Stepping Inside the Box: Analysis of Sojourner Perspectives on Successful Study Abroad Experiences

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined sojourner adjustment success utilizing a unique method for collecting and analyzing perceptions and sense making of the sojourner participants. Through this dissertation research, I gave returned study abroad students (sojourners) the opportunity to reflect on their sojourn experience, share their adjustment stories, and identify factors that were personally relevant to their success. They were asked to provide their perspectives on the relationships among those factors reported in the literature that are commonly believed to influence successful adjustment. This allowed me to connect existing literature on the subject with the lived experience of the sojourner participants. This study broke new ground while building on the vast body of work in cross-cultural and sojourner adjustment. Although the majority of previous research studies in this area relied on quantitative survey designs and researcher-generated models, I investigated this topic through a multi-method approach. This study relied on in-depth, participant-driven, qualitative interviews that were semi-structured using a software-assisted method called Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM). This dissertation sought to answer two research questions. First, what factors do participants identify as being keys to the success of their sojourn? Second, what relationships do sojourner participants perceive among the factors contributing to the success of sojourner adjustment? This dissertation found that openness was the factor most selected by participants in their explanation of a successful sojourn. Additionally, participant profiles and influence structure summaries provided evidence of the relationships participants saw between success factors in their lived experiences. In terms of preparing sojourners for going abroad, analysis of the composite structure revealed what could be prioritized in
pre-departure training for impending sojourners. Themes emerged which provide insight into the commonalities of the sojourner experience despite differences in one's program or personality. This dissertation also explained additional success factors participants identified (e.g., ability to manage language fatigue, creation of connections with other travelers) that were not initially provided to them. Finally, suggestions for study abroad students/coordinators, researchers, and employers are provided.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Almighty God, who charts the course, guides the steps,

and directs the path of those who walk with Him.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the excellent members of my committee, Dr. Benjamin Broome, Dr. Judith Martin, and Dr. John Baldwin. Their advice and patience allowed me to create this work. I want to thank my amazing husband who tirelessly provided encouragement and support, and who is a daily blessing to my life. I want to acknowledge my loving family and, specifically, my inspiring Mom who has been an example of strength, perseverance, joy, and compassion. Her wisdom, faith, sacrifice, and love laid the groundwork for my future success. I also want to gratefully acknowledge the student sojourners who contributed their stories, ideas, enthusiasm, and time to this project.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores sojourner adjustment success utilizing a unique method for collecting and analyzing perceptions and sense making of the sojourner participants. This study breaks new ground while building on the vast body of work in cross-cultural and sojourner adjustment. While the majority of previous research studies in this area have relied on quantitative survey designs and researcher-generated models, a growing number of researchers are recognizing the need to investigate this topic through a qualitative lens or multi-method approach. From the earliest stages of this project, I was committed to a participant-centered research design and to using a unique methodology that would allow the voice of the sojourner to be integrated with the voice of the researcher, in an effort to go beyond what has been done in the past and contribute to the holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

This study relies on in-depth, participant-driven, qualitative interviews that were semi-structured, with analysis completed using a software-assisted method called Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM). Through this dissertation research, returned study abroad students (sojourners) were given the chance to reflect on their sojourn experience, share their adjustment stories, and identify factors that were personally relevant to their success. They provided their perspectives on the relationships among those factors reported in the literature that are commonly believed to influence successful adjustment. This allowed me to connect existing literature on the subject with the lived experience of the sojourner participants. Exploring these connections added another
dimension to how we understand the world of the sojourner and, ultimately, how we prepare sojourners for adjustment abroad.

In order to contextualize my approach to and passion for the current study, I will present my own narrative account of my experience with this topic. But to begin, I will articulate the importance of conducting such a study, specifically addressing the significance of studying sojourner success, by offering a practical justification. In the following section, I will describe the need for deeper insights into the mind of sojourners, and finally, the limitations that exist in much of the previous research in this area.

**Importance of Studying Sojourner Success**

Although generations of scholars have produced literature pertaining to the topic of sojourner adjustment, I believe there is an opportunity for breathing new life into this research topic. A timely and holistic approach to this topic is vital for two key reasons. First, on a practical level, as the number of students who study abroad grows, so does the need to examine how we as teachers, scholars, and mentors prepare and equip these students for the challenges of transition. The second reason is to connect the lived experience of the sojourner with the existing literature in order to gain a deeper understanding of how student sojourners perceive and make sense of the cross-cultural adaptation process.

It is estimated that more than 200,000 U.S. American students study abroad each year (NAFSA, 2011). Further, new legislation is looking to raise that number. The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act is seeking to create a national fellowship program to increase the number of students who study abroad to one million per year. A key reason to study sojourner adjustment success is the growing numbers of
students, international and domestic who are going abroad as well as the increase in international travel and the constant crossing of boarders. We have an opportunity, and I believe a responsibility, to prepare and equip these students for the challenges of transition in the rapidly globalizing and increasingly diverse world and to enhance their study abroad experience.

According to the Institute of International Education (2010) 260,000 U.S. American students studied abroad in the 2009-2010 academic year. Despite tough economic conditions and heightened fears regarding international safety, this number has been relatively consistent for the last decade (ACE, 2008). Other potential deterrents include the significant effort one has to put into spending a semester or year in a foreign country including the travel and accommodation arrangements, the cultural and linguistic differences, and the general perceived discomfort associated with breaking away from one’s familiar routine and creating temporarily a new way of life. Despite the additional effort a sojourn requires, students are still drawn, in large numbers to the advantages of study abroad.

A survey of college-bound students reported 81% interest in participating in a study abroad program (University Leadership Council, 2009), despite only about 1.5% of college students who actually participate. Be it wanderlust, curiosity, academic or self-development, or the recommendation of peers who studied abroad, students continue showing active interest in going abroad and more than 200,000 each year do voluntarily (albeit temporarily) migrate.

There is strong interest to increase these numbers of sojourners because of the perceived benefits of the sojourn experience. Government-sponsored programs,
expanding programs at top-ranked universities, and a continually growing body of research on this topic are evidence. Leaders in this country see the student sojourn as valuable both to the individual and to the collective reputation of our nation. A NAFSA sponsored survey of more than 1000 likely U.S. voters in November 2010 reported that they believe international education is essential to the success of today’s young people in “navigating a competitive international landscape, thriving in the global workplace, and leveraging their talents and skills in ways that move the United States forward in an increasingly connected world” (NAFSA, 2011, p. 4).

Promotion of study abroad programs relies on increasing the chances of a successful outcome of a sojourn. Successful sojourns are often characterized in several ways: completion of the program (i.e., not ending the sojourn early by returning home) (Storti, 1990), self-report of satisfaction by the sojourner (Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 1995), achievement of academic and personal goals (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007) and intercultural competencies gained. More than 10,000 students across 200 universities, in a ranking of study abroad programs reported the top three “learned competencies” of study abroad to be: 1) increased independence and confidence, 2) increased ability to adapt to new situations, and 3) acquisition of a new perspective of home culture from a global context (“Students rank,” 2011). The general benefits of study abroad programs are also reported anecdotally by returned sojourners eager to share their experiences and encourage future sojourners.

The reported benefits by students who study abroad as well as the reported deterrents by those who opt to not go, provide compelling and practical reasons for further investigation in this area. As the number of students travelling abroad grows,
research must adapt its methods of investigation to better understand and hopefully improve the complex phenomenon that is sojourner adjustment.

A second justification for conducting a study such as this is to gain a better understanding of how student sojourners perceive and make sense of the cross-cultural adaptation process. Sojourner adjustment is a complex and dynamic process (Kim, 2001). When individuals relocate to an “unfamiliar socio-cultural environment” and strive to establish and maintain a relatively “stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with that environment,” the process can be messy, unique, beneficial, and ongoing (Kim, 2004, p. 339). A topic this complex may benefit from exploring unique methods of data collection and analysis. Kim’s systemic and holistic view of the process is a good fit with my research.

Although previous researchers in this area have provided valuable findings (e.g., Chen, 1992; Furnham & Chen, 1986; Jordan & Cartwright, 1998; Kim, 2001; Ward, 2001; Ward & Chang, 1997; Weissman & Furnham, 1987), they use primarily quantitative approaches. Existing literature has reported many factors that may influence sojourner’s psychological and sociocultural adjustment in a foreign culture. Limitations of these previous studies include a lack of cohesion in the findings reported across disciplines, overlapping definitions for terms used (Ady, 1995), and linear models that are primarily researcher-driven. Rather than continuing to use traditional quantitative methodologies, I believe I can add to a growing body of literature that strives to approach the topic from a qualitative, participant-centered perspective.

Another limitation of the existing research on this topic is the lack of clarity regarding the relationships among the many factors that can influence one’s adaptation.
Although the bulk of the research is quantitative, more researchers are recognizing the need to approach sojourner processes through qualitative methods. This holistic approach may be better able to address the lack of clarity and cohesion in how the reported factors fit together (Kristjansdottir, 2009). Researchers have begun to explore the process of sense-making among sojourners. Chen (2004) describes the experience of Chinese sojourners in the U.S. as a “situation that calls for ingenuity, resourcefulness, and problem solving with heightened awareness” (p. 266). Chen (2004) calls sense-making “a process by which strangers reorient themselves” (p. 271). Studies that use qualitative methods to explore how sojourners make sense of the cultural transition process can provide insight into how people uniquely experience the phenomenon of intercultural communication (Chen, 2004). Investigating sense-making of the sojourners may provide information as to the relationships among the many factors that influence adaptation. A method that uses sojourner-driven, in-depth interviews may provide deeper insight into connection between the perceptions of the sojourners and the existing literature on the subject.

In short, the relevance of this project is the growing need to improve the preparation of students who will be going abroad, provide some clarity regarding the relationships among factors reported in the literature, and the opportunity to better understand the perceived experience of the returned sojourners. In the following section, I present a personal narrative as a way to contextualize my connection to this topic.

My Sojourn Experience

Direct enrollment. Six months at the University of Westminster, in London. This meant I was on my own, enrolled in a university three times the size of the private liberal
arts college on the Hudson River I attended at the time. I would have to arrange for my
own housing, my own transportation and my own navigation of this foreign land. I did
not get picked up at the airport. I did not have a group of school friends with whom I was
traveling; there was no chaperone to tell me which line to get in at customs or simply to
hand me a travel card. I was on my own except for the cursory pre-departure meeting
held by the college study abroad office, which basically consisted of telling me to watch
out for pickpockets and that I will probably experience a “U-curve” effect, starting with a
“honeymoon phase.”

In the beginning of my sojourn, nothing really felt like a honeymoon. It was not
carefree. Buying produce, making friends, asking for directions, and getting to class all
presented challenges because of the differences – differences that I thought I had been
prepared for – after all they speak English. Everything came with a steep learning curve.
But I kept going. My tolerance for ambiguity was essential in those six months, as was
my behavioral flexibility. I would jump right in or wait it out, depending on what the
situation called for.

All the while, I was trying, fruitlessly, to figure out which stage of the U-curve I
must be in. I learned about the classic training model before I arrived, but my sojourn
never quite fit what the trainers told me I could expect. Each small victory, of say,
learning how to barter with vendors at the markets, would fill me with pride and convince
me that I had reached the final stage: adjustment. But then I would get sent sailing back
down to the culture shock stage each time I encountered cultural conflict or
miscommunication I did not see coming. Despite my fluctuating comfort levels, I
recognized that I bounced back from my ‘culture shock’ a bit faster and stronger each
time. Eventually I had to let go of my pre-determined model that a researcher had described half a century earlier (Lysgaard, 1955). When I did that, I was able to take a step back and look simultaneously at all that I had accomplished and all that I still had to learn (and maybe never would learn), creating a larger picture of how I was adjusting. It was both comforting and exciting, and I was able to see that it was the challenges, or rather, getting through those challenges, that made my study in England even more of a successful experience. Those encounters with culture shock did not send me back to square one. They caused me to grow and to gain confidence in my abilities, expanding what I thought I capable of.

If I had to pick a defining moment or one indicative of my successful sojourn, it would be about three quarters of the way through my semester abroad in London, England. New friends and I traveled to Italy, a place even more foreign, and it was exciting and frustrating all over again. We stayed only a couple weeks and when we reached Heathrow airport again, I had the strangest sensation: I was glad to be home. I felt home. After only about three months, this foreign place had become a home with all its endearingly peculiar traits. What once was so unbelievably new was now comfortable, almost routine. I had learned to live in a new place.

Coming back from my world-changing, perspective-altering sojourn I wanted to know if my “stressful but successful” experience was typical. I found a lot of research, but it seemed disconnected from what I had seen, felt, and lived. I did not see my experience, what I had gone through, reflected in what I was reading. What made this worse was that after I started working for my college’s study abroad office, I saw that the
impending sojourners were being “prepared” just as I had been, using a stage model that probably would not predict what their experience would actually be like.

As I continued my research and came into contact with more and more returned sojourners, two things became immediately apparent: 1) sojourners like talking about their sojourn. A euphoric and nostalgic light switches on inside them at the mention of the topic. Returned sojourners do not get as many opportunities as they would like to share the experiences they had and sometimes it is hard for them to articulate the complex and dynamic process they have just been through without the time and reflection to make sense of it all; and 2) like my experience, theirs may not be adequately reflected in the research literature. The literature suggested that there were many factors that may influence how successful a sojourn might be, but there was a lack of clarity in the relationships among those factors and an absence of how the returned sojourners perceived those factors in relation to their experience.

Building on my own reflective analysis of my time studying abroad, the goal of this project was to better understand how sojourners navigate, perceive and communicate the success of their sojourn experience. I wanted to hear from the sojourners rather than relying solely on the writings of researchers whose primary goal may have been to generalize their findings to all sojourners. My personal experience as a study abroad sojourner helped me recognize the need to go beyond the existing inconclusive, researcher-driven models and instead look at how sojourners make sense of their journey. This interest in connecting the literature with lived experience led me to investigate the process of sojourner adjustment from a holistic and interpretive approach and fill the current gaps that still exist in the cohesiveness of the study abroad literature regarding the
interrelationships of potentially influential factors. This can broaden and deepen what we know and empower participant sojourners. Rather than simply relying on traditional pre-designed survey methods, I invited returned sojourners to join the conversation. I was interested in understanding sojourners’ definitions of success and allowing them to construct sense-making models of their own experiences.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined the importance of conducting original research that takes a qualitative, participant-centered approach to the topic of sojourner adjustment success, and I have provided a personal account of my connection to and passion for this topic. The chapters that follow provide the relevant background literature and methodological plan that is necessary for carrying out this dissertation research. Specifically, in chapter II, I begin by providing definitions sojourner adjustment, gleaned from the existing literature. Next, I identify the relevant conceptualizations of success through the types of factors found in the literature, and then I present my categorization of those success factors. Finally, the chapter ends with an articulation of the two most pressing gaps in the literature, which leads to my research questions that guided my study.

In chapter III, I present my research philosophy including my theoretical approach to research and my commitment to participant-centered research design. I explain the unique methodological tools I used to explore the research question, including in-depth interviews and ISM, and the specific research design I chose including participant selection and procedure.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND LITERATURE

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the relevant literature as it pertains to the psychological, practical, and personal conceptualization of adjustment. Sojourner and environmental characteristics that, according to the literature, influence or predict success in the context of the study abroad sojourn will be articulated. Then my categorization of these success factors will be presented. Finally, in this chapter, I will address the need for research to go beyond the existing literature: 1) to investigate not just the factors that influence success, but the relationships among the identified success factors and 2) to explore this topic from the perspective of the sojourners. To begin, I will define key terms that will be useful in exploring this topic and the context in which adjustment will be studied.

Defining Sojourner Adjustment

It is first important to recognize the distinct nature of a sojourn experience and how it differs from other types of cultural transitions (e.g., those of long-term migrants or refugees). Sojourner adjustment is a relatively short-term process that is conceptually distinct from cultural or ethnic assimilation (Ady, 1995). Sojourners are unique because of the situations in which they find themselves throughout the cultural transition process (e.g., voluntary as opposed to involuntary relocation, desire to assimilate or segregate, receptivity of the host culture). Although much of the existing literature aims to transcend specific contexts, this dissertation research will focus specifically on the college study abroad sojourner. A college study abroad program is an example of a temporary, voluntary sojourn. When students participate in a study abroad sojourn, it is usually
linked to an assignment or tasks of limited duration abroad (e.g., taking classes or participating in an internship).

