, enabling them to feel they comprehend the host culture to a greater extent. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Individual differences in trait mindfulness among sojourners are positively associated with greater coping efficacy.

H2: Individual differences in trait mindfulness among sojourners are positively associated with greater perspective-taking.

H3: Through individual differences in greater coping efficacy and greater perspective-taking among sojourners, trait mindfulness will predict greater affective competence.

As sojourners feel more comfortable and become more acquainted with people from the host culture, they can begin to form relationships with the host nationals. Trait mindfulness can lead to improved communication in forming relationships with the host culture by its ability to effect greater interpersonal skills in terms of affective competence. Consequently, mindfulness

aids in establishing relationships with host nationals and it is reasonable to argue that establishing relationships with host nationals represents an outcome of affective competence.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Individual differences in affective competence among sojourners are positively associated with establishing relationships with host nationals.

As trait mindfulness produces greater affective competence to establish relationships with host nationals, this competency in turn generates greater support seeking. As a result of affective competency, sojourners are not only emotionally engaged with the host culture, they also understand how to enact culturally appropriate support seeking behaviors. In other words, sojourners who understand the emotional orientations of the host culture are able to employ appropriate behaviors specific to the host culture to solicit support from their newly formed relationships with host nationals. Therefore, this mechanism of support seeking from host nationals is an outcome of affective competence. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Establishing relationships with host nationals is positively associated with greater skilled support seeking among sojourners.

Subsequently, through engagement of support seeking from relationships with host nationals, sojourners are able to obtain social support. An individual who is able to seek support will then perceive that he or she has greater social support. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Greater skilled support seeking among sojourners is positively associated with greater perceived support.

Based on the link between perceived support and loneliness, the degree to which one perceives how much social support he or she has influences his or her state of loneliness. The

previously reviewed literature indicates that social support during sojourner experiences is related to reduced stress and feelings of loneliness. One who perceives he or she has social support assists in assuaging the loneliness and challenges that a sojourner encounters while abroad.

Mindful individuals who demonstrate greater affective competence with host nationals will likely establish relationships with peers that they can call upon in times of emotional distress. Further, as a result of having a support network in the host culture, mindful sojourners will experience greater perceived support and decreased feelings of loneliness. Accordingly, trait mindfulness predicts the well-being of a sojourner, ameliorating the concern of loneliness during cross-cultural adjustment. Therefore:

H7: Greater perceived social support among sojourners is negatively associated with feelings of loneliness while abroad.

In this study, I will also look at how the importance of mindfulness varies according to study abroad program duration. Given the concern in the study abroad literature regarding whether short-term programs offer valuable benefits similar to long-term programs, it is debatable if students on short-term programs fully invest into their time abroad. This study questions whether students who venture abroad for a shorter amount of time are as concerned with forming friendships since they will only be abroad for a few short weeks. They may not be as concerned with building a connection to the host culture, therefore lacking the need to exhibit trait mindfulness.

On the other hand, it is likely that students who participate in long-term study abroad programs arrive to the new environment more adequately prepared to engage with the host culture. Because they know they will be abroad for a longer amount of time, they may exhibit

trait mindfulness to a greater degree in order to form relationships and to become acquainted with the host culture. Program duration plays a large role as students studying abroad for a longer period have more opportunity to be mindful and engage with the host culture. Research suggests that the longer amount of time students spend in the host country has a significant effect on the sojourner experience (Dwyer, 2009). The greater duration of the sojourn, the more likely it is that individuals' emotional resources will be tested, and thus mindfulness will have an impact on their time abroad.

The present study aims to determine whether long-term versus short-term programs have a moderating effect on the importance of mindfulness in establishing relationships during the acculturation process. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Program duration will significantly moderate the influence of mindfulness on establishing relationships with host nationals in that greater duration will demonstrate a stronger positive association than shorter duration

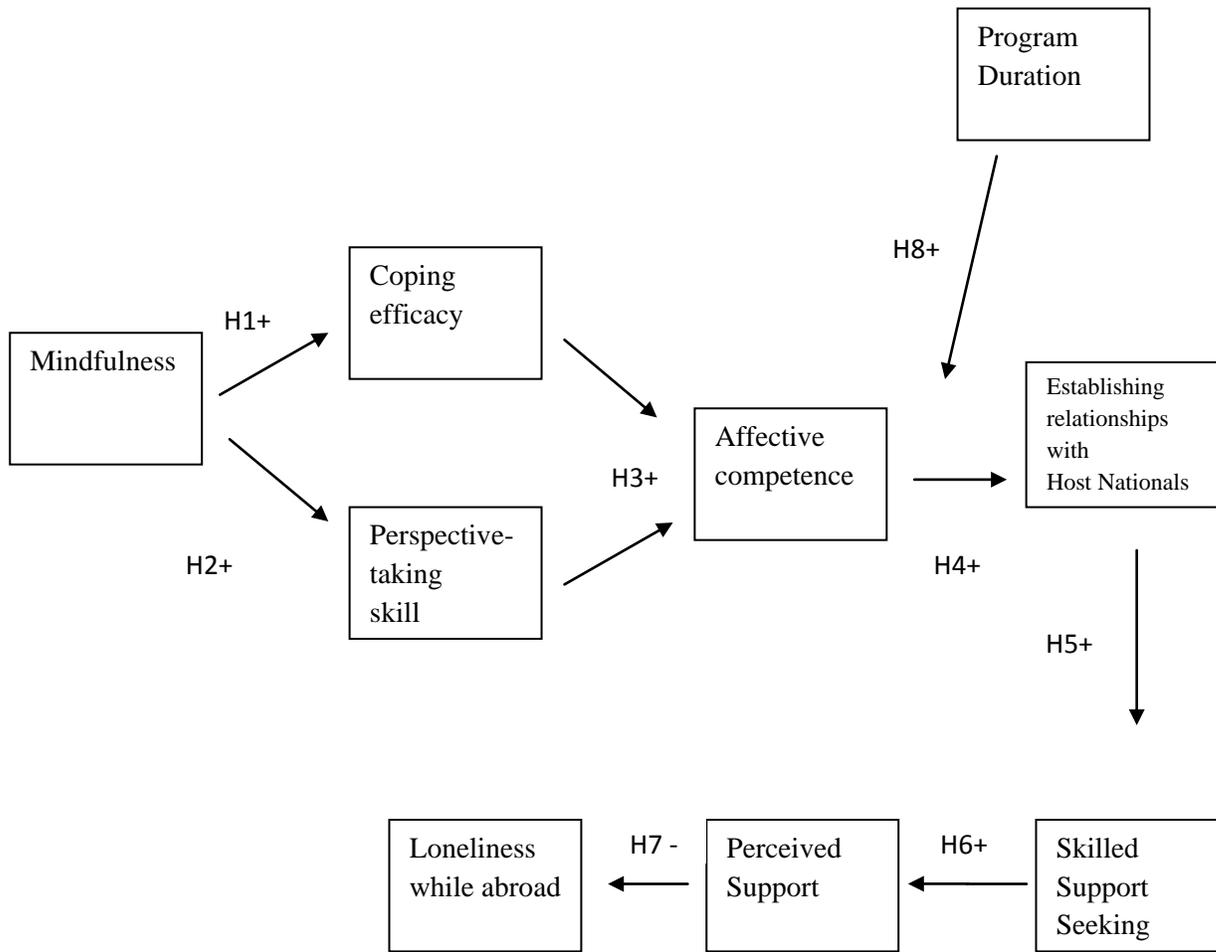


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

Chapter 2

METHOD

In this study, students with sojourner experiences reported on their experiences of living in and adapting to a foreign culture in the context of communicating with and seeking support from the host culture. Measures were selected to examine how the cross-cultural adaptation process of students contributed to a successful overseas study experience and an end result of achieving emotional well-being as well as a reduced state of loneliness.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the measures utilized in the present research. Since several scales were adapted and modified from other sources or developed by the author, the pilot study was conducted in order to determine reliability of the scales. Additionally, piloting the questionnaire allowed the author to ensure that participants understood the survey questions and that the questionnaire was accurately developed; in other words, to ensure that the survey flowed well and that there was no confusion for the participants.

Participants

A survey instrument was used to assess the main variables in the study: trait mindfulness, coping efficacy, perspective-taking, affective competence, establishing relationships with host nationals, skilled support seeking, perceived support, and loneliness. The pilot study was distributed to international students enrolled at the University of Delaware for the spring 2011 semester ($N = 86$). The Office of Graduate and Professional Education administered

the survey by sending an informational email with the link for the online survey on behalf of the PI. As the study does not pose any risk to participants, consent forms were not required and the study received exemption from IRB.

International students were selected for the pilot study. This was done based on concerns that if the pilot study was conducted with the study abroad students, the participation from this population would be exhausted. As a result, there would not be enough participation from the study abroad students during the main study. International students are a similar group to study abroad students in that they experience emotional challenges during their cross-cultural adjustment while studying overseas.

The results for each measure are discussed below.

Measures

As some of the scales utilized in the study were modified or developed, the following measures were submitted to principal-axis factor analyses to determine accuracy of the scales: coping efficacy, perspective-taking, affective competence, and establishing relationships with host nationals. The other measures used in the study were assessed for reliability.

Mindfulness.

As the current research focuses on the acting with awareness and nonjudging of inner experience facets of Baer et al.'s (2008) definition of mindfulness, this study utilized the subscales for these two facets from the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills instrument as published in Baer, Smith, and Allen's (2004) study (e.g., "I tend to evaluate whether my perceptions are right or wrong"). Baer et al. (2004) report both strong validity and reliability for

this five-point Likert scale. In examining the results from the pilot study, the five-point Likert scale demonstrated strong reliability with Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$.

Coping efficacy.

To measure how well participants cope with and handles stress, eighteen items were utilized and modified from Folkman and Lazarus's (1988b) study to assess sojourner's efficacy in coping. While these items measure to what extent individuals use coping strategies, this study is concerned with how well respondents feel they use the coping strategies (i.e., how efficacious they perceive themselves to be). Rather than asking survey participants when they are upset if they think it is appropriate to "get control of my feelings," the items were modified to inquire about feelings of emotional upset and loneliness while abroad and how well participants felt they were able to get control of their feelings.

Exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was used to examine the coping efficacy items. Four items loaded on one dimension, representing one's ability to think about how they cope (i.e., Understanding Coping). This factor structure accounted for 45.14% of the variance and revealed strong reliability, $\alpha = .92$ (see Table 1).

Five items loaded onto a second dimension, representing a distraction and self-blame form of coping. Accounting for 16.24% of the variance, this factor structure demonstrated strong reliability, $\alpha = .84$ (see Table 1).

Three items loaded onto a third dimension, representing emotional control coping. This factor accounted for 6.61% of the variance and demonstrated strong reliability, $\alpha = .90$ (see Table 1).

Perspective-taking.

Four ten-point Likert scale items were developed by the author to measure sojourners' ability to take on others' perspectives (e.g., "I imagine how it would feel if I were in the other person's situation"). An exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation confirmed a one-factor scale with loadings of .950, .899, .875, and .814 on one dimension (see Table 2). The one factor structure accounted for 83.67% of variance among the data. The scale demonstrated strong reliability, $\alpha = .93$.

Affective Competence and Establishing Relationships with Host Nationals.

The author designed two scales to assess if students are emotionally attuned to the host culture that they interact with during their sojourner experience (affective competence) (e.g., "I was able to gage when host nationals were feeling sad") and to determine if students formed relationships with the host nationals (e.g., "I was invited to the homes of my host national friends"). Items were adapted and modified from McKay-Semmler's (2010) dissertation on cross-cultural adaptation (in advisement by Dr. Young Yun Kim).

Exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was used to examine the affective competence items. Five of the fourteen items loaded clearly on one dimension, .900, .875, .823, .693, and .668, respectively, while the other items did not load into a clear factor (see Table 3). Based on these results of one strong factor, the first five items were retained and the remaining items were deleted from analysis. With these five items, the one factor structure revealed a strong internal consistency score, $\alpha = .89$, and accounted for 45.47 % of the variance.

Exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was also used to examine the measure of establishing relationships with host nationals. One item cross-loaded

onto another item (see Table 4). With the removal of the one faulty item, the scale demonstrated a one factor structure and strong reliability ($\alpha = .93$). The factor accounted for 62.89% of the variance.

Skilled Support Seeking.

Ten items were taken from Mortensen et al.'s (2009) study to measure support seeking in terms of seeking instrumental and emotional support (e.g., "I would share my feelings with host national friends"). This ten-point Likert scale revealed a high internal consistency score, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$.

Perceived Support.

Sojourners' perception of social support while abroad was measured with Procidano and Heller's (1983) perceived social support scale. Their scale was designed to measure perceived social support from friends by measuring the degree that one perceives his or her needs are met by his or her network of friends (e.g., "My friends gave me the moral support I need"). Procidano and Heller (1983) report high internal consistency for this scale (Cronbach's alpha ranging from .84 to .90), as well as strong validity. After conducting the pilot study, this scale demonstrated strong reliability, $\alpha = .87$.

Loneliness.

To determine a sojourner's state of loneliness (e.g., "I felt left out"), this study utilized the well-known UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). This scale is commonly used in the literature and is both reliable and valid, in that scores are usually consistent and the scale measures what it intends to measure. The pilot study results indicate strong reliability, $\alpha = .92$.

Program Duration.