As researchers strive to define what can optimize one’s adjustment in a new environment, it is important to sort out the varied and often overlapping definitions of the key terminology in the existing body of literature. Researchers across disciplines have used multiple terms (e.g., cross-cultural adaptation and assimilation) to describe dimensions of similar phenomena. Kim (2005) discusses the related but distinct terms: Adaptation is described as happening through an active process of interactive communication; assimilation is the acceptance of mainstream cultural elements of the host society by the individual; acculturation is the process commonly defined as the acquisition of some, but not all aspects of the host cultural elements; coping is associated with stress management and the psychological response to changes; and integration is social participation in the host society. These terms convey facets of the cross-cultural transition experience. Alone, these terms do not fully capture the complex notion of sojourner adjustment.

Sojourner adjustment has been conceptualized in a variety of ways across disciplines and ideologies. Generally, previous studies have conceptualized adjustment as a process that one goes through or an outcome that one achieves. More specifically, it has been described as: a stage in a complex transition (Lysgaard, 1955, Oberg, 1960); a matter of necessity (Anderson, 1994) in a struggle for equilibrium (Kim, 2004); person-environment fit (Ward & Chang, 1997); a matter of conscious/unconscious choice to be made by the stranger (Berry, 2005); a necessary step towards intercultural communication competence (Gudykunst, 1995); and as a desired outcome, reflected in a
sojourner’s comfort (Ward, 1994), competencies (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Ward 2001; 2004), and achievement of an intercultural identity (Kim, 2001) in a new environment.

For this dissertation, I took a holistic, multidimensional view of the phenomenon of adjustment. The integrative communication approach taken by Y. Y. Kim (2001, 2005) provides some insight into how one may better define the complex notion of adjustment in cross-cultural transitions and forms the theoretical foundation for this study. Kim (2005) defines adjustment as the “phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (p. 380). The goal of adjustment is to achieve an overall person-environment ‘fit’ between one’s internal conditions and the conditions of the new environment (Kim, 2001). Thus, adjustment is achieved through the process of adjustment. Rather than treating adjustment as a single variable or stage, Kim (2005) refers to the entirety of the phenomenon: an individual who moves from his/her primary socialization into a new, multifaceted one through the encounters with an unfamiliar culture.

Adjustment has been conceptualized as the process whereby one adapts to a new culture by adopting its values, attitudes, and practices or finally feeling comfortable in a new environment (Kim, 2001). It can also be explained as the process of holding both the old and new identities; the home and the host culture values and practices; the achievement of interculturalness. Kim (1988) defines interculturalness as the “ability to manage the varied contexts of the intercultural encounter regardless of the specific culture involved” (p. 265). According to Kim (2001), interculturalness is the adaptive
capacity to understand and accommodate demands of a different culture. Further, Kim describes three facets of a sojourner’s interculturalness or intercultural competence. These are: improved psychological health in dealing with the environment, increased functional fitness in carrying out daily transactions, and a movement from the original cultural identity to a broader “intercultural” identity.

Studies on these three facets of interculturalness, like much of the background literature on sojourner adjustment, can be divided along the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of the phenomenon. However, researchers across disciplines use different names to characterize aspects of these dimensions. In an effort to summarize the relevant background literature, studies primarily concerned with these dimensions of adjustment are addressed in the following paragraphs.

**Psychological Well-Being**

The existing sojourner adjustment literature places much emphasis on the psychological and socio-emotional dimensions of cross-cultural transition. This affective dimension of adaptation is primarily concerned with feelings of satisfaction and psychological well-being in the sojourners. Scholars in the 1960s and 1970s defined adjustment in terms of coping with the stress from the lack of familiar cues (Oberg, 1960). Psychological, emotional, and even physical stress (Adler, 1975; Storti, 2001) were associated with this dimension of the study of adjustment when one crosses cultures.

A significant portion of research concerned with the affective dimension of adjustment focuses on culture shock. Culture shock, a classic and prominent concept in the study of sojourners, is described as “a normal process of adaptation to cultural stress
involving symptoms such as anxiety, helplessness, and longing for a more predictable and gratifying environment” (Church, 1982, p. 540). It has been described as a “catalyst for change” (Taylor, 1994) and “an intense experience” (Kim, 1988). Culture shock is defined as a stage that one goes through on the way to adjustment. Research that conceptualizes adjustment in stages has often relied on models to explain the experiences of sojourners. Models such as the U-curve model (Lysgaard, 1955) have classically been used in orientation and training programs for impending sojourners. However, these models have their short-comings (see Church, 1982; Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2009; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998, among others). A limitation of these approaches is that not everyone’s experience follows the assigned stages; that is, the stages may occur out of order or they could repeat. As a result, this linear, predictive approach to research can be of limited use to sojourners at the start or in the midst of their sojourn experience.

This dissertation does not aim to predict the experience of sojourners using a generalized pattern, but to examine participants’ construction and interpretation of their successful experience from their own perspectives.

A successful sojourn is one that results in what Kim (2001; 2004) calls intercultural transformation. The affective outcome of that transformation can be described as psychological health (Kim, 2005; Martin, 2004). The methodological techniques utilized by several researchers illustrate various mechanisms for assessing successful sojourn adjustment. For instance, Weissman and Furnham (1987) emphasize psychological well-being by measuring sojourner adaptation with a mental health survey. Martin et al., (1995) emphasize a global assessment of success of the sojourn by asking students to rate their overall satisfaction with their overseas experiences using a five-
point Likert-type scale, ranging from not satisfied to extremely satisfied. The affect dimension of sojourner adjustment has been foundational to sojourner adjustment research, but it alone does not indicate the intercultural transformation or guarantee a successful sojourn.

**Culture Learning and Social Functioning**

A culture learning perspective (Kim, 2001; Taylor, 1994; Ward et al., 2001) also can be found in the literature. This behavioral dimension, referred to as sociocultural adaptation by Ward and associates, involves moving from low to high self- and cultural-awareness. In an open-system perspective (Kim, 2001), when one encounters a foreign environment, the desire to adapt is a natural response. Often, this adaptation manifests in the form of striving to regulate one’s behavior in appropriate and effective ways in relation to the behavior of others. Repeated activities result in new learning (e.g., communicating with members of the host culture, carrying out daily tasks).

Taylor (1994) uses educational learning theory to describe intercultural adjustment as a transformative process whereby the stranger develops an adaptive capacity (i.e., functional fitness), altering his/her perspectives to effectively understand and accommodate the demands of the host culture. This functional fitness (Kim, 2001) is directly related to what other scholars call competence. Specifically, Martin and Harrell (2004) describe the development of intercultural competence as the “ability to navigate the culture, comfortably use the language, and understand the home and host cultures” (p. 326).

Whereas intercultural competence might be one way to defining success in adjustment, acculturation is another term that appears in the sojourner adjustment
literature. Explicitly, Ward and associates have generated a significant body of literature on theoretical approaches to the psychological study of acculturation (Ward, 2004, p. 185) involving the affective and behavioral dimensions, namely psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation (Ward, 2001; 2004; Ward & Chang, 1997; Ward & Searle, 1991). The former is essentially concerned with coping with stress, emotional satisfaction, well-being of sojourners through transitions, whereas the latter, deals mostly with cultural specific skills, ability to negotiate in society and competencies in social learning. These dimensions, combined with the third theoretical dimension of cognition, explored in the following paragraphs, form the core components of much of the research associated with the topic of cross-cultural adjustment.

**Intercultural Identity**

A third dimension found in the cross-cultural adaptation literature is concerned with the processes involved in changing and maintaining identity, and the role that sojourners’ expectations play on their adjustment. A sojourner has *adjusted* when the “sojourner’s internalized communication symbols and meanings more or less match those of the rest of the given cultural community” (Kim, 2001, p. 49). Kim (2001) describes how old perspectives break down because they no longer fit as they did before (in one’s home culture) and how, through interaction and communication with the host culture, one builds a new perspective and even an intercultural identity. An *intercultural identity* is developed when the sojourner no longer only identifies with his/her own group, but also with other groups within new cultures. In this way, sojourners develop the ability to adapt their perceptions and cognitions.
Although much of the previous research identifies factors that may influence or predict successful adjustment, what is less clear in the existing literature is the interconnectivity across factors from these three dimensions. I was unable to find a comprehensive model that indicates how these factors worked together towards the development of _interculturalness_. Moreover, much of the existing research is researcher-driven rather than participant-constructed. If factors contributing to the development of this interculturalness can be identified and their influence on one another mapped, it can be useful in education and training for future sojourners. That is, an investigation into the intersections of the existing literature might act as a heuristic for future training sessions.

**Conceptualizations of Success in the Literature**

Previous studies of sojourner success have identified factors, mostly personal characteristics, that may positively enhance a student’s sojourn experience or support the psychological and sociocultural and cognitive dimensions of cross-cultural adaptation (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007; Church, 1982; Kim 2001, Martin, 1987; Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 1995; Ward & Chang, 1997; Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004; Ward & Searle, 1991; Weissman & Furnham, 1987). These contributing factors can be broadly categorized as _Sojourner Characteristics_ and _Host Environment Characteristics_ and there are several subcategories under each (See Martin & Harrell, 2004 for an overview).

Sojourner characteristics, in various incarnations and combinations, have dominated much of the existing literature on sojourner adjustment as potential factors contributing to success abroad. Researchers have shown interest in how one’s personality, skills, or behavior might impact, say, how quickly one adapts or how swiftly
one moves through the culture shock stage. Sojourner background has been a significant site of inquiry in this respect. Research has included variables such as nationality, age, gender, religion, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. Background demographics are, on their own, reported to be of little influence, but when in context of other factors, can be influential (Kim, 2001). A sojourner’s background features may only be influential because of a construct Kim (2001) calls ethnic proximity (i.e., how similar one’s home and host culture are, thus easing the cultural learning curve). Host environment characteristics are, to a lesser extent, also reported as potential contributing factors for smoother transitions. They are: receptiveness of the host culture, host-home culture differences, ethnic proximity, and amount of contact a sojourner has with his/her home culture while abroad (Kim, 2005).

The impact of personality attributes on a sojourner’s adjustment is a prominent feature of the existing literature. Sojourners “enter a host environment with a set of more or less enduring personality traits” and the challenges they face will be placed within the context of their personality (Kim, 2005, p. 390).

Kim (2001, 2005) outlines several personal factors (called personality resources) that contribute to one’s intercultural transformation. These are those traits that should help facilitate adaptation by enabling sojourners to endure stress and maximize learning. They include openness, strength of personality and positivity. First, openness refers to a willingness to attend to new and changed circumstances with less rigid, ethnocentric judgments, and with more open-mindedness and empathy. Second, strength of personality is an ability to cope with challenges with calmness and clear thinking,
resilience and risk taking, patience and emotion regulation. Finally, positivity includes an optimistic outlook, emotional compatibility and engagement with local social processes.

Cultural fit (Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004) is another collection of contributing factors including dimensions such as extraversion, agreeableness and low neuroticism. Extraversion refers to a talkative, energetic, active nature, which is seen in someone who is good at making contact with others. Agreeableness refers to someone who is cooperative, trusting of others, good-natured, easy to get along with, and cordial. Low neuroticism refers to, a person who is not generally nervous, tense, or gloomy.

Cognitive skills, affective personal qualities, and behavioral competencies are prominent in the literature as well (Jordan & Cartwright, 1998; Martin, 1987; Matsumoto et al., 2003; Triandis, 1977). For instance, cognitive skills involve a knowledge about the target culture, knowledge concerning cultural differences and the impact of the differences on intercultural communication/interaction and self-awareness, particularly about one's beliefs and values, based on understanding one's own cultural norms. Affective personal qualities pertain to one’s flexibility, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and ability to suspend judgment. Behavioral competencies provide an ability to solve problems created by cross-cultural differences, ability to form relationships, and ability to accomplish tasks in an intercultural context.

Additionally, preparation presents a factor that could facilitate success or even mitigate the adverse effects of culture shock (Storti, 1990). A sojourner’s preparedness for change includes training, prior experiences with transition or going abroad, and the voluntariness of transitions. Specifically, Kim (2005) defines preparedness as “different levels of mental, emotional, and motivational readiness to deal with the new cultural
environment, including understanding of the host culture and language” (p. 389).

Learning activities contribute to this preparedness, such as formal training, host culture media exposure, or prior cross-cultural adaptation experiences. Furthermore, sojourners’ preparedness is often influenced by their own positive or negative expectations of the sojourn (Martin et al., 1995; Martin & Rohrlich, 1991) and their willingness to interact with the host culture.

A review of the background literature makes it clear that there is a need for a clear, delineated set of these influential factors with which researchers could work. In the section that follows I address this issue.

**Identifying and Categorizing Success Factors**

I conducted a content analysis of the previous sojourner adjustment literature in order to identify and categorize the commonly reported factors that influence sojourner success abroad. Here I present what is a comprehensive, although not exhaustive, list of what I will be calling *success factors*.

Using the existing literatures’ conceptualization of the psychological, practical, and personal achievement of adjustment as the measure of success, I compiled a set of those *factors* that the literature indicated as being predictors/influencer of a sojourner’s successful adjustment. The texts analyzed were drawn from communication, psychology, education, and other disciplines. Identifying factors across multiple disciplines revealed a general emphasis on personal attributes and characteristics when it came to predicting the success of a sojourner’s adjustment and to a lesser extent, revealed factors pertaining to the conditions of the host culture and the interaction between sojourner and host culture. Additionally, mining the literature for these factors revealed that, often, there
were multiple terms to describe the same concept. In those cases, the terms were synthesized or replaced. Some factors such as age, voluntariness, and length of stay were not added to the final list due to the focus and parameters of the study (i.e., college-age, study abroad programs, for 6 to 12 months).

After creating a comprehensive list of all the items that could be called success factors (i.e., characteristics, conditions, actions, etc. that the literature reported to be predictors or indicators of adjustment), and when the repetitive terms had been eliminated, I grouped the factors into seven categories. These factors within categories A through G are depicted in Figure 1. In the following paragraphs, I present a brief explanation of each category.

Categories A through F each represent some aspect of a sojourner’s personal attributes, knowledge, and/or abilities. Category A is labeled as Self-Concept. This category essentially describes the sojourner’s understanding or picture of him/herself. It is the character or intrinsic personality of the sojourner that is described in these items. For example, hardiness is a factor in this category. It refers to one’s ability to endure difficult conditions [similar to Kim’s (2005) personality strength]. Optimism is a factor in this category that refers to one's possessing a positive outlook despite circumstances.

As suggested by the research, the severity of the culture shock experienced may be mitigated if the sojourner has previously traveled abroad, and thus having been through the adjustment process before. Additionally, previous familiarity with the culture of the host country and knowledge of the language are reported to provide advantage in adjusting successfully. Category B is therefore labeled Growing Competencies and
A. SELF-CONCEPT
Emotional resilience: the capacity to recover quickly; to bounce back
Hardiness: ability to endure difficult conditions
Independence: ability to think and act for yourself
Self-esteem: confidence in one’s own worth or ability
Ability to manage stress
Optimism: possessing a positive outlook
Effervescence: a natural vivacity and enthusiasm
Confidence: trust in one’s own abilities and qualities

B. GROWING COMPETENCIES
Previous experience traveling abroad
Ability to speak the host language
Familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs

C. RISK TAKING
Willingness to take risks
Curiosity: strong desire to learn or know something
Motivation to participate in host culture: desire to take part in local customs
Willingness to use host language during interactions

D. SENSITIVITY
Cultural sensitivity: quick to detect or respond to differences or changes
Ability to recognize nonverbal differences between home and host culture
Ability to adapt one’s own communication style
Empathy: ability to understand someone’s feelings or see things from their perspective
Self-awareness: knowledge of one’s own character, motives, and feelings

E. RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT
Ability to form bonds with locals
Willingness to initiate contact with host culture
Comfort in social situations: feeling relaxed in a group of people.

F. FLEXIBILITY
Behavioral Flexibility: willingness to adapt behavior to match host culture’s expectations
Openness: not being closed off to new acquaintances and experiences
Tolerance for ambiguity: ease in dealing with situations in which much in unknown
Contemplativeness: prolonged thought or meditation in most situations
Self-reflection on cultural experience: taking time to journal or reflect over time
Ability to control or regulate one’s own emotions.
Receptiveness: willing to consider or accept new suggestions or ideas
Nonjudgmentalism
Ability to think critically
Ability to problem solve
Patience: the capacity to tolerate delay
Creativity: the use of imagination or original ideas

G. PROGRAM FIT
Cultural similarity to the host culture
Ethnic similarity to the host culture
Availability of social support
Frequent encounters with cultural differences
Opportunities for frequent contact with members of host culture
Positive expectations are met or surpassed
Receptiveness of members of host culture to outsiders

Figure 1. Categorized Success Factors
contains factors such as *ability to speak the host language* and *familiarity with the host culture customs*.