Program duration will be measured by including one item in the questionnaire that will ask students to indicate whether they participated in a short-term (five week summer or winter session) or long-term study abroad program (semester or full year).

In sum, the results of the pilot study demonstrate that the measures have strong reliability and that the questionnaire was designed well for participants. The factor analyses helped to eliminate weak items and confirm strong one-factor scales.

Main Study

Participants

Data was collected from 400 undergraduate study abroad students (305 females and 95 males) who participated in University of Delaware short-term programs (winter session and summer session programs) and long-term programs (fall semester, spring semester, and year-long programs) within the past five years. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to over 55 ($M = 21$; $SD = 3.41$). The author contacted the study abroad office (Center for International Studies) at the University of Delaware to inquire about sending a survey to past study abroad students. The study abroad office routinely sends forms and questionnaires to study abroad students and agreed to administer the author's online survey. They distributed the informational email with the link for the online survey on behalf of the PI. The main study does not pose any risk to participants and has received exemption from IRB to exclude the use of consent forms. As an incentive to participate in the study, participants who completed the online survey were entered to win one of two \$30 Amazon.com gift cards.

Power

As a greater sample size allows for greater statistical power, in order to determine a sufficient sample size for the study, power analyses were conducted with G Power 3.1.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). G Power indicated a minimum of approximately 130 responses with a medium effect size for regression analysis with one predictor. For regression analysis with two predictors and a medium effect size, G Power indicated a minimum of approximately 160 responses. For ANOVA, G Power indicated a minimum of approximately 200 responses. The main study attained more than enough responses ($N = 400$) and therefore the sample size does not pose any power concerns.

Measures

In examining the measures of the main study, the following scales demonstrated strong reliability: mindfulness ($\alpha = .81$), support seeking ($\alpha = .94$), perceived support ($\alpha = .92$), and loneliness ($\alpha = .90$).

Understanding Coping was submitted to an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation. The analysis confirmed a one-factor scale with loadings of .858, .804, .784, and .601 (see Table 5). The one-factor structure accounted for 68.61% of variance among the data and revealed strong reliability ($\alpha = .84$).

Distraction and self-blame coping were submitted to an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis and did not demonstrate a clear one-factor structure. As a result of this and low reliability ($\alpha = .57$), it was removed from analysis.

Emotional Control Coping was submitted to an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation and revealed a one-factor structure with loadings of .902, .882, and

.784 (see Table 5). It accounted for 82.13% of variance among the data and demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .89$).

Perspective-taking was submitted to an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation. The results confirmed a one-factor scale with loadings of .926, .923, .890, and .851 (see Table 6). The one-factor structure accounted for 85.42% of variance among the data and demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .94$).

The results of an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation for affective competence resulted in a one-factor structure with loadings of .885, .871, .840, .805, and .805 (see Table 7). The structure accounted for 76.63% of variance among the data with strong reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

The results of an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation for establishing relationships with host nationals resulted in a one-factor structure with loadings of .842, .828, .788, .783, .766, .735, .673, .630, .585, and .480 (see Table 8). The structure accounted for 56.19% of variance among the data and demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .91$).

The results for each hypothesis test are discussed in the next chapter.

Table 1*Pilot Study Factor Analysis of Coping Efficacy*

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Understanding Coping</i>			
I was able to adjust my priorities	.832	.096	.121
I was able to work to understand the situation.	.811	.100	.134
I was able to think about the event and learn from my mistakes.	.743	.119	.112
I was able to outline my priorities.	.639	.034	.152
<i>Distraction and Self-Blame Coping</i>			
I was able to fantasize about how things might turn out.	-.157	.730	.021
I blamed myself for procrastinating.	.117	.723	.046
I was able to daydream about a better time or place.	-.168	.719	.118
I became very tense.	.170	.717	-.102
I blamed myself for being too emotional about the situation.	.052	.699	-.123
<i>Emotional Control Coping</i>			
I was able to try not to let my feelings get out of control.	-.026	-.095	.902
I was able to try to relax so I can think straight.	.032	-.005	.841
I was able to calm my emotions so I can think about what to do next.	.154	.032	.765

Table 2*Pilot Study Factor Analysis of Perspective-taking*

	<i>1</i>
I can work to understand how things appear to the other person.	.950
I imagine how it would feel if I were in the other person's situation.	.899
I can put myself in the other person's shoes and imagine his/her point of view.	.875
I can imagine what the other person is thinking and feeling.	.814

Table 3*Pilot Study Factor Analysis of Affective Competence*

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
I felt comfortable joking with host nationals.	.900	-.042	.155
I felt I could make my host national friends laugh.	.875	.032	.053
I was able to gage when host nationals were feeling happy.	.823	.018	-.029
I was able to understand the host nationals' sense of humor.	.693	.145	-.148
I was able to gage when host nationals were feeling sad.	.668	-.006	.012

Table 4*Pilot Study Factor Analysis of Establishing Relationships with Host Nationals*

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
I was invited to the homes of my host national friends.	.852	-.032
I felt like I was able to connect with host nationals.	.830	.038
I talked to host nationals in my classes.	.823	-.446
I went out shopping with host nationals.	.821	.164
I went out to eat at restaurants with host nationals.	.792	-.293
I felt included when I spent time with a group of host nationals.	.787	-.358
My host national friends would offer me a car ride to social gatherings.	.763	.080
I was invited to school events by host nationals.	.711	-.050
My host national friends would take me out to become acquainted with the city/town we lived in.	.701	.287
I went out to see a movie with host nationals.	.659	.078

Table 5*Main Study Factor Analysis of Coping Efficacy*

	<i>1</i>
<i>Understanding Coping</i>	
I was able to adjust my priorities	.858
I was able to work to understand the situation.	.804
I was able to think about the event and learn from my mistakes.	.784
I was able to outline my priorities.	.601
<i>Emotional Control Coping</i>	
I was able to try not to let my feelings get out of control.	.902
I was able to try to relax so I can think straight.	.882
I was able to calm my emotions so I can think about what to do next.	.784

Table 6*Main Study Factor Analysis of Perspective-taking*

	<i>I</i>
I can work to understand how things appear to the other person.	.926
I imagine how it would feel if I were in the other person's situation.	.923
I can put myself in the other person's shoes and imagine his/her point of view.	.890
I can imagine what the other person is thinking and feeling.	.851

Table 7*Main Study Factor Analysis of Affective Competence*

	<i>I</i>
I felt comfortable joking with host nationals.	.885
I felt I could make my host national friends laugh.	.871
I was able to gage when host nationals were feeling happy.	.840
I was able to understand the host nationals' sense of humor.	.805
I was able to gage when host nationals were feeling sad.	.805

Table 8*Main Study Factor Analysis of Establishing Relationships with Host Nationals*