Category C is labeled *Risk Taking* and speaks to the internal motivation that prompts the sojourner to move outside of his/her comfort zone. Specifically, factors in this category include *curiosity* and *motivation to participate in the host culture’s customs*. *Sensitivity* is the label for category D. This contains factors from the literature relating to one’s recognition of his/her own communication style as well as others’ communication style. Success factors such as *cultural sensitivity*, *ability to recognize nonverbal differences*, and *self-awareness* are in this category.

Category E, *Relationship Management*, contains factors that speak to a sojourner’s management of their interactions and relationships with others. Specifically, if and how sojourners voluntarily interact with members of the host culture is included. For example, ‘*willingness to initiate contact with the host culture*’ and ‘*ability to form bonds with locals*’ are two of the factors in this category. Category F, *Flexibility* represents those factors from the literature that indicate that *Flexibility* is an indicator of successful adjustment abroad. Specifically, the ability to recognize and adapt to communication styles, possessing an openness to new experiences and acquaintances indicate this flexibility. *Tolerance for ambiguity* and *creativity* are among the factors in this category.

Category G, or *Program Fit*, pertains to the factors which are outside of the control of the sojourner. Whereas the previous categories A-F pertain to the characteristics of the sojourner, these are factors that relate to the nature of the sojourn
program and host culture conditions. These include receptiveness of members of host culture to outsiders and ethnic similarity to the host culture.

**Research Questions**

Research suggests sojourner adjustment is a multifaceted process with impact on personal, relational, and systemic levels. To go beyond what has been done in the past and meet the challenges associated with sending more than 200,000 US students into cross-cultural transitions each year, research needs to approach the topic of adjustment as a complex and dynamic process. To reevaluate some of the basic approaches and assumptions that researchers have employed, this dissertation gives sojourner participants the opportunity to voice their perceptions of how these success factors relate to each other and the overall notion of interculturalness described in the literature.

While existing studies have contributed valuable and varied findings, gaps remain, particularly in regard to the interrelationships among the success factors identified in the literature. A sojourner-generated structuring of the relationships between these factors may fill these gaps. Two weaknesses of previous studies that need to be addressed are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, previous studies have often been primarily driven by the researchers’ interest or ideology, bound by academic discipline, and limited to quantitative survey methods, which may not fully capture or coincide with concerns of the sojourner. The participant-centered approach is interested in offering the sojourners the chance to identify factors salient to their experiences.

Second, the large number of disparate factors and the incongruous, but overlapping terms, prevent a cohesive and parsimonious language in which we can speak
about and study these factors. Kim (1995, 2001, 2005) calls adaptation a complex and dynamic process with internal and external conditions that need to be taken into account. Kim (2001) calls for research that transcends particular disciplinary and ideological viewpoints so as to link variables into a coherent system of description and explanation and a realistic understanding of what happens when one crosses cultural boundaries.

My design for the current study addresses the weaknesses of previous research in this area. While scholarly literature was a significant contributor to the present study, I incorporated the voices of those who lived the sojourner process. Although these questions could be approached from a researcher-driven perspective, the more valuable lens is that of the sojourner. A study is warranted that addresses these concerns and seeks sojourner perspectives, particularly in the issue of selection of factors that are salient to the sojourner. Thus, my first research question is proposed:

RQ1: What factors do participants identify as being keys to the success of their sojourn?

Having a viable list of the factors is an essential step in filling gaps in the literature since the ultimate purpose of the present project is understanding how these factors relate in the process of adjustment. The sojourner-produced list is only the beginning. How do these factors work together? Do certain factors need to be present before others can support adjustment? Do some factors contribute more to the success of a sojourn than others? In my review of the literature, I did not find answers to these and other queries.

Having identified these factors, it is important to see how they reflect the lived experience the sojourners. More specifically, to understand how participants perceive
these factors and the relationships among the factors as relevant to their success. Thus, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: What relationships do sojourner participants perceive among the factors contributing to the success of sojourner adjustment?

“As proponents of differing perspectives and models often argue past one another, with little mention of the relations that exist between them” (Kim, 2001, p. 26), there is all the more reason for user-generated models that seek to investigate relationships between factors. The answers to these two research questions will help address some of the weaknesses of previous research and allow my study to provide a better understanding of sojourner research, one that is participant driven.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the relevant background literature that informs my research questions, and presented a cohesive set of categorized success factors. I outlined key gaps in the existing literature, namely the need to investigate sojourners’ perspectives on the relationships among the factors that influence successful adjustment. In the next chapter, I will explain the methodological approach and tools that I used to explore these research questions. I will present, in detail, my research design and strategy for data analysis.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the dynamics of sojourner adjustment success from the viewpoint and voices of the sojourners. As a researcher and former sojourner, I wanted to explore how the participants made sense of events, actions, and characteristics that they felt significantly supported their successful sojourn. In this chapter, I will describe the methodological tools and research design that were used to connect the existing literature to the lived experience of the participants. I will present my process for ensuring that I met the criteria of good qualitative research, selecting participants and conducting in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews. I will present my interview guide and my design for data collection and analysis.

First, I will articulate my personal philosophy towards research, including my identity as qualitative interviewer, and the participant-centered, holistic approach that informs my choice of methods for data collection and analysis for this dissertation project. In the following paragraphs, I begin with a narrative, which reflects my identity as a researcher and the philosophy that informs my use of qualitative methods.

My Research Philosophy

Among the many facets of our identities, there is often a role with which we most identify. My identity has included many roles: daughter, sister, student, and teacher, to name a few. Of all the titles I avow, I think the one that best encapsulates me is that of traveler, because, while its literal meaning suits my penchant for exploring new geographic locations, it also calls to mind a picture of one who is moving, exploring, learning. I hold these things dear in my life. When I am traveling, it is all at once
exhilarating and peaceful, curious and satisfying. Arriving in a new city, I wander the marketplaces and museums, the neighborhoods and the narrow streets, to let in new sights, tastes, and sounds. I wander to let my mind wrap around new words and ideas; I wonder to let my senses discover, and gain a deeper understanding of the new terrain and the people in it. As a traveler, I am constantly surrounded by the familiarity of the unfamiliar. Choosing to listen, observe, and learn before I act. New cultures waiting to be encountered. What anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson called the *improvisational dance*, waiting to be learned.

Similarly, in my research, I often feel as a traveler would: exploring, discovering, listening, learning. As an interviewer, I am a traveler into the lives of others. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) describe this sentiment well: “In line with the original Latin meaning of conversation as ‘wandering together with,’ the interviewer walks along with the local inhabitants asking questions and encouraging them to tell their own stories of their lived world” (p. 48). A qualitative interview is a conversation: a chance for strangers to wander together with the intention of sharing, listening, creating, and learning. As interviewer/traveler wandering through the sojourner’s landscape, I enter into conversations with the people I encounter. I might start out with a sense of where I would like to go, but I will set the map aside when an interesting and unforeseen path comes into view. As an interviewer, I feel that same sense of excitement and peace as when I am traveling: I have never been here before, I do not know what I will find, and I would not have it any other way.
My Approach to Research Methods

A primarily interpretive theoretical perspective informed this study. I believe that research is at its best when the researcher and the participants are producing knowledge through communication with the goal of understanding the participants’ point of view. I agree that the research interview is a “production site of knowledge” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 55). Human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. The researcher’s intention is to make sense of and interpret the meanings that others have about the world (Creswell, 2009).

Having been trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods, educated in first a post-positivist and then interpretive tradition, I recognize the strengths each paradigm brings as a style of research and valuable findings that have been produced by functionalist and interpretive scholars in the study of sojourner adjustment. It has been my experience that traditional, single-method research, stops short of providing the holistic understanding needed to describe the sense-making that goes on in the mind of the sojourners. As Charmaz (2006) writes, “The priority they (quantitative methods) gave to replication and verification resulted in ignoring human problems and research questions that did not fit positivistic research designs” (p. 5).

In order to move beyond the current weaknesses of much of the existing literature and develop a more complex picture of the sojourner adjustment process, an interpretive approach and qualitative methodology are called for. My methodology for this project was informed by the interpretive paradigm and a form of naturalistic inquiry, which historically draws from a social constructivist and a phenomenological point of view. The
following paragraphs explain this theoretical perspective in terms of the influences of social constructivism and phenomenology.

Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live (Creswell, 2009). Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. The goal of the research is to rely on the participants' views of the situation being studied. The intention is to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter into the world of others and attempt to achieve a holistic understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; Merriam 1998; Patton, 1990; Schram, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). Qualitative research is grounded in an essentially social constructivist philosophical position. It is concerned with how the complexities of the sociocultural world are experienced, interpreted, and understood in a particular context and at a particular point in time by the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). One of the main reasons for conducting a qualitative study is so that researchers can listen to participants and build an understanding based on what is heard (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

A phenomenological study describes how individuals perceive, feel, judge, remember and make sense of situations. In qualitative inquiry, “phenomenology is a term that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors’ perspectives and describing the world as experienced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 26). Qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding the lived experiences of the participants. It is a strategy of inquiry, a philosophy, and a method (Creswell, 2009) where knowledge arises out of acting and interacting (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).
“The goal of interpretive research is to understand, rather than predict, human communication behavior” (Martin & Nakayama, 2014, p. 194). As a researcher and member of this community that I studied, my goal was understanding the meaning held by participants, exploring their perceptions of the relationships among the success factors drawn from the literature. Rather than being a passive observer who collects facts via an objective or predictive survey, I see my role of researcher as one whose participation is inseparable from the creation of those facts. Qualitative analysis does not seek to separate facts from values. Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe this approach’s focus on the reflexive role of the researcher by arguing that methodologies that rule out personal experience from inquiry in the name of objectivity undervalue the “importance of self-reflection both in its relation to what reality is and to its role in knowing it” (p. 5).

Qualitative research attempts to create a holistic picture of the participant’s understanding or sense making of an issue. Qualitative researchers possess a “desire to step beyond the known and enter into the world of the participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). The world is very complex; there are no simple explanations for things, rather events are the result of multiple factors coming together and interacting in complex and often in anticipated ways (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Qualitative researchers strive to understand the varied interactions and emotional reactions to the particular situations and problems humans encounter (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Additionally, scholars from an interpretive approach believe that intercultural communication research can be more relevant to the everyday lives and experiences of participants and subsequently theory and research should be
firmly based in lived experiences that are not only relevant to, but indicative of “the success of everyday intercultural encounters” (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 8). Qualitative research aims to develop a complex picture, a holistic account of a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. A larger picture emerges when researchers include participants in identifying the factors involved in a situation and in exploring the participants’ perception of the interaction among those factors. A “holistic perspective on adaptation serves to integrate sociological and anthropological factors and psychological factors in explaining the process” (Kim, 2005, p. 395). So too, does this study look holistically at the system of influences relating to sojourner adjustment and provided a comprehensive idea set mined from across the vast literature on the topic. The fluid and dynamic nature of qualitative analysis allows a more complete picture to emerge. To that end, exploring the participants’ perception of the complex interaction among success factors was the goal of this project.

**My Commitment to Participant-Driven Research**

It is important to make a distinction between researcher-driven and participant-driven research methods. Whereas the former is useful for conducting theory-driven research, the latter provides a way for gaining authentic insight into understanding the lives and minds of the participant. According to Creswell (2009), “Qualitative research focuses on acquiring the participants’ assessment of a problem, learning the meaning that the participants hold about an issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers from the literature” (p. 39). Further, as Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue, “Important to us are the great varieties of human action, interaction, and emotional responses that people have to the events and problems they encounter” (p. 6).
Collier (1989) reports that research “must endeavor to develop constructs and perspectives that represent the participants’ experiences” (p. 289). Therefore qualitative researchers should seek to cultivate the ideas and points of view that accurately embody participants’ experiences. Positivist methods do not always allow for emergent and unstructured responses of the participants. A variety of voices and opinions that reflect the respondents’ perspective may not be included in the list of choices given to the respondents by positivist researchers (Collier, 1989, p. 288). A critique of existing literature in the areas of competence and sojourner adjustment is that the research conclusions do not always reflect what the participants are experiencing. Although previous studies provide valuable findings, most research is driven by researchers’ interests.

Broome and Fulbright (1995) suggest that a limitation with the more traditional problem-solving methods has been a lack of tools helpful in successfully incorporating “participant perspectives on what is considered important to study” (p. 26). Rather than giving students a standardized survey to fill out, a collaborative and interpretive approach is warranted. This holistic, participant-generated method is rare in the existing sojourner research and is what I believe is needed to better understand the complex and dynamic process of cultural adjustment. Therefore, in the following section, I present the tools that I used to collect data from the sojourner participants.

**Methodological Tools**

In order to adequately address my research questions, I needed to use methodological tools that allow the participants’ responses to drive the interview and relevant data collection. In the following paragraphs, I explain why interviews and an
idea-structuring software were the appropriate methods for data collection for this dissertation.

**In-Depth Interviews**

Charmaz (2006) suggests that an interview is a directed conversation that allows for an in-depth investigation into a particular topic or experience, which subsequently makes it a very useful tool of interpretive inquiry. It is useful for eliciting a participant’s interpretation of his or her experience. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) report that in semi-structured interviews, researchers attempt to understand themes of the lived, everyday world from the participants’ own perspectives. This kind of interview seeks descriptions and interpretation of meaning from the interviewees. It comes close to an everyday conversation, but is not as informal or unstructured. Yet, it is not as restrictive as a pre-determined questionnaire. Interviews are often begun with an introduction, which briefs the participants on the purpose of the interview and whether any recording devices are being used (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

A semi-structured interview is conducted according to an interview guide, defined as “a script which structures the course of the interview more or less tightly” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 130). The guide can include an outline of topics to be covered and initial questions. The purpose of the interview determines how closely the researcher should stick to the guide versus how much to allow the participants’ answers to open up new directions for the interview. In an in-depth, qualitative interview, the purpose is to seek participant elaboration. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue:

To further encourage elaboration, interviewers who know what they are asking about, and why they are asking, will attempt to clarify the meanings relevant to
the project during the interview. Such attempts at disambiguation of the interviewee’s statements will provide a more secure ground for the later analysis.

(p. 134)

These moments of meaning clarification during the interview may also communicate immediacy to the subject by implying that the researcher is attentive and listening to what is being said.

Interviewer questions should be concise and simple. Often, the introductory question, which begins the interview, may focus on a concrete situation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). More information than simply the verbal response may be relevant to the situation. For instance, researchers may record the entire interview event. This includes the interviewee’s voice and nonverbal (face or bodily cues) behaviors, which simultaneously accompany the statements. This ultimately provides deeper access to the participants’ meanings than the transcribed words will do on their own. In addition, interviews are often recorded and transcribed so that researchers have auditory and written textual accounts of the interview, which allow for a much more in-depth analysis of meaning derived from a participant-focused research methodology. “The interview is usually transcribed, and the written text and sound recording together constitute material for the subsequent analysis of meaning” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008, p. 27).

To conclude an interview, the researcher might decide to provide the interviewee with a few of the main findings she or he has acquired throughout the interview (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008). This allows the participant to respond further to this feedback, which can often provide some insight not anticipated originally. For example, an interviewer might say, “I have no further questions. Is there anything else you would like to bring up
or ask about, before we finish the interview?” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008, p. 136). If the participants have any lingering thoughts or concerns regarding the interview, they have a final opportunity to present them.

Based on my interests in sojourner adjustment and exploring the participant perceptions of the interaction between factors that literature has claimed predict success, I chose to analyze how returned sojourners, who describe their sojourn experience as successful, construct and understand the inter-relationships among the factors that influenced their success. In searching for tools that would let me do this, I decided that a tool originally designed to guide groups and individuals through the process of creating mental models that reflect their perceptions of a complex topic would serve as a helpful guide for the interviews. The next section provides an explanation of the principles behind Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) (see Warfield & Cardenas, 1994) and how it was used in this study as an interview guide with the goal of helping student sojourners construct models of their success.

**Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM)**

“Different forms of interviews are needed for different purposes, just as a craftsman needs a number of different tools in the toolbox” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 143). In this section, I present a general description of ISM. First, I describe how the ISM structuring process works, drawing from two key studies, and then I will explain how the ISM methodology provided a viable format for the semi-structured interview guide on this topic of sojourner adjustment.

ISM is a software-assisted methodology that helps participants identify relationships among ideas based on their perceptions and experiences (Warfield, 1987,
ISM is useful to support the recording, structuring, displaying, and reporting of participants’ work.