	<i>1</i>
I was invited to the homes of my host national friends.	.842
I felt like I was able to connect with host nationals.	.828
I talked to host nationals in my classes.	.788
I went out shopping with host nationals.	.783
I went out to eat at restaurants with host nationals.	.766
I felt included when I spent time with a group of host nationals.	.735
My host national friends would offer me a car ride to social gatherings.	.673
I was invited to school events by host nationals.	.630
My host national friends would take me out to become acquainted with the city/town we lived in.	.585
I went out to see a movie with host nationals.	.480

Chapter 3

RESULTS

The current study examined study abroad students' experiences of communicating with host nationals in terms of seeking support during their time overseas on short-term or long-term programs. This chapter reports results of analyses that test the hypotheses as outlined in Chapter 1.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H1 predicted that individual differences in trait mindfulness among sojourners would be positively associated with greater coping efficacy. To test this hypothesis, two separate linear regressions were performed with the two subscales of coping efficacy. The first linear regression analysis was performed with understanding coping as the dependent variable and trait mindfulness as the independent variable. Mindfulness was found to be a moderate yet statistically significant predictor of understanding coping ($B = .156, p = .002$) with the regression model accounting for a modest 2.2% of the variance in understanding coping (adjusted $R^2 = .022, F(1, 400) = 9.90$). All reported beta weights are standardized.

The second linear regression analysis was performed with emotional control coping as the dependent variable and trait mindfulness as the independent variable. Mindfulness again proved to be moderate but significant predictor of emotional control coping ($B = .212, p < .001$) with the regression model accounting for 4.3% of the variance in emotional control coping (adjusted $R^2 = .043, F(1, 400) = 18.80$).

Therefore, the results reveal that mindfulness was positively associated with greater coping efficacy; H1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2

H2 proposed that individual differences in trait mindfulness among sojourners would be positively associated with greater perspective-taking. To examine the association between these two variables, linear regression was performed with perspective-taking as the dependent variable and trait mindfulness as the independent variable. H2 had a decidedly weak effect of marginal significance ($B = .098, p = .051$) and the regression model accounted for only .7% of the variance in perspective-taking (adjusted $R^2 = .007, F(1, 400) = 3.84$). H2 was marginally supported.

Hypothesis 3

H3 posited that through individual differences in greater coping efficacy and greater perspective-taking among sojourners, trait mindfulness would predict greater affective competence. A linear regression analysis was performed with coping efficacy (understanding coping and emotional control coping) and perspective-taking as the independent variables and affective competence as the dependent variable. Understanding coping ($B = .239, p = .001$) and perspective-taking ($B = .435, p < .001$) were found to be significant predictors of affective competence, while emotional control coping was not found to be a significant predictor ($B = -.009, p = .896$). The linear regression model accounted for 35.6% of the variance in affective competence (adjusted $R^2 = .356, F(3, 400) = 74.48$). Thus, the results reveal partial support for H3.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted that individual differences in affective competence among sojourners would be positively associated with establishing relationships with host nationals. A linear regression was performed with establishing relationships with host nationals as the dependent variable and affective competence as the independent variable. Results reveal that H4 was supported. Affective competence was found to be a significant predictor of establishing relationships with host nationals ($B = .378, p < .001$) and the regression model accounted for 14.1% of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = .141, F(1, 400) = 66.28$).

Hypothesis 5

H5 tested if establishing relationships with host nationals would be positively associated with greater skilled support seeking among sojourners. Linear regression with support seeking as the dependent variable and establishing relationships with host nationals as the independent variable provided support for H5: establishing relationships with host nationals was found to be a robust and significant predictor of greater skilled support seeking among sojourners ($B = .645, p < .001$). H5 was supported and the regression model accounted for 41.4% of the variance in support seeking (adjusted $R^2 = .414, F(1, 400) = 282.97$).

Hypothesis 6

Based on the link between support seeking and perceived support, H6 proposed that greater skilled support seeking among sojourners would be positively associated with greater perceived support. A linear regression was performed with perceived support as the dependent variable and support seeking as the independent variable. H6 was supported ($B = .404, p < .001$)

and the regression model accounted for 16.1% of the variance in perceived support (adjusted $R^2 = .161$, $F(1, 400) = 77.76$).

Hypothesis 7

H7 predicted that greater perceived social support among sojourners would be negatively associated with feelings of loneliness while abroad. To examine the relationships between these two variables, a linear regression was performed in which feelings of loneliness was the dependent variable and perceived social support was the independent variable. Perceived social support was found to be a significant predictor of loneliness and reveals support for the negative relationship ($B = -.596$, $p < .001$). In other words, participants who indicated greater perceived support, also reported being less lonely. H7 was supported and perceived support accounted for 35.3% of the variance in loneliness (adjusted $R^2 = .353$, $F(1, 400) = 219.05$).

Hypothesis 8

H8 proposed that program duration would significantly moderate the influence of mindfulness on establishing relationships with host nationals in that greater duration would demonstrate a stronger positive association than shorter duration. The rationale behind this prediction is: (a) sojourners who stay a full year have more time to establish relationships with host nationals and (b) that sojourning for a full year exposes international students to more emotional duress and requires greater emotional resources. To test this hypothesis, a 2 by 2 ANOVA was performed with establishing relationships with host nationals as the dependent variable and high vs. low affective competence and short vs. long-term program duration as the fixed factors. Due to the limited number of survey respondents who participated in long-term

programs ($N = 43$), 43 short-term participants were randomly selected to compare to the 43 long-term participants. In addition, an analogous split median was conducted for the affective competence variable.

The interaction effect was not statistically significant, but there were two significant main effects of program duration ($F(1,82) = 12.400, p = .001, \omega^2 = .11$) and affective competence ($F(1,82) = 6.439, p = .013, \omega^2 = .05$) on establishing relationships with host nationals (see Figure 2).

Overall, the study found support for the regression analyses H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, and H7, and partial support for H3. Additionally, two main significant effects were found as a result of the ANOVA analysis. The following chapter will discuss the implications of these findings.

Observed Power

Power analyses were computed with the use of G Power 3.1.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). The regression analyses which included one independent variable (H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, and H7) had a power of .80 for the small effect size, 1.0 for the medium effect size, and 1.0 for the large effect size. The regression analysis for H3 which included three independent variables of perspective-taking, understanding coping, and emotional control coping had a power of .64 for the small effect size, 1.0 for the medium effect size, and 1.0 for the large effect size. These results indicate that the observed power for the regression analyses has high power for medium and large effects and acceptable power for small effects. The ANOVA analysis (H8), which examined program duration, had a power of .15 for the small effect size, .62 for the medium effect size, and .95 for the large effect size. These results reveal high power for a large

effect, and lower power for medium and small effect. This suggests that the ANVOA analysis may miss some of the small and medium effects.

Table 9*Descriptives for Main Study Variables*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Mindfulness	3.24	.45
Coping Efficacy		
<i>Understanding Coping</i>	7.82	1.43
<i>Emotional Control Coping</i>	7.81	1.72
Perspective-taking	8.04	1.48
Affective Competence	7.81	1.62
Establishing Relationships with Host Nationals	5.31	2.47
Support Seeking	5.56	2.43
Perceived Support	7.06	1.62
Loneliness	3.06	1.69

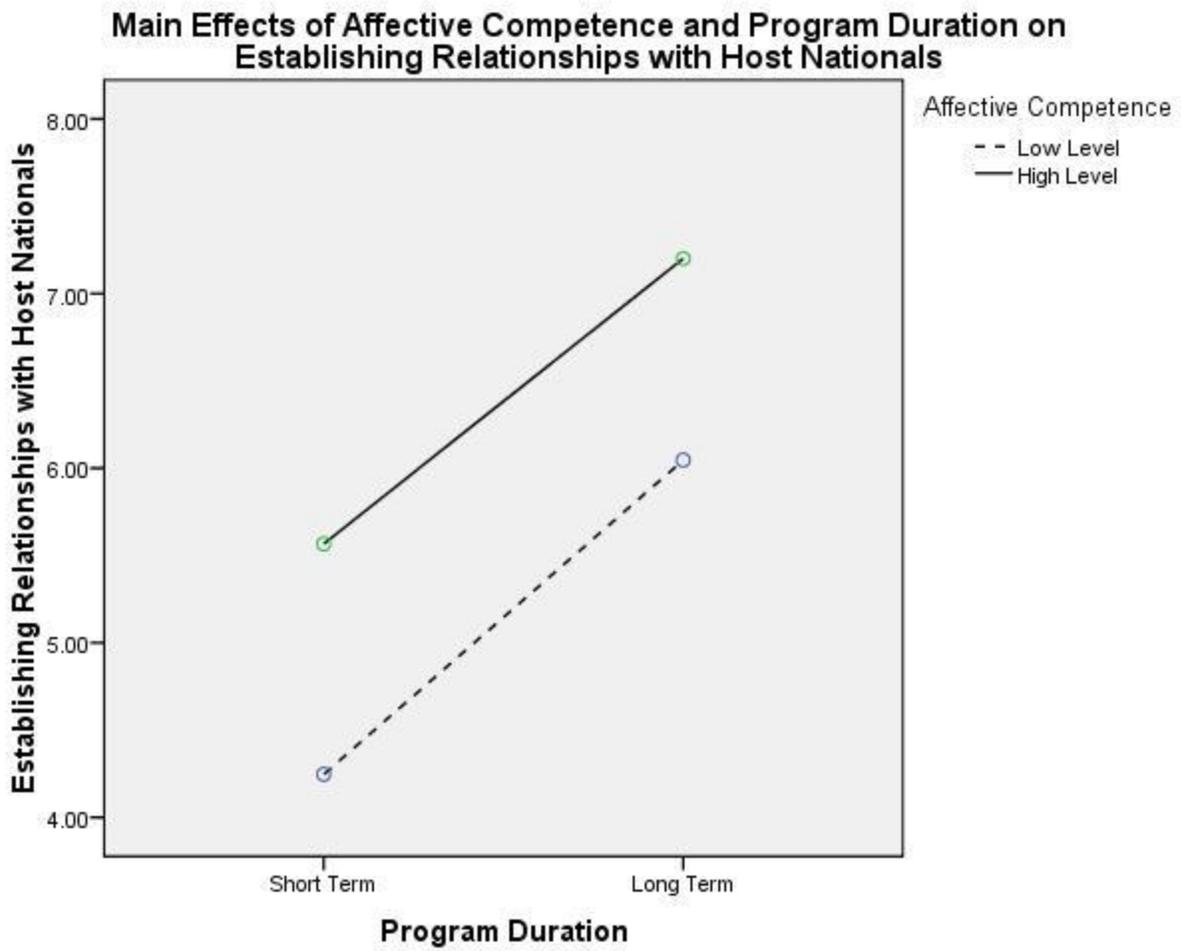


Figure 2. Main effects of affective competence and program duration on establishing relationships with host nationals.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

Currently, there is a growing population of American study abroad students. At the same time, research in this area has focused on outcomes associated with a successful overseas study while ignoring the processes involved in cultivating such success. The present study attempts to address this gap in current research by articulating the emotional, cognitive, and communicative processes individuals use to establish relationships and support networks with host nationals, and further, to show the emotional benefits of doing so.

Utilizing Kim's (2005) integrative communication theory on cross-cultural adaptation as a theoretical framework, the current study tested a model that incorporated trait mindfulness as a predictor of sojourners' communication abilities with host nationals, and resulting emotion-based outcomes. The findings provide support for and justify the importance of mindfulness in the field of intercultural communication as well as provide support for the importance of program duration in study abroad. The following discussion expands on the importance of these findings and addresses their implications on cross-cultural adaptation. This section also discusses limitations of the current study and offers suggestions for future research.

Analysis of Results and Implications

The literature review suggests that trait mindfulness can help sojourners communicate with people from a different culture in two ways and as demonstrated in H1 and H2 in the model: through coping efficacy and perspective-taking. H1 purported that sojourners with greater degrees of trait mindfulness would be positively associated with greater coping efficacy. H2 purported that sojourners with greater degrees of trait mindfulness would be positively associated

with greater perspective-taking. The results from the study support H1, and H2 was marginally significant.

H2 may have only been marginally significant because of the nature of the items for the perspective-taking measure. With reexamining the items for perspective-taking (see Appendix C), they refer to imagining another's state, whereas the nonreactivity (i.e., nonjudgment) facet of mindfulness (see Appendix A for trait mindfulness items) is more concerned with understanding one's internal state rather than understanding another's state. Consequently, this may be why mindfulness was not as strong of a predictor of perspective-taking. It appears that the observing facet of Baer et al.'s (2008) definition of mindfulness would be more related to perspective-taking; its inclusion should be considered in future studies.

In general, these findings tentatively suggest that trait mindfulness facilitates greater coping efficacy and greater perspective-taking among sojourners; in this case, study abroad students.

Coping efficacy and perspective-taking are important in that they help generate the important skill of affective competence. As explained in the literature review, individuals who are able to handle stressful situations through their coping efficacy skills and able to understand others' perspectives are more likely to acquire greater affective competency: this is what H3 proposed.

As Gudykunst and Kim (2003) explicate, affective competence is the ability to understand host nationals on an emotional level. The capability to tap in to the emotional orientations of a host culture is a critical skill because it facilitates greater communication. Partial support was found for H3: perspective-taking and the understanding coping measure of

coping efficacy were found to be significant predictors of affective competence, yet emotional control coping was not supported.