The main principle behind the ISM software is to ask participants to make judgments about the relationship between paired items. The ISM software uses mathematical algorithms developed by Warfield (1976) that minimize the number of queries necessary for exploring relationships among a set of ideas (Broome, 1995). These algorithms are based on matrix algebra and transitive logic (e.g., if A influences B and B influences C, then it can be inferred that A likely influences C). The length of time and number of necessary queries required to finish discussion of all necessary pairs of ideas depends on the total number of ideas in the set, but generally, the ISM software is able to infer between 70-80 percent of the judgments involved in relating the complete set of ideas. This reduction in the number of queries saves considerable time in the interview process, making it unnecessary to pair all ideas with one another. This significantly reduces the fatigue that would otherwise be unavoidable in exploring the relations among a large set of elements, making ISM an invaluable asset to this research.

The following are the four steps in the interpretive structural modeling or ISM process, drawn primarily from the work of Broome (1995) and Broome and Fulbright (1995). They are: (1) identifying and clarifying a subset of ideas to use in the structuring and the presentation of a "relational question" for exploring relationships among a set of ideas (e.g., "Does idea A relate in X manner to idea B?"); (2) developing a graphic/visual structure by using the relational question to explore connections/relationships between pairs of ideas; (3) displaying and discussing the structure; and (4) amending the structure, if needed or suggested by the participant.
The ISM software has mostly been used in working with groups of about 8-15 individuals who are brought together for the purpose of addressing complex problem situations (see Broome & Chen, 1992; Broome & Keever, 1989; Warfield, 1976, 1994; Warfield & Cardenas, 1994). Two examples of the use of ISM follow: Broome (1995) reports how Native American tribes were able to collectively identify problems they were facing as a nation, and through a facilitated process that included ISM, were able to map out a systematic plan for accomplishing their goals for the future. Likewise, Broome and Fulbright (1995) reported using ISM across multiple participant groups, creating a multistage influence model of “barriers to group problem-solving,” using the ideas produced by and interrelationships perceived by participants (p. 25). Broome (1995) and Broome and Fulbright (1995) provided additional direction for how to analyze multiple sets of these influence structures as a composite structure. The structuring process in these articles allowed the participants to produce an influence structure that showed the groups’ understanding of how certain ideas influence each other.

These examples of previous research demonstrate what is possible in applying this method to my research study. Specifically, I used the framework that the ISM software provides as a semi-structured interview guide. The current study expanded the application of this ISM process and utilized the software in a new context, although still consistent with the original design of the technology. For this dissertation, each one-on-one interview utilized the ISM process. The original design of the ISM process was to allow group discussions regarding complex problems. This ISM methodology typically introduces items pulled from a grand list created by participants through a facilitated discussion in step one of the process. However, as opposed to an idea-generating phase, I
used the success factors culled from the literature on sojourner success. Consequently, this study’s use of the ISM software as a semi-structured interview guide is an evolution from the previous uses ISM. It allows sojourners to focus on two relevant success factors at a time so they can make sense of and reflect on their experience in an ordered and systematic way.

Another benefit of using ISM as a method for data collection in this study, is that through the ISM process, participants’ responses can be turned into a visual representation of how they make sense of the relationships among a set of factors. These visual structures can be viewed as “mental models,” generated by the participants’ perceptions of the relationships between the factors selected. The updated software can be used to create a visual product or structure of each interview. The visual structures are designed entirely by the participants’ responses and are shared instantly with the interviewee at the end of his/her session, giving insight to both researcher and participant. The visual structures provide both qualitative and quantitative data of how participants make sense of a complex issue or experience. Specifically, visual influence structures can reveal the supporting or contributing relationships among the factors in the idea set selected by the participants. Additionally, there is potential for some benefit to returned sojourners. Often, at the end of interviews, the participant has given a great deal of information about his or her life, but not received anything in return (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). But through the transparent structuring process of ISM, participants are essentially collaborators in analyzing their sojourn. The sense-making that can take place though reflection of the significant experiences can provide the participants with a better understanding and deeper appreciation of their sojourn.
Research Design

Any qualitative research project needs to carefully specify how it collected data and made good analytic use of it. Although the basic research design of this study matched aspects of already established methods, this dissertation breaks new ground with a unique use of ISM as a participant-centered instrument to investigate the sojourn experience. In this section, I will first discuss how participants were selected for this project. Next, a description of my procedure for conducting in-depth interviews with ISM as my interview guide follows. Finally, I offer my data analytic strategy for synthesizing the information acquired from participants regarding their sojourner adjustment.

Participant Selection

The sojourn experience is typically characterized as a temporary living arrangement in a foreign culture. The study abroad experience is a commonly studied example of a sojourn. Students, usually in college, spend a semester or a year taking courses for credit at a host culture school. Student sojourners travel voluntarily and are usually in the host culture for a specific purpose such as taking academic courses or working. This sojourn experience differs from other types of migrations such as immigration, as the sojourner knows that he/she is not permanently relocating, and from vacation as the traveler will likely spend six months to a year in this new environment.

Participants for this study were returned sojourners, recruited using a university study abroad program database with permission from the university study abroad office. Returned sojourners were selected as they have first-hand expertise regarding their sojourn and adjustment. According to Charmaz (2009), the interviewer, who seeks to truly understand an issue, should use participants who have the relevant experiences to
provide insight. As a result, interviewers should be motivated to find those individuals with a unique knowledge of the relevant context and topic, which enhances what the researchers will learn about an experience (Neuman, 2003). Regarding the number of participants, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) argue that the number of interviews should be around 15 with an acceptable range of anywhere between 5 and 25. This range captures the best combination of time and resources for a particular study, and it acknowledges that after a certain threshold is met, adding more interviews results “yielding less and less new knowledge” (p. 113).

Participants were selected on the basis of the following criteria. First, participants must have taken part in a direct enrollment program, where they enrolled as university students in the host country and not simply taking home-institution courses while traveling abroad with classmates. The former is more indicative of an immersion experience and more likely to spur the “stress-adaptation-growth dynamic,” which Kim (2001) argues is necessary for the development of the intercultural identity as a result of adjustment. Second, participants must have been students who identified their sojourn as ultimately “successful.” This does not mean the sojourn was without challenges or stress. Student sojourners who regarded the experience as a success were able to provide insight into the relationship among specific contributing factors that, in their mind, supported their successful adjustment. Third, students must have been sojourners in an English-language program in a non-English speaking environment (e.g., country in Western Europe). This ensured a relatively similar transition experience among participants in terms of cultural proximity to the host culture and language proficiency. This specificity
in region and language was useful in the analysis of the data through composite structure analysis.

**Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews Using ISM**

I conducted 15 in-depth audio-recorded, one-on-one, in-person interviews with returned student sojourners, college students who participated in a six-month or longer study abroad program in a foreign country. Interviews ranged from 90 minutes to 180 minutes and were semi-structured using a combination of both open- and closed-ended questions. The ISM software served as an interview guide for much of the interview, providing a consistent start to each participant’s structuring phase. Success factors were previously identified and categorized from the existing literature (as discussed earlier), serving as the ‘idea set’ from which sojourners selected factors relevant to their own experiences. The ISM software adapts as the participants make choices, so the interview questions therefore adapted, and the course of each interview varied based on the specific responses of the participants (Mishler, 1986).

The recorded interviews were then transcribed and the resulting data was analyzed. Including the pilot test (two interviews) and main study data collection (15 interviews), I conducted approximately 34 hours of interviews. Additionally, each of the 17 interviews took approximately 10 hours to transcribe, for a total of 170 hours of transcription. Once compiled, the transcriptions consisted of 217 total pages of single-spaced text. I took 2-3 pages of handwritten researcher notes, during and immediately after each interview. Much of these were also converted to typed text and later integrated into the transcript texts as memos. Along with the transcription text, the interviews produced a graphic product, referred to as a visual structure. The 17 visual structures each
contained 12 items in a unique order. Six sets of scores for each item on each visual structure were calculated and recorded for later analysis. In the following paragraphs, I describe the ISM-interview process in more detail.

As I sat down with each returned sojourner, my first goal was to put him/her at ease and help him/her get into a mindset of thinking and talking about his/her study abroad experience. After introducing myself and the general goal of the study, we would begin. The first thing I had them do was fill out a one-page sheet that asked them to list their first name, sex, age, ethnicity, where and when they studied abroad and some characteristics about the abroad program (e.g., was it an exchange, was it through a company like ISA, were your classes taught in English?), and their housing/living situation while abroad (e.g., home-stay, roommates). I requested permission to record the interview and was granted permission by every participant. Then, I started the audio recorder and began the interview by verbally asking participants introductory questions about where they travelled and where they lived. They told me where they sojourned and how long they had been back. This was intended to let them get a feel for using their voice in the space, encouraging them to tell any stories that came to mind. This led into more focused questions regarding what their goals were for going abroad and how they chose their destination and prepared for their sojourn, what their early impressions of the host country were, and if those impressions changed over time. We talked about cultural differences, and I asked about any challenges they may have faced. They were asked to recall any instances when they felt out of place, confused, or unhappy in the new place (i.e., symptoms of with culture shock). We then talked about their successes in their sojourn, defining moments, or memories of adjustment (i.e., feeling that they belonged,
fit in or learned the culture). All participants identified their sojourn as a success and subsequently were specifically asked to explain their definition of and markers for success as it related to their sojourn. This was important for framing their later responses. It also made a good segue to discussing what they believe made their sojourn a success. Then, the structuring phase of the interview began. That process is described below. Before concluding the interview, I asked the participants if they had any question or anything else they wanted to share.

Participants were shown the list of success factors culled from the extensive body of literature on sojourner adjustment and cross-cultural adaptation. These success factors were placed into seven categories: 1) Self-Concept; 2) Growing Competencies; 3) Risk Taking; 4) Sensitivity; 5) Relationship Management; 6) Flexibility; and 7) Program Fit (see Figure 1 for complete list of factors within categories). To foster consistency of understanding across participants, definitions accompanied each factor as needed. These factors were categorized to provide further context. Participants were then given the chance to look over, ask about, and clarify the list of factors, before I asked them to select a subset to structure. That is, they were asked to consider the success factors and reflect on their sojourn experience. They were informed that these are characteristics and behaviors identified in the scholarly literature on sojourner adjustment and that I was interested in seeing how these factors played a role in their sojourn experience.

Participants were asked to select from each category one factor which they believed was influential in the successful outcome of their sojourn: “Please select one factor from Category A that you feel was influential to your success while abroad.” “Next, please select one factor from Category B…” and so on until the participants
selected their first seven factors in their subset. Participants were then asked to select five more factors from across any of the categories. The organization and selection of factors across the categories allowed the interviews to be structured, but not fixed.

After selecting their (top 12) factors that they reported as essential in their personal experience with adjustment, participants were instructed that they would next see pairs of factors together with the relational question, and they would be asked to make a judgment as to any relationship between each pair of factors. The following relational question guided the ISM interview process: “In the context of sojourner adjustment, does factor A significantly contribute to factor B?” The "contribute to" relationship examines the positive influence that factors have on each other and (as discussed earlier) can be interpreted as “supports,” "helps achieve," "makes it easier to accomplish," "promotes," “enhances,” "increases the likelihood of," or "helps advance" (Broome, 1995, p. 209). In this dissertation, the term “significant” is not used as a quantitative, statistical term. It is instead used to help participants distinguish a deeper relationship from a superficial one. The use of the term “significant” is used in ISM research (Broome et al., 2002) when asking participants to make a judgment about a relationship between two items. The term helps participants judge the strength of the perceived relationship. It represents a deeper or more powerful connection between the factors.

Participants saw the success factors they chose in pairs, together with the above stated relational question. The possible responses were “yes” and “no.” The participant contemplated the question before making a judgment about the relationship of the pair. Before a "yes" vote was entered in the ISM software, participants were asked to recall
their experience and to provide a rationale for the answer they gave (See Appendix A for a walkthrough of sample ISM session and see Figure 2 for one example pair of factors and rationale). Participants were asked to provide a rationale for each pair of items that they saw as significantly related to one another. If the participants did not see a significant relationship between the pairs, then a "no" vote was entered. Another pair of ideas was then projected on the screen, and the process was repeated. This process continued until the relationships between all necessary pairs of ideas had been explored.

Example Participant Response: yes
Example Participant Rationale: I think curiosity prompted me to seek out opportunities, more than someone else on the same program. I wanted to know all about how they lived and what they ate so I would try to go to non-touristy places and I would ask a lot of questions. I remember, I asked one my teachers there, what her favorite authentic restaurant was and she invited me to her family’s house. It was great and I never would have been able to get to experience without being curious.

Figure 2. Sample Interview Question and Rationale.

The participants selected 12 factors. Of the 144 possible combinations of paired factors, participants were presented with approximately 40. The ISM software inferred responses for the remaining combinations of paired factors using the transitive logic discussed earlier. The ISM software generates a chart that keeps track of participant responses called a response matrix. The cells of each participant’s response matrix are filled as the participant responds “yes” or “no” to each pair of factors. By examining a
participant’s response matrix (see Appendix B), one can see the outcome of each pairing of selected factors. To read a participant’s response matrix, one looks first at the factor number across the top and then locates the factor number on the left side and finds where these factors meet. The cells of the response matrix either contain a zero to indicate no significant relationship between factors or a one to indicate a significant relationship between factors. For example, one participant, Hannah, was presented with 38 combinations of paired factors during her interview. The ISM software inferred the remaining 106 combinations. Hannah response matrix (see Appendix B) revealed 89 yeses and 55 noes. This approximate ratio of yes to no was typical for the remaining participants.

Next, the ISM software used the information entered for constructing a visual representation of the data collected, showing the result of the participants’ judgments to the participants themselves. These influence structures resemble flow diagrams that are read from left to right. They usually contain multiple levels or stages and multiple paths of influence.

**Visual influence structure.** The visual structures are based on the participant response of “yes” or “no” to a series of paired comparisons. They are produced by the ISM software and displayed as items in boxes, arranged in columns or stages that are connected by arrows or lines denoting influence or in this case “significantly contributes to.”

Participants’ perceptions of how factors relate to each other are based on the order of the factors, from left to right, along the arrows, Individual participants saw almost immediately the structure that their decisions produced and they had the opportunity to
respond to what they saw and amend it as they saw fit. An example of the influence structure created from the pilot interview with myself can be seen in Figure 3.

**Pilot test.** Prior to beginning my data collection for this dissertation study, I conducted a pilot study to test and refine my research design. “The pilot study allows the researcher to focus on the particular areas that may have been previously unclear” (Janesick, 1994, p. 213). This is useful for clarifying issues of how the ISM interview methodology would be understood by student participants. The pilot study consisted of individual interviews with two returned sojourners, similar to the participants who would be selected for the full study. In these interviews, I practiced with the use of these methodological tools. The ISM as an interview guide worked seamlessly. The participants immediately caught on to the paired format. They became excited when an ordered pair of factors appeared on the computer screen that resonated with their experience. They were enthusiastic to share memories of what they had experienced, and describe how their experiences pertained to the success factors they saw.

Certain refinements resulted from the pilot interviews. Specifically, the phrasing of the guiding question was adjusted, as was asking participants to provide rationales for each vote of yes, rather than simply asking for rationales when a new factor appeared in the pairs. In addition to the pilot interviews, I wanted to provide a visual walkthrough of the ISM interview process. Using my own sojourn experience as the subject, I selected a subset of factors, just as the participants would do, and then carried out the steps for the
Figure 3. Example of an Influence Structure and the Result of Pilot ISM Interview.

ISM process. I took screenshots of the paired item questions as they appeared on the computer screen and I recorded and transcribed my rationales for each of my votes. At the end of my own walkthrough with the ISM protocol, I created the visual influence structure from the data I collected. This long process was enormously helpful for me to experience what the participants will be doing. It was at times a challenge to articulate what I felt in my “gut” about the relationship between paired items, but mentally working through it provided clarity to what I had experienced in my sojourn. Overall, it was enlightening to me as a returned sojourner and useful to me as a researcher as I proceeded.

Data Analysis

In this section, I first outline how I met the criteria of sound qualitative research. Then, I provide how I analyzed the data collected from the interviews, including a description of how the influence structures were analyzed to create a composite picture of the findings.
Meeting the Criteria of Sound Qualitative Research

“Qualitative research allows researchers to get at inner experiences of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). Sound qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. The credibility of qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher. Although reliability and validity are the measures of good quantitative studies, there are other terms that encompass the spirit of these concepts but apply to the naturalistic work specific to qualitative research. That is, terminology that is uniquely suited for judging research that studies feelings, subjective experiences, and the meanings that people attribute to events and situations in real-life settings. To ensure I met the criteria of sound qualitative research, the following section addresses a variety of strategies that I employed to reach what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call trustworthiness.