Understanding coping helps individuals to have the ability to control their own thinking when they are coping with difficult situations, thus representing a form of perspective-taking of the self. Therefore, individuals who have greater skill in understanding themselves (understanding coping) and understanding others (perspective-taking), are more likely to understand the emotional orientations of someone from another culture. In other words, being able to understand themselves and others helps sojourners to know how to communicate with host nationals on the emotional level.

Emotional control coping may not have been significant because this is the ability for individuals to calm themselves and is not necessarily related to willingness to understanding themselves or others. This skill does not lead to knowing how to understand others emotionally; instead it helps individuals to understand how to handle their own emotions. The skill most likely represents individuals who were able to take care of their emotional needs by themselves rather than looking to others for help. The understanding coping and perspective-taking variables have more in common with affective competence than emotional control coping.

As the results reveal, understanding coping and perspective-taking aid sojourners in gaining a higher level of affective competence. The resulting implication is that students who have greater levels of affective competence were better able to understand the host nationals on an emotional level. When these students studied abroad, they were able to understand and connect with the locals from the host culture.

H4 predicted that sojourners with high levels of affective competence would be positively associated with establishing relationships with host nationals. H4 was supported, indicating that

the competency of understanding locals on an emotional level helped the students to establish relationships with host nationals. Their greater level of affective competence resulted in students' ability to communicate with host nationals to a greater degree.

As Burleson and MacGeorge (2002) suggest, individuals inherently need and seek support from other human beings. Social support becomes more crucial when one enters a new and unfamiliar environment. H5 predicted that sojourners who established relationships with host nationals would be positively associated with greater skilled support seeking. H5 was supported, indicating that as students were able to make friends with some of the locals, they were then able to turn to them for support and seek support from them.

H5's results imply that as the study abroad students were able to understand the locals on an emotional level and form relationships, the students in turn felt comfortable to ask their new acquaintances for support. Therefore, understanding host nationals through getting to know the emotional orientation of the host culture (affective competence) does allow for sojourners to form new relationships, giving way to support seeking.

Subsequently, H6 tested if individuals who sought support from host nationals resulted in greater perceived support; this was supported. Essentially, study abroad students who sought support from the relationships they formed with the host culture perceived they had greater support.

Consequently, as substantial research indicates that a lack of perceived support is linked to loneliness (e.g., Bell & Gonzales, 1988; Sheets & Mohr, 2009), H7 examined whether greater perceived support would be negatively associated with feelings of loneliness while abroad. H7 was supported and revealed a negative relationship, suggesting that study abroad students who were able to make friends with and seek support from host nationals perceived they had greater

support, and as a result, felt less lonely, mitigating some of the negative impacts of overseas student experiences.

One major concern in the study abroad literature is whether short-term programs offer the same benefits and produce the same outcomes as long-term programs. H8 examined this concern of program duration by proposing that the influence of mindfulness (through affective competence) on establishing relationships with host nationals would demonstrate a stronger positive association with greater duration than shorter duration. The results showed two significant main effects. First, individuals with high affective competence establish relationships with host nationals greater than people with low affective competence. Second, regardless of whether one has high or low affective competence, he or she establishes more significant relationships with host nationals the longer he or she is overseas.

This finding implies that higher degrees of trait mindfulness influenced students' affective competency level. Therefore, students with higher levels of affective competency were able to form relationships with host nationals to a greater degree. Additionally, students who were overseas longer formed greater relationships with host nationals. The latter seems intuitive, in that the longer the student is overseas, the more opportunities he or she will have to form new friendships.

Intriguingly, program duration had a larger effect than affective competence. This suggests that while the influence of mindfulness through affective competence does have an effect on study abroad students' ability to communicate and establish relationships with host nationals, the length of the sojourn is what seems to matter most. While mindfulness had an effect on some people, it is only marginally influential. Its effect size is relatively small compared to program duration, demonstrating that program duration plays a larger role in

predicting relationship formation with host nationals. Program duration represents a more robust predictor.

Interestingly, the ANOVA analysis did not produce a significant interaction effect, suggesting that how long a student stays overseas does not impact the influence of mindfulness, and therefore affective competence, on the ability to form new relationships with locals.

Overall Implications

One of the main goals this study sought to find out was how to meet some of the emotional challenges of overseas students. In looking at the context of social support as a positive influence to reduce negative feelings and promote greater well-being, this study proposed trait mindfulness as a solution. In addition, this study looked at how program duration modifies relationship formation with host nationals.

The overarching implication of the findings is that while trait mindfulness helps to a certain degree in improving students' state of well-being by reducing loneliness while overseas, program duration has a greater effect. Unpacking this claim further: Students who study overseas for a greater amount of time are physically overseas longer and therefore have more opportunities to meet host nationals and form friendships, allowing them to have greater support. In turn, greater perceived support leads to decreased feelings of loneliness, resulting in improved well-being.

Nevertheless, trait mindfulness does appear to help some students. Students who have higher levels of trait mindfulness are able to act with awareness and take a non-evaluative stance toward thoughts and feelings, preventing stereotypes and preconceived notions from impinging upon their ability to communicate with individuals of a different cultural background. This

allows them to have greater coping efficacy (in the form of being able to think about what to do in order to cope during a stressful situation) and perspective-taking skills (being able to understand others' perspectives). In turn, these two skills result in greater affective competency, allowing one to understand host nationals on an emotional level. With being emotionally attuned to the host culture, greater relationships are established with host nationals. The students who are able to make these connections and friendships have people they can turn to for social support while living in a foreign environment. Greater support seeking leads to greater perceived support, resulting in diminished feelings of loneliness.

In terms of successful study abroad experiences: by making friends and having social support, students are more likely to have a successful overseas experience, which is the desired end goal of study abroad programs. This addresses the question initially proposed in Chapter 1, of what factors are involved in how students attain a successful study abroad experience and what leads to the outcomes of rewarding experiences rather than adverse experiences.

Limitations

As in any study, there are methodological limitations. The sample size presents some limitations in its generalizability to the greater study abroad population. The University of Delaware has greater number of students who participate in short-term than long-term programs. Given that many of the students in the study participated in short-term programs, it is unclear how much interaction the students actually had with host nationals. Future studies should consider the type of study abroad program and look at how much interaction is involved during the program with locals of the host country. Some study abroad programs visit several places during the program rather than remaining in one stationary location. This could impact findings

in terms of the amount of interaction students have with host nationals and their ability to establish relationships. Future research should look at programs that involve greater host culture interaction (programs whose aim is cultural immersion) as well as include greater number of students who participate in long-term programs.

In considering the ANOVA analysis, and given the low number of long-term program participants, the comparison of short-term and long-term duration may have little applicability to the greater study abroad population. In addition, as the observed power suggests that the ANOVA analysis may miss some of the small and medium effects due to low power, the results should be considered accordingly. The low power for small and medium effects may also explain why the analysis did not produce a significant interaction effect.