Credibility is an “evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a ‘credible’ conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). In other words, the "truth" of the findings as viewed through the eyes of those being interviewed. To address credibility, triangulation and member checking were employed. I designed a research procedure where were two types of data would be collected and analyzed: 1) the qualitative interview responses and rationales of the participants and 2) the quantitative scores, computed for each factor selected by participants, determined through participant responses to the paired comparisons, and recorded by the ISM software. By analyzing both the quantitative matrix of scores and the participants’ qualitative rationales, I generated multiple layers of
data that I could analyze. The qualitative data helped me interpret the scores from the perspective the participants. This technique provided a richer, more multilayered analysis and more credible data set than either type alone could provide.

Second, I engaged in “member checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with each of the participants. One goal of the study was to increase the participants’ knowledge. Scholars suggest that researchers engage in dialogue about their findings with participants. This can yield a more complex understanding and analysis of the data and be beneficial to the participant and the researcher. In the process of member checking, the research participants each saw a visual structure summarizing his/her responses to the interview questions. They were given the opportunity to offer comments on whether or not they felt the output was congruent with their own experiences. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) suggested developing rapport with the participant early on in the interview, so that he/she feels comfortable enough to share personal and accurate information. Allowing time at the end of the interview for “loose end questions” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 210) will help ensure the participant has provided all that he/she wanted to share with the interviewer. I utilized these strategies before and after each interview.

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project. In order for findings to be transferable, the contexts must be similar. Therefore, it is important to identify key aspects of the context from which the findings emerged and the extent to which they may be applicable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To address transferability, I outlined the specific criteria for participant inclusion in the study. My choices about whom to interview had an impact on the data I was able to collect and analyze. Additionally, I did not
overgeneralize the potential reach of the findings. I cannot presume that another researcher would have the same findings from sojourners from other types of programs or other regions of the world, with other language backgrounds and requirements. The findings may be applicable to other sojourner contexts, but that will be for future studies to explore.

For this study, I used a type of thick description of my methods and of the data gathered, so outsiders would be able to follow and repeat the study. My choice of methods provided recorded and transcribed formal interviews with participants and resulted in a visual structure as record of the results. Full transcripts of the interviews and copies of the visual structures were kept securely on file. This study’s “paper trail” gives other researchers the ability to transfer the conclusions of this research to other contexts, or to repeat, as closely as possible the procedures of this project.

*Dependability* is the extent to which the research would produce similar or consistent findings if carried out as described, including taking into account any factors that may have affected the research results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is an assessment of the integrated processes of data collection and data analysis. As for the interpretation of the data, the numerical scores recorded through the ISM software limit the subjective interpretation of the researcher; thus, regardless of who is analyzing the data, those findings would be identical to what I provide in this dissertation. Further, the meaning behind the scores, which is open to more interpretation, was analyzed using the rationales of the participants (i.e., their own words). As for the categories of the success factors, these came directly from the current research literature, but, because any reading and production of knowledge is socially constructed, I do not assume that another researcher
would come up with the same category types. The categories that emerged in my analysis of the literature may not be exhaustive or mutually exclusive.

To further address the issue of dependability, I relied on an independent audit of my research and methods by the Arizona State University Office of Research Integrity and Assurance (see Appendix C), and my dissertation committee made up of experienced professional members of the communication discipline (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They advised at every stage of the study from prospectus to data analysis and writing of results. My committee examined the data in a formal data meeting and were able to examine my audit trail. This consists of the original transcripts, participants’ visual structures, data analysis documents, interview notes, comments from the member checking, and the text of the dissertation itself.

Confirmability is a measure of how well the study’s findings are supported by the data collected. To corroborate the findings, researchers should provide evidence that comes directly from subjects, rather than the researcher's biases, motivations, or perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). First, I passed human subjects approval for this research, through the University IRB. Next, I transcribed my formal, recorded interviews, and these materials printed as direct quotes that appear in the text of this dissertation. In transcribing, I strived to “preserve the naturalness of the interview” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 213); that is, I transcribed verbatim as not to lose any of the participants’ meaning.

Second, a strategy suggested to ensure confirmability is reflexivity. Throughout the research process I strived to be self-reflexive about my role in collecting and analyzing data. As addressed earlier, my biases, experiences, and motivations for
conducting this study were made explicit in the dissertation. I am a White and a relatively young female with a relatively privileged background, who had the opportunity and support to attend college and study abroad.

Some scholars suggest keeping a separate journal for personal reflections (Lindloff & Taylor, 1995, 2011). I kept researcher notes and reflective memos during interviews and the reviews of the transcripts. I included these comments in order to preserve context, provide clarification, describe interactions with participants, and record my interpretations of participant responses. I documented my ideas and decisions during the research and analysis process.

As would follow from my metatheoretical assumptions, I believe that understanding the sojourner experience can best be accomplished through an in-depth analysis of my participant-generated documents (e.g., visual structures) and interview transcripts. I rely on my data, not as a mirror of reality, but as one way of opening up the conversation of understanding sojourner success. I read and reread documents and transcribed interviews for recurring patterns. Furthermore, I listened to interview tapes/files while reading transcripts numerous times to ensure the validity of the transcripts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In these ways, I ensured that the findings are from the research and research context, not my own biases, thus adding to the overall trustworthiness of this qualitative research endeavor.

**Walking a Path Through the Influence Structures**

The 15 in-depth interviews resulted in 15 individual visual influence structures, each comprised of those success factors selected by individual participants. The visual structures are based on the participant response of “yes” or “no” to a series of paired
comparisons. They are produced by the ISM software and displayed as items in boxes, arranged in columns or stages that are connected by arrows or lines denoting influence or in this case “significantly contributes to.”

These structures revealed the relative influence of each factor as judged by the participant who selected it. Not all the factors that appeared in the structure are directly connected to one another. As Broome (1995) writes, several *walks* can be taken by following various *paths* in the structure. To walk a path, one starts on the left side of the structure and follows the arrows that represent the line of influence. The factors that participants perceived as having the most influence appear on the left side of the structure. Moving towards the right of the structure, factors that appear are supported by the preceding factors. Factors that have equal or reciprocal influence were grouped as part of a cycle on the structure.

By walking these paths, one can get a glimpse of the mental model used by the sojourners to explain their successful experience. By starting with a factor that appears on the left side of the structure and then following its *path of influence*, one can understand the relative potential of that factor, as perceived by the participants. If one started with a factor that appears on the right side of the structure and walked back to the left, one could understand what, from the participants’ perspective, needs to be achieved before this goal can be realized (Broome, 1995). These walkthroughs describe the factors participants chose as being keys in the success of their sojourn.

**Addressing Research Questions**

**Data analysis for research question one.** The first research question asked what factors participants identify as being keys to the success of their sojourn. Two forms of
data were necessary to address this question. First, participants’ influence structures needed to be examined to determine what factors participants’ selected. Second, the selected items needed to be tallied to determine across the group, which items were most chosen. Each of the fifteen participants identified 12 factors. I created a spreadsheet with every factor/category and I checked off which factors participants chose. In the example provided below (see Figure 4), a “True” shows up when participants used that factor in their structure map, a “False” when they did not use that factor. This information allowed me to determine which factors were the most often selected from the group of 15 participants; these results are discussed in the next chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORES</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CATEGORIES</td>
<td>Selected Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. SELF-CONCEPT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Summation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Emotional resilience: the capacity to recover quickly; to bounce back</td>
<td>TRUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hardiness: ability to endure difficult conditions</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Independence: ability to think and act for yourself</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-esteem: confidence in one’s own worth or ability</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ability to manage stress</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Optimism: possessing a positive outlook</td>
<td>TRUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Effervescence: a natural vivacity and enthusiasm</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Confidence: trust in one’s own abilities and qualities</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Example of Hannah’s Factor Selection from Category A

Data analysis for research question two. The second research question asked what relationships sojourner participants perceive among the factors contributing to the success of sojourner adjustment. In order to address the second research question, participants’ visual structures were used to calculate six defining influence scores for
each factor. These six influence scores, calculated for each factor, were used to interpret the visual structures individually and across the whole group of participants.

I analyzed each participant’s visual structure, according to the factors chosen and their location on the structures. For this, I used a quantitative method of analysis used in previous work with ISM (see Broome, 1995; Warfield & Cardenas, 1994). This involves the calculation of score sets for each factor selected. The scores represent various aspects of the potential influence of each item/category. The computations of these influence scores will be described the following paragraphs:

**Defining influence scores.** Six influence scores were computed for each factor from each category, for each of the 15 participants. The six types of defining influence scores are: position score, succedent score, antecedent score, activity score, net score, and influence score.

First, each success factor was assigned a *position score* (POS). Factors in the leftmost stage (i.e., furthest to the left on the visual structure) were assigned the highest score, and those in the rightmost stage were assigned the lowest score, so a score of one. The position score of factors on the left varied depending on how many stages there were in the participant’s structure. Once scores for the individual factors had been found, position scores for categories were found by summing the position scores of those factors contained in each separate categories.

For each factor, the *antecedent score* (ANT) is the number of factors lying to the left of that factor in the visual structure that, according to the structure, support or in this case, contribute to the development of that factor. Likewise, the *succedent score* (SUC) is the number of the factors lying to the right of a given factor that it supports, or to which it
contributes. Once these scores are determined, antecedent and succedent scores for the categories were found by summing the antecedent (or succedent) scores for those factors from each category.

The activity score (ACT) for a factor or category is the sum of the antecedent score and the succeeding score. It is often the case that items at the highest activity score are located in the middle of the structure. Such items can be viewed as the “conduit through which influence passes” (Broome, 1995, p. 214).

The net succedent/antecedent/ (NET S/A) score was found by subtracting the antecedent score from the succedent score for a given factor or category. If the Net S/A score was positive, it means that the factor is a net source of support. If the net score is negative, it means that the factor is a net receiver of support. This score is a rough measure of the amount of actual influence adjusted for difference between categories in the total number of items included in the structures.

Finally, the influence score (INFLU) for each factor in each visual structure was found by adding the position score to the NET S/A score. Combining a factor’s position (i.e., where it is located on the visual structure) with the net a/s score, which reflects the actual items included in the structure, one finds the influence score, reflecting both actual and potential influence. The potential influence is important, because other items could be added to the structure at a later time without changing significantly the position score of a particular item relative to the other items on the structure.

Interpreting scores can serve different purposes of the analysis. As Broome and Fulbright (1995) report, position score is an important indicator if one is looking for potential aggravation, but succedent score is more important if one is interested in actual
aggravation, and net and influence scores provide an overall picture. Generally, any successful interpretation of the influence structures requires the analysis of multiple scores. It is important to use more than a single score, since, for example, a category may have a low influence score but a high activity score. A low influence score can mean that an item needs more support than it provides, whereas a high activity score can mean that the factor is quite active in receiving and dispensing support. A balanced picture results from the interpretation of multiple scores (Broome, 1995).

**Computing and comparing category scores.** In order to fully address the second research question, influence structures generated by the 15 sojourner participants were analyzed collectively to create a composite or meta-structure of the data collected. To create the meta-structure, the factor scores needed to be converted to category scores so that comparisons could be made across the whole group of participants.

Influence scores for categories were found by summing the influence scores of those factors contained in each separate category. An average influence score for each category was found by dividing the total influence score for the category by the number of times a factor from that particular category was chosen by participants. This same procedure was duplicated for the remaining five influence scores (POS, ANT, SUC, ACT, NET S/A).

This process adjusts the scores by controlling for the number of times a category was chosen and determines the power of the category itself, not simply that it was chosen more times than another category. For instance, this allows me to know, regardless of how many factors were in a category or the number of times a category was chosen,
when that category was chosen, how it related (in terms of significant contribution) to the other six categories.

Comparing category scores was beneficial because, when analyzing the meta-structure, the category on the far left side of the map indicates the highest perceived influence potential. A category in the first or leftmost stage has the potential to contribute to all the categories to which it connects on the right. In other words, it would be a foundational category of factors that is strategically positioned to provide support for the other factors in one’s success abroad. Categories that appear in the last (rightmost) stage would have less influence power; but instead, their accomplishment depends, to a significant degree, on support from the left.

Central to the sound interpretation of the composite structure were the rationales for the relationships among factors, which were analyzed. Analyzing the scores and rationales, across all the interviews provides unique insight as to the sense-making of participants’ understanding adjustment. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Specifically, in order to create a composite structure and compare participants’ perceptions, scores were calculated quantitatively, and analyzing the scores within the context of the qualitative rationales led to a richer understanding of why participants voted the way they did.

**Conclusion**

This chapter offered a description of the methodological tools and strategies used to examine the lived sojourn experiences of students and answer the proposed research questions. I provided the research design I used to connect the existing literature to these lived experiences. Next, I presented my process for ensuring that I conducted sound
qualitative research analysis. Then, I described how I selected participants, and I articulated my process for conducting in-depth, ISM-structured qualitative interviews. Finally, I presented my interview guide and discussed the data analysis strategy I used to address the two research questions.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The following chapter addresses my two research questions by presenting the findings from my ISM-structured interviews with student sojourners. First, I introduce each sojourner through a participant profile and a summary or walkthrough of his/her influence structure. Second, I present the most selected factors from each category. Third, I analyze the position and influence scores across categories, for all participants and provide an in-depth analysis of a composite-structure comparing the influence scores across categories. I then offer two emergent success factors and the sojourners’ reactions to the visual structures and interview.

**Participant Profiles and Influence Structure Summaries**

The following participant profiles present the 15 sojourners who shared their experience and stories with me. I felt it was useful to tell these stories, to enable the reader to hear the “voice” of the participants and to provide the context in which the adjustment success factors operated. The profiles were developed through the course of conducting and analyzing the in-depth interviews and include participant background, personality characteristics, and general information about their sojourn programs. After each participant profile, I provide a walkthrough of the participant’s influence structure. This walkthrough includes participant rationales to help illustrate how each participant perceived the relationships among factors.
Hannah

Figure 5. Hannah's Influence Structure

Hannah, 21 years old, composed and polite and a self-proclaimed “bookworm,” studied abroad in Moscow, Russia, for a full year. She had been back for six months when I interviewed her. Like many of the participants I interviewed, she reported feeling some symptoms of reverse culture shock;

Now we’re at the six-month mark where the reverse homesickness has set in. All those Power Points they [the Study Abroad office] give you before you go abroad, you never look at them because you think, ‘No, I’m a very open person, I’m never going to go through cultural shock or whatever.’ But all of them are true! (laughs).

Unlike most of the other participants, however, this feeling of “reverse homesickness” did not mean she wanted to go back – not to Russia anyway. “There were so many times I said, ‘I hate this country,’ but then you adopt certain things as norms, and now I miss them.” She missed what being in a foreign country meant for her; the way it challenged and excited her taught her new things about herself:
My boundaries, my comfort zone, was challenged a lot more than it ever had been and now I realize that it’s kind of thrilling. It’s kind of fun. And being back in the States, where I’m not taking as many risks, I realize how much that adds to my experience as a human. That’s mostly what I miss.

Being pushed out of her comfort zone was both a literal and figurative experience for Hannah in Moscow. “I remember picking up my package at the post office and for a while I couldn’t figure out how come I wasn’t getting to the front of the line. And I realized you have to really assert yourself.” Her placid voice grew in volume and cracked just slightly as she started to summon the courage she had needed for all those months in Russia. “So to get anywhere…” This willowy, young woman started showing me how she had to physically “assert” herself, trying to make frame bigger and maneuver her skinny arms and pointed elbows in front of the imaginary crowd. “… you just have to shove!”

We [in the U.S.] are so used to politeness and in Russia, you’d never get on the metro, or off it, if you didn’t shove your way through. At the grocery store, you gotta defend your spot in line. So it is a little bit of added stress. So coming back to the States… everything is really orderly and I could relax and know that I’m going to get to the front of the line if I just stand there and do what I’m doing.

Then there are also moments where I think, ‘I could get this done so much faster in Russia!’

Hannah went on to provide some insight into what contributed to the success of her sojourn. This is captured in her influence structure.
Reading a participant’s influence structure can be illustrated as walking a visual path and there are often several routes one can take to get from left to right. The structure that Hannah’s responses created is shown above. Starting with the left side of the structure, *ability to speak the host language* (B.10), is the single factor in its own box, but below that, also at the left-most side, sharing one box are *ability to recognize nonverbal differences* (D.18), *self-awareness* (D.21), and *self-reflection on cultural experience* (F.32). Items in a cyclical relationship (i.e., the participant answered that the factors each contribute to each other) are pictured in the same box when those items both give influence to and receive influence from the other items in the box. Subsequently, this will be referred to as a cycle. These three factors, along with *ability to speak the host language* (B.10), have the highest position scores in Hannah’s visual structure. These are the success factors with the strongest influence potential. This means Hannah responded positively regarding the contribution of these factors to the other factors she selected. Hannah’s *reflection on her cultural experiences* (F.32), such as “journaling” and just “quietly contemplating” informed her *self-awareness* (D.21) as well as her ability to better understand the host culture:

You have to be able to understand some things about yourself to understand the culture. Something I actually found was my awareness as an American. I never really thought of Americans as being culturally different in any way, really because we’re always taught that we are melting pot. But being abroad, I did get that. Being able to say, ‘This is what Americans do,’ I was able to say, ‘Well this is the way that Russians do it.’ And so the culture definitely led me to a self-awareness. But I was able to process those differences much more easily after I
realized that I did have an identity: A cultural identity. Separate, very much separate, from the one I was in.

Hannah explained how ability to recognize nonverbal differences (D.18) significantly contributed to her self-awareness (D.21).

I mean, you might think that a person is nasty or a culture is nasty, but to recognize where those differences come from makes you a lot more aware of things that are influencing your own values. So it then it becomes less of an 'us against them' and more like 'I just need to kind of figure out what's going on here.'

Hannah’s influence structure shows a reciprocal relationship between ability to recognize nonverbal differences (D.18) and her self-awareness (D.21). Therefore, of equal interest in understanding Hannah’s successful sojourn is the contribution she saw of self-awareness (D.21) to ability to recognize nonverbal differences (D.18):

Yes for that one. I would say yes for kind of the same reason I answered yes to the inverse of that, it's important to reflect on you and what's making you see it that way. The more you understand about yourself, I think the more you can spot your own biases and error in judgment and so you're able to recognize those nonverbal differences as being cultural as opposed to a personal type of thing.

Continuing on, one can see these left most items significantly contribute to the next box containing a cycle of two factors: behavioral flexibility (F.28) and ability to problem solve (F.38). As Hannah learned more about the culture and as she started recognizing nonverbal differences (D.18) she began to realize she would need behavioral flexibility (F.28), which, in turn, helped her develop patience (F.39):
The trains were on time in Russia, but everything else is totally unreliable. If you go to a theatrical performance in the States you are expected to get there 15 minutes early, whereas in Russia, it is totally ok to get there just at the time it is supposed to start or a little late. You’ll end up wasting a lot of time being really disappointed if you don’t learn to adapt.

According to Hannah’s visual structure, these factors contribute to the large cycle of factors containing emotional resilience (A.1), optimism (A.6), willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25), patience (F.39), and availability of social support (G.43). Hannah claimed that the ability to problem solve (F.38) significantly contributed to patience (F.39). “Confidence in your ability to problem solve (F.38) definitely contributes to patience (F.39). Not being confident in your ability to get out of the situation creates panic and I think that’s when you make hasty decisions.”

Following the path from this cycle, the influence extends to willingness to take risks (C.12). Hannah stated that optimism (A.6) significant contributed to willingness to take risks (C.12) and she explained, “You have to be overly positive. You have to kind of fool yourself sometimes.”

Finally, after the structuring, I gave Hannah an opportunity to view her influence structure and make any changes she felt were necessary to best capture her sojourn. Instead of suggesting changes, Hannah provided some additional insight into her study abroad trip. The following quote reflected Hannah’s reaction to seeing her completed visual structure and specifically how the large cycle of items led to the rightmost factor:

So I think it’s really important when going out into the host culture that you know there’s going to be problems that you run into like when you’re at the store and
something suddenly happened you need to be confident in your ability to find an alternate way to do things and I think a big component of problem solving skills is patience and trying on different strategies or options. I think you have to have at least the confidence in your ability to problem solve to go out there because stuff happens—scary stuff happens—and you know if you are able to get out of it, you’re you will be more likely to attempt it.

Chris

- Independence (A-3)
- Confidence (A-8)
- Ability to speak the host language (B-10)
- Willingness to take risks (C-12)
- Cultural sensitivity (D-17)
- Receptiveness (E-34)

Frequent encounters with cultural differences (G-44)

- Willingness to use the host language during interactions (C-15)
- Ability to form bonds with locals (E-22)
- Self-esteem (A-4)
- Ability to manage stress (A-5)
- Patience (F-39)

Figure 6. Chris’ Influence Structure

Chris, 23-year old male sojourner, prepared for his 10-month study abroad in Beijing, China much like any other sojourner would:

I had taken language classes and on my own, I researched things to do there and what I would need day-to-day. Do they have toilet paper in the restaurants? They don't. So you have to carry it wherever you go. Little things like that.

In addition to the “just daily survival stuff,” Chris also spent a good deal of his pre-departure time researching “customs, what is acceptable, what is not, for my own safety. I am a homosexual, so I was very concerned about what would, if I was found out, what would happen.”

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Chris was afraid of standing out and he reported that his first impression of China was that it was “a collective society.” They were generally dressed the same, not a lot of differences in hair. Everyone had black hair for the most part. Every now and then you would see someone who had a Mohawk or maybe they have dyed their hair and they definitely stood out. That continuity between everyone was certainly there all the time, but as I visited different places, including their art district, a place called 798. You saw their art and found that there was this individualism coming out there. Wanting to come out. Very subtly and safe. That is sort of how it evolved my perception. That change in his perception also allowed him to adjust his expectations and his priorities. “My goal for going abroad was to gain a different perspective. I definitely got that. I grew a great appreciation for where we lived, which is like Disneyland all the time, compared to Beijing, which isn't even that bad.” Chris stated that even though he thought he had prepared for anything that might happen, he encountered situations that did not appear in any pre-departure material. For instance, Chris noted, Electricity, so it was a finite amount. Once you used it, the power went out. I would have to call someone; they would come and have to put more money basically into the power thing. And I used my laptop, I Skyped and things like that. So, I found out that I use a lot of power compared to these people. My first, real impression when I got to my dorm was how small it was. I don't know the dimensions, but it was very small until I found out that there was a student there who helped lead us around. He explained that he also lived in dorms and they put
six people in there. And I was living in a six-person room by myself. That was very humbling.

Chris’s visual structure begins with two separate cycles that lead down separate paths, and reconnect down the visual structure. The first cycle of four factors consists of independence (A.3), confidence (A.8), ability to speak the host language (B.10), and willingness to take risks (C.12). As a rationale for why he felt independence (A.3) significantly contributed to confidence (A.8) Chris told a powerful story about one of his favorite moments as a sojourner:

I was by myself and I was on the subway. There isn't a lot of English written anywhere. So relying on being able to understand Chinese characters and whatnot. On the way one day, I looked up at the stop and I could read the word zoo. I never lived alone, I have four siblings and the trip was really liberating, so that day, I saw the zoo stop without thinking about it. I said I am going to the zoo. I went by myself for five hours. I hung out by myself. But it was very liberating because I didn't have a teacher there and I was able to get around by myself. Everyone should have that experience to feel what it was like to be a fish out of water. You are forced to use what you have to survive. It broadened my self-esteem. If I can do this in this weird situation, I can do a lot of other things. Being forced in an independent situation definitely increased my confidence and my self-esteem. It is something I’ll never forget.

This cycle leads to frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44). When asked to explain why he thought willingness to take risks (C.12) contributed to frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44), Chris noted,
People in China seem very serious. Facial expressions say they are not messing around. Body language, nonverbals are very, ‘we don't mess around.’ It does not seem to be a causal place. No one is causal. But if I was to walk up to a police officer, who had a very stern face to ask him a question, pretty soon afterward, he would become very friendly.

For Chris, the fear that he could communicate incorrectly or would it not be received amicably created a higher level of risk. Therefore, stepping out and interacting with locals despite feeling intimidated by their use of nonverbal communication provided him with more opportunities for interacting with the culture, which ultimately increased his comfort when he encountered Chinese locals.

Continuing on the walkthrough of the influence structure, the second cycle consists of the two factors: cultural sensitivity (D.17) and receptiveness (F.34), which leads down a path to a two-factor cycle with willingness to use the host language during interactions (C.15) and ability to form bonds with locals (E.22), where it reconnects with the first path coming from frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44). In describing how cultural sensitivity (D.17) could lead to the ability to form bonds with locals (E.22), Chris stated,

You have to be open to new ideas. A guy I met there, he kept taking a phone call from his sister and I asked him about the one child thing. He said that it is not actually his sister; it is his cousin. He explained that the one child rule is good because if you have more than one child, you have to pay a significant fee or fine. But the attitude there is if you have a lot of money, then you are better or smarter. It weeds out the stupid, if you will. He honestly believed this. I had to be sensitive
to that, but he was also the person helping me out on certain situations. I
definitely had to be sensitive to an opinion I didn't share.

This two-factor cycle of *willingness to use the host language during interactions* (C.15) and *ability to form bonds with locals* (E.22) moves down a single path and ends at the three-factor cycle consisting of *self-esteem* (A.4), *ability to manage stress* (A.5), and *patience* (F.39). To understand how *self-esteem* (A.4) contributed to the *ability to manage stress* (A.5), Chris stated,

> If I was walking up to a police officer in China and I had the knowledge and
ability to interact correctly and not say anything wrong or be arrested. That itself
is a stressful situation and if you have the tools to do that and the self-esteem, it
would contribute to managing stress.

From this walkthrough, one can see that Chris views six factors as the driving
forces in the characterization of his success while studying abroad in Beijing, China.
Chris was very passionate about the opportunity to help future sojourners and he offered some advice to them:

> Absolutely get out of this country. Go see the rest of the world. Realize where you
live. I would say go to a place where you witness suffering, so that you can come
back and maybe alleviate it here. You can't really teach an experience, you can go
to a cultural class and they can tell you, but until you are there, there is nothing
that can teach you that. So, it is something that a student will have for the rest of
their lives. I think we are always, we are all a slave to our own perspective. We
only choose what we want to see. I think everybody should go somewhere and see
the world and don't just go to Italy and eat great food. Go hang out with the lepers and see what you have and what you can do and find yourself that way.

Melinda

Figure 7. Melinda’s Influence Structure

Melinda was a 21-year old sojourner who spent back-to-back semesters in Granada, Spain, for six months, and immediately afterwards in Lyon, France, for another six months. Melinda’s ethnic identity as a Hispanic-American woman played a role in how comfortable she felt during her semester abroad in Granada, Spain.

I’ve always been proud of being half Hispanic. So, when people started to say things like, “Oh you look like you're from here. I'm surprised you're American!” It really gratified me. That part. [Smiling] It was part of my motives. It helped me realize -- It was like, "Yes. I really was here because I am Hispanic, I love this culture. I love being identified as being one of these people!" The first time someone asking for directions I was like, "Yes! I look like one of them. They think I know this place." I told myself "you can get along here."
However, Melinda was still not entirely comfortable in the new environment. There were several adjustments to be made.

The cleanliness of the city was an adjustment. Lots of stray dogs and cats running around everywhere. The city I was in felt safe, there were always people around, anytime even at night. There was a large Muslim population and so men would sit outside shops having tea. There were a lot of people just walking around and they would talk to you… In Spain you really can’t look around or make eye contact with a lot of guys because they would come over to you and try dancing with you. Even when you didn’t want them to and it was kind of hard to get away from them. In France it was much easier, you could make eye contact and they wouldn’t harass you as much unless, at the risk of sounding racist, unless they were from Egypt or Middle Eastern country. Because then they were just very aggressive and there were a lot of those in the city I was studying in and Lyon.

Melinda, like several of the participants, equated her success with being able to personally connect and communicate on what she deemed a deeper level and form bonds with members of the host culture.

Every time I had a successful conversation and really got into different topics… I talked about politics a couple times. Explaining the way I lived back in the states…Every time I was really able to communicate deeply with someone in the language, it was a big victory! To get beyond just saying I’ll have a cup of coffee. To joke with them or to show my personality. One of the first months that I was there, I was meeting up with my host families’ -her nephew and he kept on throwing sarcastic jokes at as me and my roommate. We were like, "We don’t
understand this you have to let us know." But by the end of that semester I was able to understand humor. I was getting the jokes! It was such a good feeling: I can do this and I can tell jokes of my own now!

Melinda’s perception that her sojourn was a success was at least partly realized through her ability to reach that deeper level of understanding with locals. Melinda also reported several additional elements that contributed to a successful sojourn; these can be seen in the following discussion.

An analysis of Melinda’s visual structure begins with factor optimism, (A.6). This single factor contributes to the remaining 11 factors she selected as keys to her success abroad.

Specifically, this factor first contributes to the cycle containing four factors: ability to speak the host language (B.10), motivation to participate in the host culture (C.14), comfort in social situations (E.26), and opportunities for frequent contact with members of host culture (G.45). For Melinda, the relationship between ability to speak the host language (B.10) and motivation to participate in the host culture (C.14) was reciprocal. Melinda explained how ability to speak the host language (B.10) contributed to motivation to participate in the host culture (C.14), “The more comfortable you are speaking the language, the more willing you are to participate and take risks and, like, new adventures and festivals and activities.” She also explained that motivation to participate in the host culture (C.14) contributed to her ability to speak the host language (B.10):

In order to understand what's going on you need to be able to speak the language and ask your questions --like for several religious festivals, lots of religious
festivals, [laughs] while I was over in Spain and in France as well. I wouldn't have known what was going on if I couldn't have communicated. So that really encouraged me to talk to the locals and specifically use the language, just find out what was going on.

The path from this cycle of factors splits to contribute to both *behavioral flexibility* (F.28) and *willingness to use the host language during interactions* (C.15). Melinda explained that *motivation to participate in the host culture* (C.14) contributed to *willingness to use the host language during interactions* (C.15),

Yes. You want to know what's going on so you have to be able to be willing to talk to people and use the language. They were definitely more receptive to me when I used the language. They were always really willing to use English if I first tried to use the language.

Melinda reported that *behavioral flexibility* (F.28) contributed to *tolerance for ambiguity* (F.30). She also stated that *willingness to use the host language during interactions* (C.15), contributes to *tolerance for ambiguity* (F.30), but the influence extends to *availability of social support* (G.43), and *ethnic similarity to host culture* (G.42). Melinda revealed how the factor *ethnic similarity to host culture* (G.42) was relevant when she stated,

I’ve always been exposed to a certain amount of Spanish. My mother’s side of the family is from Mexico. That’s what got me interested I think. I think, also because I look like them… I’d seen a lot of Spanish and Latin-American films.

When Melinda was asked if *willingness to use the host language during interactions* (C.15) contributed to *ethnic similarities to host culture* (G.42), she replied very
affirmatively, “Definitely. [laughs] Because if I wasn't willing to speak Spanish, nobody would've thought I was actually Spanish.”

The paths join up again and meet at the final cycle of factors, ability to adapt one’s own communication style (D.19) and self-awareness (D.21). Melinda explicated how her behavioral flexibility (F.28) contributed to her self-awareness (D.21):

Anytime I was trying to copy what the locals were doing, I adapted my behavior. I would find out if I was comfortable with that or not. Doing one makes the other. It all contributed to my self-awareness, because you learn how far you will go to adapt and then what you are not comfortable doing. I had to get more comfortable with being aggressive. I had to learn how upfront and rude you can be to get somebody out of your face. It was hard for me to be as confrontational as I needed to be.

After the structuring part of the interview, Melinda had a lot to say about this cycle at the right-most of her visual structure:

The success for me was just having learned about this new way of life, this new culture. Understanding it, making friends and connections with some Spaniards. Having also discovered new aspects of myself: knowing that I was strong enough and independent enough to do this. I felt so confident afterwards. Trying new experiences.

From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Melinda views the single factor of optimism (A.6) as the driving force in the characterization of her success while studying abroad in Granada, Spain and then Lyon, France. Melinda illustrates this with the following quote:
By the time I got to France, I think I was burnt out from all the cultural differences. I did miss home sometimes, I missed my family. A year is a long time to be away and doing back-to-back [sojourns], I think I was just exhausted. I’d be in my room crying until I told myself ‘I’m in my room crying…in France!’ and that would get me… I’m surrounded by all this wonderful history and culture and people these opportunities that I never would’ve had it was much easier to get over any troubles I had. That really helped me a lot.