It is also important to note that the results from the analyses for H1 and H2 indicate that while mindfulness is a predictor of coping efficacy and perspective-taking, it only explains a small amount of the variance for each (understanding coping 2.2%, and perspective-taking .7%). Mindfulness may be a weak predictor of behaviors and experiences that are recalled from the past because it may be a trait that students possess now. As a result, the time difference may attenuate the predictive power.

With this in mind, future studies should consider the nature of a retrospective questionnaire when examining trait mindfulness. Utilizing self-reports of a present trait like mindfulness to predict what people will recall in the past may not yield a strong effect. In looking at how trait mindfulness may have played a role in past experiences, it is important to consider whether participants were mindful during the time period they are reporting on, or if their level of trait mindfulness is representative of how mindful they are today.

In regard to the scales utilized in the study, the scales for the coping efficacy variable should be reevaluated as they present a concern of scale validity. Originally, there were three subscales for coping efficacy. However, the distraction and self-blame subscale was eliminated due to poor reliability and failure to produce a one factor structure. The emotional control subscale was not found to be significant, and as indicated above, it measures a different kind of skill and does not necessarily facilitate greater understanding of others. Future research should consider developing a scale that more accurately measures what is intended and addresses this issue of scale validity (a scale that measures precisely how well individuals cope through being able to control their own thinking and understanding themselves).

Lastly, another limitation in this study is the concern of a Type 1 error. Seven linear regression analyses were conducted in this study. When a study repeats the same type of statistical test multiple times, it increases the chance of a Type 1 error, or known as a multiple test problem. The more tests that are conducted, the more likely there is a chance of results to be statistically significant when they might not actually be significant. With several separate analyses in the current study, unwarranted influence among the variables could not be controlled for. This high number of regression analyses could impact the data and results, increasing the chance of a Type 1 error. Some of the results that were found to be significant in this study may not actually be significant.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides support for the initial questions posed, future research would benefit from expanding on the topics investigated in this study. The section provides suggestions for extending and pursuing further research in these areas.

To begin with, study abroad program administrators', parents of study abroad students, and often study abroad students themselves, are frequently concerned about homesickness. This study provides pragmatic answers to this concern as well as provides an avenue for future research.

To reiterate, trait mindfulness leads to both greater perspective-taking and affective competency and helps individuals learn to be more open and aware of their environment. Mindfulness can also lead to better awareness of one's own emotions and can facilitate better emotional coping. Thus, trait mindfulness helps with understanding both the self and others to a greater degree.

Through the aid of mindfulness skill and affective competence, making friends with people of the host culture becomes easier as well as seeking support from them, and sustaining social support while abroad is a key element to attenuating homesickness. To this end, and on the basis of this study's preliminary support for trait mindfulness in intercultural communication, the resulting implication is that study abroad program coordinators should consider incorporating mindfulness training for students prior to program departure as an effort to encourage greater understanding of cultural differences and as a way to promote greater ease during the cross-cultural adaptation process. Research shows that mindfulness is a skill that can be developed through training and is a skill that can be further cultivated (Baer, 2003). The most widely recognized mindfulness training program is the 8 to 10 week mindfulness-based stress reduction course that was originally developed by Kabat-Zinn (1990). Program coordinators should consider implementing this training during the semester prior to when students study abroad.

In addition, future research should conduct a study that compares a group of students who undergo the mindfulness training course prior to going abroad with those that go overseas

without any training. Researchers could examine the impact that the mindfulness training has on students' ability to communicate with host nationals and the overall effect it has on their time abroad. As the goal is to improve students' emotional state during study abroad programs and to ensure successful experiences, this would be a worthwhile research prospect.

Next, as a substantial concern in study abroad research is whether students gain just as much out of short term stays compared to long term stays, it would be beneficial for future research to expand upon an important finding in this study: greater program duration leads to developing greater friendships with host nationals.

Specifically, the type of relationships that students form while overseas should be examined more closely. Does a host national friend that a student makes for just a few weeks (a short term program) have a strong impact on his or her support system compared to a host national friend who a student has for several weeks (a long term program)? Certainly making friends in itself matters (in order to have any type of viable support system), but what about the quality of the friendships? Simply having friends means that a person can perceive he or she has support, even though friendships he or she has while overseas may or may not satisfy social support needs. Perhaps the meaning of friendship brings about different significance when a student is overseas longer because greater issues are more likely to arise the longer he or she is abroad. For example, students might be more likely to get homesick the longer they are away from home. In this circumstance, it can be speculated that the type of friendships will really matter when a student has a more dire need to turn to someone for support.

Conjecturing, perhaps this is why people make more friendships the longer they are abroad. Future research should conduct studies to examine this important area in greater detail: if students are more likely to form greater friendships while they are overseas longer not just

because there is more opportunity to, but because they have a greater need for it. As a result of greater need, the meaning and type of friendships with host nationals may vary and change depending on the length of the sojourn, and may impact a student's emotional state.

Considering that study abroad research is concerned with the outcomes achieved from going overseas and acquiring intercultural competence, this would be an interesting avenue of research to pursue when looking at what types of competencies and benefits students may gain from a short term or long term program. This could also provide further support for research on mitigating negative emotional states while abroad. Findings about type of friendships while abroad could impact well-being, and in turn impact the overall study abroad experience.

With the above suggestions in mind, future research would attend to some of the concerns regarding benefits gained from study abroad, further emphasizing the importance of study abroad participation for American college students. Extending research in this area would also allow researchers to investigate in more depth the effectiveness of mindfulness in intercultural communication.

Conclusion

The current research serves as a preliminary study in incorporating mindfulness into an empirically testable model in intercultural communication. The research focused on emotional challenges that are often encountered when adjusting to a foreign environment on study abroad programs and how to allay some of these difficulties. With analyzing the communicative process of support seeking, this study provides early support that, to a certain degree, trait mindfulness can help mitigate adverse study abroad experiences and help to reduce negative feelings while abroad through its influence on affective competence to make friends and seek

social support. However, the findings indicate that longer program duration has a greater effect on forming relationships with host nationals, which as a result, would lead to greater perceived support and diminished loneliness.

On the whole, this study serves as an initial step in examining the factors involved in attaining a successful study abroad experience and is a first step towards filling the gap in the extant study abroad literature of looking at the mechanisms involved during the acculturation process. The present research provides pathways for future research in looking at the role of program duration and relationships with host nationals in study abroad and opens the door for looking at the function of mindfulness in intercultural communication.

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Appendix A

Trait Mindfulness

Please rate each of the following statements using the scale provided. Please select the number that best describes your own opinion of what is generally true for you.