I was very optimistic, at least I tried to be when I was abroad, because it was something that I really wanted to do and of course there were times when I thought this is awful, why did I come over here? But I always got over that even if I had to talk through it with family and friends but you know I was always ready to confront the next thing we had to meet the new challenge. Learn something new like I was still really still excited and optimistic about going abroad again sometime and seeing new things. I love learning about this kind of stuff and like living it is so amazing that it just made everything better. Even when it was a bad experience I was still like, "Well I'm having this bad experience, I have this bad experience while I was in France or Spain you know?" I can say that you know I was sexually assaulted by a homeless guy in a Paris metro, it wasn't that serious, he touched my butt... [laughing] I was like oh gosh I could say that it happened, and is a cool thing to happen even though it was really disturbing at the time -- I just laughed after it happened - it all makes for stories.

Her optimism seemed to come from her strong motivation to study abroad, and it was what brought her through some dark times and some rough experiences. Creating a
positive narrative around their sojourn experiences and putting a positive spin on negative events was a common phenomenon I recognized during several of the interviews.

Emma

Emma was a student sojourner who traveled a lot during her semester abroad in Barcelona, Spain. “London, Manchester Amsterdam, Dublin, Milan, Florence, Rome, Munich, and throughout Spain. It was the main reason I wanted to go abroad. I wanted to travel.” This is a common practice for sojourners and unfortunately, Emma had another common sojourner experience: “I only put my backpack down for a minute... Everything was stolen. They got my camera and 20 Euro in cash, my credit cards, my coach purse, my passport, my iPod. I was on my way to the airport, so everything was in there. It was a disaster. It was a horrible 48 hours.” She acknowledged her “rookie mistake” with some self-deprecation and a bit of sarcasm in a dry, humorous delivery that was present throughout the interview:

I thought to myself, "I’m responsible. How did this happen to me?" They [the abroad program coordinators] tell us, the odds are good that at least one of you will lose your passport. I didn’t think it would be me. I thought it would be that idiot girl over there…It wasn’t…it was me.

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Each of the sojourners I interviewed who studied abroad in Spain reported similarly that they were mugged. Even though they were warned by their program, they believed it would not happen to them.

Surviving and getting past this experience contributed to Emma’s definition of success:

Even after all of that I still enjoyed my time abroad, I think there is something to be said about that. Success is adaptation. Did I just make up a word? Adaptation: Being able to and be happy with changing your habits and getting used to other people. Accepting that a culture that exists is something you shouldn't change or try to change. Just immersing yourself and embracing it is success. Being able to overcome those challenges that were thrown at you. I heard of kids who got their stuff stolen and just went home. That’s not okay. That is a waste. So staying, I suppose, that is success.

Emma did not deny that she faced challenges; in fact her approach to the whole experience ensured that she would still consider her trip to be successful. To better understand how she arrived at a successful sojourn, I will walk through the factors she selected. An analysis of Emma’s visual structure begins with the factor opportunities for frequent contact with members of host culture (G.45). Emma explained that she chose a homestay program in Barcelona, Spain with a woman she would call “Madre” (mother).

“It was just me, Madre, and the dog Romeo.”

Emma also got to interact often with Madre’s friends. “If you don't speak Spanish, good luck. If you go back to the generation I was living with, Madre, and all her friends, they grew up in Franco's regime. You don't speak English or Catalan. No dialects. You
This choice of a homestay and the interaction with locals came to be a very significant factor since \textit{opportunities for frequent contact with members of host culture} (G.45) contributed to the remaining 11 factors.

Following the path, one can see that \textit{opportunities for frequent contact with members of host culture} (G.45) significantly contributes to \textit{ability to adapt one’s own communication style} (D.19). Specifically, this factor contributes to the cycle containing factors \textit{emotional resilience} (A.1), \textit{ability to speak the host language} (B.10), \textit{willingness to take risks} (C.12), \textit{openness} (F.29), and \textit{tolerance for ambiguity} (F.30). Although \textit{ability to speak the host language} (B.10) was one of her 12 chosen factors, it did not mean that it came easy to Emma, as she stated:

Learning a language that was a little bit tough; I was used to Latin-American Spanish and this was Spain Spanish and there are some differences. So there were a couple instances where I thoroughly embarrassed myself. You just have to dive in; you’re going to look stupid, they appreciate the effort. Although, they try to speak English as soon as they hear the accent.

Emma acknowledged the fear of communicating with non-Americans when she stated that \textit{willingness to take risks} (C.12) contributed to \textit{openness} (F.29), “Yes, it is just getting to know your people and not just hanging out with the Americans. It is scary at the time and because hanging out with the Americans is easy.” On the other hand, some factors can help increase the desire to communicate with locals. For instance, Emma stated that \textit{tolerance for ambiguity} (F.30) contributed to \textit{willingness to initiate contact with host culture} (E.25), “Especially in the beginning because you just sometimes have
no idea what they are talking about. Even if you understand the words, you don't know what they want. Working with the unknown. Just dive in and get used to it.”

Another path from factor *ability to adapt one’s own communication style* (D.19) shows that Emma believes it contributed to *ability to recognize nonverbal differences* (D.18). In her rationale, Emma again referenced this idea of just accepting the manner in which things are done in the new culture,

Yes. The thing is, you have to just go with it, what they have over there. Otherwise, you will not fit in and be comfortable. If you are willing to change the way that you think. Not with morals, but the way that you view things, interactions, it will help you think why this is the case or at least be more accepting. Like the whole, "Hola, guapa" in the streets. You have to get used to it. No, that is the creepy, old men calling out to the young girls. That is not ok. Whistling, cat calls. My Madre's friends would say, “Adios guapa,”—"Bye sweetie"—because I am young. That is ok.

Continuing along this path, the five-factor cycle beginning with *emotional resilience* (A.1) significantly contributes to *willingness to use the host language during interactions* (C.15) and *willingness to initiate contact with host culture* (E.25). These two factors and *ability to recognize nonverbal differences* (D.18) contribute to the single factor *ability to form bonds with locals* (E.22) that significantly contributes to *hardiness* (A-2). Emma provided the following rationale when asked to explain how *emotional resilience* (A.1) contributed to *hardiness* (A.2), “Yes, if you cannot recover and if you cannot adapt to these situations and whatever problems arise, there is no way that you will survive abroad.” Here, Emma did not simply suggest that *emotional resilience* (A.1)
is a desired factor for survival abroad; she suggested that there is no way to survive without it.

Also, Emma explained why she thought the ability to recognize nonverbal differences contributed (D.18) to the ability to form bonds with locals (E.22), “Things that are the norm for them, aren’t going to be the norm for us. If you are expecting that, you will be fine.” However, it seems to really be the willingness to initiate contact with the host culture that Emma believes can break the ice with locals, “Yes, the locals don't speak English, so that is huge. If you don't try, they think you are the snooty American. And they don't want anything to do with you.” When I asked Emma, “Is speaking bad Spanish better than no Spanish?” She replied,

Yes. If you walk up to them and they hear the American accent, they will try to speak English. But if you walk up to them and speak Spanish, they, well they will still respond to you in English, but they are so much happier with you because they are like ‘thank you for making that effort.’ By the end of the trip, I went to the airport to fly out and was talking to the lady and she asked for my passport and she said, "oh, you are American." I was like, "yes!" She was like, "I could tell you were foreign, but I couldn't tell from where." That was exciting.

This idea of blending in with the culture was exhilarating to several participants. Further, Emma tried to make the most of these opportunities with locals to speak Spanish, even though she was not fluent. This is reflected in her structure where the single factor of opportunities for frequent contact with members of host culture (G.45), which comes from Category G, Program Fit was the driving force in the characterization of her success while studying abroad in Barcelona, Spain.
After the structuring, when looking at the rightmost item of hardiness (A.2)

Emma remarked that the sojourn experience gave her the skills to endure difficult conditions,

Getting mugged put a damper on the rest of the trip because I tried harder to save money in anyway I could. That is my only regret… I’m the oldest so if my sisters go abroad I can say, ‘Look, listen to me, this is what you do. Don’t cheap out to save 20 bucks for a flight that leaves at 6 AM and has a 10-hour layover night in an airport.’ I did that a lot. So I can tell them how to spend it [their money] and I will give them 20 bucks. But really, I have the experience of sleeping in many airports. There is something to be said about being able to say you can do that.

**Christian**

![Figure 9. Christian’s Influence Structure](image)

Christian, a smart and serious 20-year old male sojourner spent a year in Moscow, Russia. Christian appeared to be very informed regarding the role that he thought Russia would play in the world throughout the next few years. He tried to pay attention to as many things in Russia as possible. He said, “I’m an observer. I watched and learned a lot from watching.” His ability to observe and analyze translated into a self-reflection he
experienced while in Russia. As a result, he reported several realizations he came to about the United States during his time abroad.

I did realize more heavily that going abroad made it very clear what defines an American. What makes me American and not Russian. We are an optimistic people. Our sense of equal opportunity is something that very uniquely identifies us, I think. That combines with our optimism to make that entrepreneurial spirit, which is a big foundation of the American success. There are other things like our attitude to women, but that goes along with equal opportunity.

Here, Christian touches on some typical American values (e.g., equal opportunity, role of women) that became more apparent when faced with a culture that differs. He also came to the conclusion that the Russians heavily rely on media to learn about Americans.

I realized that we are largely mischaracterized. One of the things I noticed is that a lot of their descriptions of Americans seem to come from music videos. Which is, think about it, that is a lot of what they watch. They think that there is this perception that we party all the time. Of course that is ridiculous, but it is all they ever see.

Christian communicated how much he missed being there. “I love being able to speak Russian. I miss using and hearing the language, I really do. Also, this is especially a big deal coming from Moscow to Phoenix. Phoenix is a little dead. Moscow is very lively.” Before he left the interview, Christian provided some advice that he thought was paramount to new sojourners,
Be relaxed; you are there to have fun, well maybe not have fun, but there to engage culture, so just do it, Nike has the best idea. Relax, go take risks, just get out there. If you walk around, something will find you.

There are several factors that led him to have a successful sojourn while abroad. An analysis of Christian’s visual structure begins with the two-factor cycle of **optimism** (A.6) and **patience** (F.39). Christian explained how **optimism** (A.6) contributed to **patience** (F.39) when he stated, “You can be patient when you are happy; you don’t get tired of being happy. Or rather, you don’t rush. Like you are not quick to engage negativity.”

Following the path, one can see that **optimism** (A.6) and **patience** (F.39) significantly contribute to the cycle containing factors **ability to manage stress** (A.5), **ability to speak the host language** (B.10), **willingness to take risks** (C.12), **motivation to participate in host culture** (C.14), **comfort in social situations** (E.26) and **tolerance for ambiguity** (F.30). When asked how **optimism** (A.6) contributed to the **ability to manage stress** (A.5), Christian stated,

Yes. Stress happens when you are worried about something or you have concerns. Especially being abroad and being in Moscow, a lot of our days were just like, hey, let's go do something. Let's start at the center of the city, at point X, let's see what's cool and go from there. As long as you are optimistic about it, you will go do things and you will have fun and it doesn't really matter what happens. Worst case, you have a nice walk. This makes sense; there is no reason to be stressful as long as you are optimistic or as long as you are not negative. When you become negative you become stressed.
Continuing on, two paths follow from this cycle of factors. The first path moves from the six-factor cycle to another two-factor cycle including *willingness to use the host language during interactions* (C.15) and *receptiveness of members of the host culture to outsiders* (G.47). This path follows on to *willingness to initiate contact with host culture* (E.25). Christian explained how *receptiveness of members of the host culture to outsiders* (G.47) contributed to *willingness to initiate contact with host culture* (E.25), “When people are receptive, it makes it easier. Makes it a lot more fun too.”

The second path moves from the six-factor cycle to *self-awareness* (D.21). A rationale Christian provided lends insight into this path. When asked if *tolerance for ambiguity* (F.30) contributes to *self-awareness* (D.21), “I’m an observer. I watched and learned a lot from watching and then I could jump in.” Following this path leads on to *willingness to initiate contact with host culture* (E.25). Christian believed that *self-awareness* (D.21) contributed to *willingness to initiate contact with the host culture* (E.25) He stated, “Self-awareness makes you comfortable, and if you are comfortable you are more willing to initiate contact.”

From this walkthrough, one can see that Christian chose factors from Category A, *Self-concept* and Category F, *Flexibility* as several of the driving forces in the characterization of his success while studying abroad in Moscow, Russia.
Olivia

Olivia, 20, a Business major, had an idyllic Parisian sojourn complete with a view of the Eiffel Tower from her apartment. She reported that she did not run into any major problems, aside from her biggest challenge, learning the language, and even that she considered very manageable. Her sojourn was not without a transition experience. For Olivia, her “eyes were really opened” being surrounded in her classes by students from around the world taking their education very seriously.

I think it was just being immersed in that environment like that…Just being in a setting of other students who knew so much and who knew themselves. There were times when I was taking a class and I was the only American student and they were all sharing their political opinions or just they were more educated, or I felt like they were more educated in their views, maybe because they were from Europe. I felt like I could learn a lot from them in terms of international business, learning about all of the currencies and I don't know, I feel like they are more educated, but that helped me want to learn that too so that I could participate in classroom discussion.
As she continued to reflect on her sojourn, Olivia commented that this is something that she said she missed now that she was back in the U.S.

They were so worldly and knew so much and I don't know how they did it. Maybe it was how they were taught from young. It helped me reflect how they saw a lot of things, had political views. I am not sure how to bring that here, but when I was over there, I was reading the Financial Times and embracing global affairs. Now I feel like since I have come back, it has lessened a lot. I wish I could get back to that mentality and be interested in all the subjects. When I was over there, the style of teaching was different. I was more open to learning from those teachers and when I came back, I was less interested. I wish I stuck with the student mentality of reading the Financial Times and keeping up with stuff.

Olivia stated that her sojourn was definitely a success. Furthermore, she believed this was epitomized during the defining moment when she successfully showed her mother and sister around France. Like other sojourners I interviewed, Olivia was eager to provide some wisdom or advice for future sojourners.

Just trust your instincts while traveling. I had a few scary experiences, but you can't let that...it wasn't scary, but you can't let negative things bring you down. You have to go in with an open mind and figure yourself out and you will be put in situations where you will feel uncomfortable, but that is part of life. So, knowing that, you will be okay.

To fully illustrate what led Olivia to conclude that her sojourn was a success, I will walk through her visual structure.
An analysis of Olivia’s visual structure begins with the single factor of *curiosity* (C.13). Describing *curiosity* (C.13), Olivia stated,

When you go over studying abroad, you don't really know what to expect. Well you do know what to expect, but not as much when you get over there. I feel like I was curious to go over there and experience all these new things and definitely curious to see new things.

From *curiosity* (C.13), Olivia’s structure follows a single path, which illustrates that *curiosity* (C.13) significantly contributes to the two-factor cycle containing factors *independence* (A.3) and *previous experience traveling abroad* (B.9). These two factors *independence* (A.3) and *previous experience traveling abroad* (B.9) contribute to the single factor *openness* (F.29). One can see Olivia’s thoughts on *independence* (A.3) here:

I think someone has to really be independent anyway when you are traveling abroad. I know a lot of people who had to have a person to go with them, because they were scared or didn't want to go there by themselves. I was independent and went by myself. And then I had the experience of meeting all the people.

Olivia’s experience traveling abroad will probably stay with her for a while and is further illustrated when she said,

Having the experience that I had over there, I feel that even when I come back here, I move right back to Boston and I was like, I am not even done, I am not ready to be home. I am ready to still travel. I came all the way back here. I feel kinda independent again. I still want to travel; I still want to see new things.

We can see how much Olivia desires to travel again, so much so in fact that it creates this drive to want to see and experience new things.
The factor openness (F.29) follows to a cycle containing six factors including empathy (D.20), self-awareness (D.21), ability to form bonds with locals (E.22), comfort in social situations (E.26), receptiveness (F.34), and positive expectations are met or surpassed (G.46). The importance of openness (F.29) for Olivia is illustrated when she stated, “Yeah, not being closed off to new acquaintances. Once you have that, once you are open minded, you can hear other people's stories and appreciate them and you feel more comfortable.” Later in her interview, she explained the relationship between openness and receptiveness,

If you are not being closed off, I am trying to think of a situation...yeah, when I am open, I am kinda open to hearing other people's stories and when you are open to that, you can receive and portray it in a different way.

Additionally, Olivia offered some greater insight into the connections between some of the factors within the six-factor cycle provided in her influence structure. For instance, when asked if positive expectations, either were met or surpassed (G.46) contributed to her receptiveness (F.34), Olivia stated, “Yes. I think that now that I have had the experience over there, I think that I'm more receptive and open to new ideas and suggestions. I would say yes.”

The cycle of six factors follows on to a two-factor cycle containing optimism (A.6) and motivation to participate in host culture (C.14). From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Olivia views a single factor curiosity (C.13) from Category C, Risk Taking as one of the driving forces in the characterization of her success while studying abroad in Paris, France.
Like other sojourners I interviewed, Olivia was eager to provide some wisdom or advice for future sojourners.