1 Never or very rarely true, 2 Rarely true, 3 Sometimes true, 4 Often true, 5 Very often or always true

1. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted.
2. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions.
3. When I'm doing something, I'm only focused on what I'm doing, nothing else.
4. I tend to evaluate whether my perceptions are right or wrong.
5. I drive on "automatic pilot" without paying attention to what I'm doing.
6. I tell myself that I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling
7. When I'm reading, I focus all my attention on what I'm reading.
8. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way.
9. When I do things, I get totally wrapped up in them and don't think about anything else.
10. I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad.
11. I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted.
12. I tend to make judgments about how worthwhile or worthless my experiences are.
13. When I'm doing chores, such as cleaning or laundry, I tend to daydream or think of other things.
14. I tell myself that I shouldn't be thinking the way I'm thinking.
15. I tend to do several things at once rather than focusing on one thing at a time.
16. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them.
17. When I'm working on something, part of my mind is occupied with other topics, such as what I'll be doing later, or things I'd rather be doing.

18. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas.

19. I get completely absorbed in what I'm doing, so that all my attention is focused on it.

Appendix B

Coping Efficacy

Sometimes being an international student can feel very lonely. It can become a challenge to cope with upset feelings when you are far from friends and family. The following items ask you to remember how well you coped with loneliness and other upsetting feelings. Please indicate how well each statement describes how well you have coped during your experience abroad.

When I was upset or lonely while I was living overseas...

Strongly Disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

1. I was able to outline my priorities.
2. I was able to work to understand the situation.
3. I was able to think about the event and learn from my mistakes.
4. I was able to adjust my priorities.
5. I blamed myself for procrastinating.
6. I became very tense.
7. I blamed myself for being too emotional about the situation.
8. I was able to daydream about a better time or place.
9. I was able to fantasize about how things might turn out.
10. I was able to calm my emotions so I can think about what to do next
11. I was able to try to relax so I can think straight
12. I was able to try not to let my feelings get out of control

Appendix C

Perspective-taking

When interacting with people from another culture, it can sometimes be difficult to understand their viewpoints. The following items ask you to indicate your ability to understand others' perspectives.

Strongly Disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

1. I can imagine what the other person is thinking and feeling.
2. I can work to understand how things appear to the other person.
3. I can put myself in the other person's shoes and imagine his/her point of view.
4. I imagine how it would feel if I were in the other person's situation.

Appendix D

Affective Competence

Now we'd like to ask you some questions about your everyday communication activities while you were abroad. The following items ask whether you feel you understood the host culture on an emotional level. Please indicate how well each statement describes you best.

While I was overseas...

Strongly Disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

1. I was able to understand the host nationals' sense of humor.
2. I felt comfortable joking with host nationals.
3. I felt I could make my host national friends laugh.
4. I was able to gage when host nationals were feeling happy.
5. I was able to gage when host nationals were feeling sad.

Appendix E

Establishing Relationships with Host Nationals

The following items ask about forming relationships with host nationals (individuals from the culture and country you lived in). Please indicate how well each statement describes you best.

While I was abroad...

Strongly Disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

1. I was invited to the homes of my host national friends.
2. I went out to see a movie with host nationals.
3. I went out shopping with host nationals.
4. I felt like I was able to connect with host nationals.
5. I talked to host nationals in my classes.
6. I felt included when I spent time with a group of host nationals.
7. I went out to eat at restaurants with host nationals.
8. I was invited to school events by host nationals.
9. My host national friends would offer me a car ride to social gatherings.
10. My host national friends would take me out to become acquainted with the city/town we lived in.

Appendix F

Support Seeking

When upset, people can do different things to cope with their feelings and their troubling situations. Indicate how well each statement describes what you would do when you encountered difficult, distressing, or upsetting situations. These questions refer to the support you would seek from host national friends (friends you made from the other culture and country you were living in) rather than from co-national friends (friends from your culture and from your home country).

While I was abroad and I was upset, I would...

Strongly Disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

1. Talk to a host national to find out more about the situation.
2. Accept sympathy and understanding from someone who was a host national friend or acquaintance.
3. Talk to someone who can do something concrete about the problem.
4. Ask advice from a relative or friend I respect.
5. Talk to someone about how I feel.
6. Find a host national friend who can help me solve the problem
7. Ask a favor from a host national friend who can help
8. Ask a favor from a host national friend who can influence the situation
9. Share my feelings with host national friends
10. Talk to a host national friend who will help me feel better about things

Appendix G

Perceived Support

The following items ask you to indicate your perceived social support from your host national relationships (relationships with people from the foreign culture and country you were living in) while you were abroad.

While I was abroad...

Strongly Disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

1. My friends gave me the moral support I need.
2. Most other people were closer to their friends than I was.
3. My friends enjoyed hearing about what I thought.
4. I relied on my friends for emotional support.
5. If I felt that one or more of my friends were upset with me, I'd just keep it to myself.
6. I felt that I was on the fringe in my circle of friends.
7. There was a friend I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later.
8. My friends and I were very open about what we thought about things.
9. My friends were sensitive to my personal needs.
10. My friends came to me for emotional support.
11. My friends were good at helping me solve problems.
12. I had a deep sharing relationship with a number of friends.
13. My friends got good ideas about how to do things or make things from me.
14. When I confided in friends, it made me feel uncomfortable.
15. My friends sought me out for companionship.
16. I think that my friends felt that I'm good at helping them solve problems.
17. I didn't have a relationship with a friend that is as intimate as other people's relationships with friends.
18. I had gotten a good idea about how to do something from a friend.
19. I wished my friends were much different.
20. When I had problems, I prefer to share them with my family and friends in my home country than with my host national friends.

Appendix H

Loneliness

In this last section, these questions ask about your state of loneliness while you were overseas. Please indicate how often you felt the way described in each of the following statements while you were abroad. Friends in these questions refer to host national friends (the friends you made from the new culture) rather than co-national friends (friends from your home country).

While I was overseas...

Strongly Disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree

1. I felt in tune with the people around me.
2. I lacked companionship.
3. There was no one I could turn to.
4. I did not feel alone.
5. I felt part of a group of friends.
6. I had a lot in common with the people around me.
7. I was no longer close to anyone.
8. My interests and ideas were not shared by those around me.
9. I was an outgoing person.
10. There were people I felt close to.
11. I felt left out.
12. My social relationships were superficial.
13. No one really knew me well.
14. I felt isolated from others.
15. I could find companionship when I wanted it.
16. There were people who really understood me.
17. I was unhappy being so withdrawn.
18. People were around me but not with me.
19. There were people I could talk to.
20. There were people I could turn to.



RESEARCH OFFICE

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DATE: May 2, 2011

TO: Tanya Kang
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [224108-2] Study on Cross-Cultural Adaptation

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: May 2, 2011

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Jody-Lynn Berg at (302) 831-1119 or jlberg@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.