Just trust your instincts while traveling. I had a few scary experiences, but you can't let that—it wasn't scary. But you can't let negative things bring you down.

You have to go in with an open mind and figure yourself out and you will be put in situations where you will feel uncomfortable, but that is part of life. So, knowing that, you will be okay.

Overall, take on opportunities. If you get invited somewhere, even if you are stressed out with school or something, go! Go to a cafe, get out, don't be a homebody. You have a limited time there, so you have to make the most of it.

This “just do it” attitude was suggested by several of the participants for future sojourners. The short-term nature of the sojourn seemed to increase their desire to try new things and their willingness to take chances or risks when they presented themselves. The thought behind it seemed to be that an opportunity missed might cause regret later.
Leo stated that he wanted something extra at the end of college career in addition to his grade point average. A study abroad sojourn appeared to be the way to accomplish this. He wanted to see the world outside of his familiar home and culture. However, his family was not necessarily on board immediately when it came to Leo’s choice of language.

Figure 11. Leo’s Influence Structure

For Leo, a sincere and contemplative sojourner, spending six months in Italy was a dream come true and one he had to fight to achieve.

I knew I wanted an adventure. I wanted to just get out. I wanted some experience. It [study abroad] was something that no one I knew had done or was doing, but that I really wanted to do. I saw one of the posters around campus when I was a freshman. I called my Mom and said "Mom, I am going to go to Italy." And then I finally started learning Italian.
I wanted to take Italian in high school, but my school didn’t offer it. In high school, I took Spanish. I like Italian more. I grew up around Spanish-speaking people my whole life. My parents both speak Spanish; my father is from Mexico. They are like, why don't you just learn how to speak Spanish?

Making the decision to learn Italian and study abroad took courage, but paid off for Leo in an emotionally gratifying way. He described his “defining moment” in Italy, which took place at one of his favorite places in the city.

I like the pizza place. The best pizza place is right next to our American school. They had the best pizza. I would go to this old guy that worked behind the counter. Every day. I would ask for the same type of pizza. Sundried tomatoes pizza. After the program had ended, I took my girlfriend and her father there. I said, I need some (something in Italian) for my girlfriend's father. He knew me and he was very impressed and he responded in Italian. I said it is my last day here. I spoke in Italian and I said “This is it. I won't be here for a while. But I'm coming back for your pizza.” We shook hands. That was probably my favorite moment.

Additionally, Leo was excited at the opportunity to share some advice for future sojourners for their study abroad trip. Although he ties his advice into some specific details regarding his own sojourn, future sojourners can still learn from the broader lessons provided below when Leo notes:

Explore. I would take different routes to school everyday. I didn't know where it would take me. It is good to go off the beaten trail. Stay within the realm of safety. Try to speak more with local people because you will end up interacting
with Americans, it is natural. But to speak with locals is more of something that people have to go out of their way for. That is weird because you are in their country. But that is what happens in Rome at least. But it is worth doing. You can't have good times and not expect bad times. You might not succeed in some cases, but that is bound to happen with everything. The entire study abroad trip, maybe you fail a test, or you miss a class or you get sick. Maybe someone in Italian might not want to talk to you, this guy cursed at me for riding a bike on the sidewalk. I didn't know you shouldn't do that. At least I got to ride in the city on a bike. Expect to fail at something. But overall, it will be worth it.

There are many factors that Leo attributes to his successful sojourn. But what struck me was his definition of success. Leo spoke slowly and thoughtfully as he answered my question.

Well, I got to travel, and not just for fun. I got to travel outside of here and continue my education. That is a big deal. In my family, we have only had one other person graduate from college. Both of my parents didn't even graduate high school. The fact that I was studying abroad was a big deal for them. The reason I would consider it a success is because I got out of the country for the first time by myself and I continued my education.

Analysis of Leo’s visual structure begins with the single factor of familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs (B.11) in which two paths emerge. The first path shows that familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs (B.11) significantly contributes to a four-factor cycle including emotional resilience (A.1), ability to manage stress (A.5), willingness to use the host language during interactions (C.15), and empathy
To explain how willingness to use the host language during interactions contributed to his ability to manage the stress, Leo replied,

Definitely. If you are in a taxicab and you are willing to speak their language, they will definitely take you where you want to go. Some people, if they have no clue or they are mindless, it will add to your stress a whole lot.

This was a reciprocal relationship and Leo illustrated this when he stated that ability to manage stress also contributed to his willingness to use the host language during interactions:

I could definitely see that when I was there. There would be some days where I was so stressed out because of schoolwork that I didn't want to talk to anybody in Italian. I just wanted to get home. I would draw blanks because I couldn't deal with it. I would give up.

Leo’s comments regarding the reciprocal relationship between willingness to use the host language during interactions and ability to manage stress reveal just how liberating or limiting the connection between language and stress can be.

Leo stated that familiarity with the host culture artifacts and customs contributed to his ability to manage stress; however, he seemed to have some trouble articulating exactly why. As a result, I asked him, “Were you familiar with Italian food or language?” This appeared to help as Leo answered, “Yeah. Italian class is not just language. You have to do presentations, watch movies, so you end up learning about random things like cultural customs and stuff like that as well.” After another minute, Leo noted,
Yes. I think once you conform to the culture, it definitely helps to immerse yourself within the culture, so yeah. If you are trying to keep things constant as if you were in America, it will definitely not help to manage stress at all.

To understand the reciprocal relationship between willingness to use the host language during interactions (C.15) and empathy (D.20), Leo first offered the following to explain how willingness to use the host language during interactions (C.15) contributed to empathy (D.20):

Yeah. If you are willing to use the host language, I think it means you would like to contribute to what they are saying and I don't know, I think there would have to be a certain amount of empathy that would have to go into it if you want to speak to them.

Inversely, to explain how empathy (D.20) contributed to his willingness to use the host language during interactions (C.15), Leo stated, “Yes. I think that probably goes both ways. Cultural sensitivity is really important. Learning not just the mechanics of the language, but the emotional side of it too.” Additionally, his cultural similarity, speaking Spanish, and growing up with many people speaking Spanish around him, he said, helped him learn Italian indirectly,

It is actually very similar to Spanish. The way I see it, like when people come from Mexico, their kids automatically pick up Spanish, so when they go to school and they grew up, they become bilingual. So the way I see it, I am learning Italian informally. My girlfriend and her family and my family all speak Spanish. I will be able to speak Italian fluently and Spanish a little bit.
Being surrounded by individuals who spoke Spanish may have played a heavy role in Leo’s desire to try something different.

This cycle of factors goes on to contribute to cultural sensitivity (D.17) and subsequently continues on to significantly contribute to a four-factor cycle including ability to form bonds with locals (E.22), willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25), behavioral flexibility (F.28), and openness (F.29). Specifically, Leo explained how empathy (D.20) contributed to the ability to form bonds with locals (E.22),

You react to their body language, or whatever they are doing at that time and definitely put yourself in their shoes and what you can do to not seem like a typical American. I think that is what they typically prefer is to create bonds with them. If you can't speak perfectly, they appreciate people trying to speak Italian rather than me have them conform to us.

Not only did empathy help facilitate the ability to form relationships with the locals, but like Emma, the mere attempt at speaking the host culture’s language was appreciated by the locals.

The second path in Leo’s visual structure shows that familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs (B.11) contributed to curiosity (C.13). This familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs actually fed Leo’s curiosity (C.13). Leo said,

When we read about these things in an Italian class, you just want to go find them. You want to test your own ability in speaking, using a phrase book. Go to the first restaurant and ask for something in Italian, like a Roman rice ball.
Following this path, one can see that *curiosity* (C.13) significantly contributes to the four-factor cycle containing *ability to form bonds with locals* (E.22), *willingness to initiate contact with host culture* (E.25), *behavioral flexibility* (F.28), and *openness* (F.29).

There is one factor *cultural similarity to host culture* (G.41), which Leo selected, but this item did not influence other items nor did other items influence it. From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Leo views a single factor *familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs* (B.11) from Category B, *Growing Competencies* as one of the driving forces in the characterization of his success while studying abroad in Florence, Italy.

**Ginny**

![Ginny's Influence Structure](image)

*Figure 12. Ginny’s Influence Structure*

Ginny, expressive and spunky, the youngest of the participants that I interviewed, sojourned in Seville, Spain, for a semester when she was only a 19-year-old sophomore and she had just returned two months before we met. Ginny was not shy about the fact that it had not been very easy to transition back to her “old” life. “It has been rough,
man!” But it had given her some insight into readjusting to U.S. American culture. As she explained, Ginny spoke very quickly and passionately and didn’t finish all of her sentences before starting new ones. Specifically, she stated,

I came back here and I’m having a really hard time. I don’t know what to believe any more and I feel like certain aspects of this American culture … are embedded in me and I don’t even realize. And I feel like it is like this monster and I need to get out, because I don’t agree with these aspects of culture, but then I see myself doing them, especially things like gender norms and being a passive woman which is… I’ve been trying to work through this stuff.

Ginny returned with a renewed motivation to challenge what she took for granted and the way she saw her life. However, Ginny’s individual experiences left her with a broader question as to the nature of culture itself. “I notice everything people say now, I’m like ‘that is a very American way of thinking.’ I confronted my consumerism and my thoughts about the American dream.” She went on:

I don’t trust culture as an entity any more because I’ve seen how different it is and I know that it is totally socially constructed. I don’t trust the influence it has had on me in terms of what is right and wrong.

These lingering questions left Ginny with much to contemplate. Aside from the cognitive strain of returning from a study abroad trip and questioning aspects of one’s life and values, Ginny experienced some behavioral and linguistic complications as well. For instance, she reported, “I developed a stutter when I first came back. I was really overwhelmed when I went to a restaurant and I couldn’t focus because I heard English all around me. I forgot how to tune out.” This behavioral response experienced upon
returning from her sojourn illustrates the nature of changes that some travelers endure both when studying abroad and reentering into their home culture.

I’m trying to get to a normalcy again – but without denying how I’ve changed without losing what I gained. Yes, I could try to go back to what I was before, but that defeats the whole purpose of it. Every day gets better. No pasa nada.

Even though she experienced some re-entry shock upon her return, Ginny believed that her sojourn was a success since she set out with some specific goals: “To experience a new culture, to travel, to learn a new language, to meet new people, to conceptualize my world view and discover myself more.” And she felt that she had definitely achieved them. What amazed her was how unchanged her life was when previously traveling with family, but how changed it was when she traveled alone and studied abroad,

The first time I traveled outside of the U.S. I was young and with my parents, but I had a romantic idea that it would be like a movie that it would make me different and I was surprised to be the same person in a new location. It didn’t change me. But being on my own this time and I learned a lot about myself, my friends, my country, and my planet. I learned a new language and am able to communicate with an entire new group of people previously inaccessible. I learned what I like and don't like. I learned how I work. I learned in what ways I am an American. I learned a new approach to life.

A walkthrough of her influence structure revealed the factors leading to this perception. The analysis begins with the three separate factors that travel along separate paths. The first path proceeds from factor emotional resilience (A.1), which significantly
contributes to *optimism* (A.6). This path leads to *curiosity* (C.13) and ends at factor *tolerance for ambiguity* (F.30). Paths two and three begin at *previous experience traveling abroad* (B.9) and *motivation to participate in host culture* (C.14) and each significantly contributed to the two-factor cycle containing *comfort in social situations* (E.26) and *openness* (F.29). In describing the relationship between *motivation to participate in host culture* (C.14) and *tolerance for ambiguity* (F.30), Ginny noted,

> I was so motivated to go, I think it made me willing to put up with a lot. I could deal with something that I found difficult. Like being on my own. I had traveled with my parents, but this was so different. I knew that I had to do whatever I could to get through it, because I knew it was only for a short time.

This cycle breaks off into three separate paths, which significantly contribute to *optimism* (A.6), *availability of social support* (G.43), and *receptiveness of members of the host culture to outsiders* (G.47). To explain why she thought *comfort in social situations* (E.26) contributed to *receptiveness of members of the host culture to outsiders* (G.47), Ginny offered,

> I was really lucky to have someone introduce me to the some locals. I was really lucky to be able to hang out with locals. I was introduced to them, so they accepted me. I wasn’t just some annoying American tourist.

By continuing on in the walkthrough, the influence structure reveals that *receptiveness of members of the host culture to outsiders* (G.47) significantly contributed to the cycle containing *ability to recognize nonverbal differences* (D.18) and *behavioral flexibility* (F.28). When asked to explain why she thought *receptiveness of members of the host culture to outsiders* (G.47) ...
host culture to outsiders (G.47) significantly contributed to behavioral flexibility (F.28), Ginny noted,

They were going through the same things I was. Having friends there is the biggest stress relief. They were going through some of the same things I was and so we could talk and help each other out that way. I’m someone who needs to vent or cathartic release. With someone who understands. I put my emotions and feelings out there so people understand how I feel and when someone understands me. I feel better. That was a big thing for me.

This path ends at tolerance for ambiguity (F.30). Ginny explained that comfort in social situations (E.26) contributed to tolerance for ambiguity (F.30) because, “When you are hanging out and it is comfortable, you are more likely to be okay with the differences. Things don’t seem as strange as they would if you were just encountered it with strangers.”

From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Ginny views three factors across categories A, Self-concept, B, Growing Competencies, and C, Risk Taking as several of the driving forces in the characterization of her success while studying abroad in Seville, Spain.
Leah

Leah, 21, was a creative writing/poetry major with a French minor who studied abroad in Lille, France for seven months. Her pixie-cut hair, multiple flowing layers of scarves and tendency to break into French during our interview added to her artistic and stylish air. She was the most talkative of the participants and answered in long trains of thought. She stated that she wanted to study abroad “because I wanted to experience foreign culture, see what it is like to be the foreigner, and improve my French.” However, this was not an easy task at first for Leah. “When I first got to France it was just like buzzing static all around me and I just remember feeling very…kind of isolated. Just like a little island…” She took a pause before continuing, “Yeah, static is like the best way to describe it … people having conversations all around you in French and then like, looking at me and I was like, ‘this is what it's like to be a foreigner.’” She explained: “When you're in a totally different culture and you're not accustomed to communicating in that language yet, it's really weird that there's this huge imaginary distance between you and everyone around you...” Returning home and hearing everyone speak English

Figure 13. Leah’s Influence Structure
was not an immediate and easy transition either. Leah noted, “I was overwhelmed when I first got back, because I could understand perfectly every single thing going on around me and I was not used to it.”

Regardless of the challenges she encountered in France, when asked if her sojourn was successful, she got very enthusiastic. “I definitely accomplished all my goals, and I had a fantastic time doing it. I learned a lot about myself and the world. I wouldn't take it back for anything.

One of the things that made Leah’s trip so successful was her development of the French language. In fact, improving her French was a priority and one of the main goals for Leah’s decision to go abroad. As a result of learning the language first hand from other speakers of it, Leah noted,

I think I had more of an appreciation for the culture, living with and speaking only French at home. This made me understand things about the way they lived, that I wouldn’t have understood if I didn’t learn so many of the French idiosyncrasies.

Leah spoke a lot about the close friendships she made with other travelers – specifically, other sojourners – and not just Americans. “When you are both from other places and your discovering this place for the first time – that is something you have in common and everybody speaks English or French so that helps.”

To understand how Leah accomplished a successful sojourn, I will discuss her influence structure. Analysis of Leah’s visual structure begins with the single factor ability to speak the host language (B.10). From this factor, numerous paths emerge and cross each other. This suggests that Leah believes many of her chosen factors significantly contribute to many of the other factors. Although there are many paths, three
major paths will be provided here. First, one path shows that ability to speak the host language (B.10) significantly contributes to effervescence (A.7), which significantly contributes to willingness to take risks (C.12). This factor contributes to receptiveness of members of host culture to outsiders (G.47), which finally contributes to willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25).

Another path also begins at ability to speak the host language (B.10) and goes on to willingness to use host language during interactions (C.15) and significantly contributes to both willingness to take risks (C.12; and follows the above mentioned path) and cultural sensitivity (D.17), which significantly contributes to empathy (D.20). To understand how willingness to use host language during interactions (C.15) contributes to receptiveness of members of host culture to outsiders (G.47), Leah provided,

Even if you are only able to speak a few words, they really appreciated it when I would order my coffee to go into a shop and not start right away in English. But I could tell they responded differently when I spoke French.

Another major path begins at ability to speak the host language (B.10) and goes on to a two-factor cycle of openness (F.29) and tolerance for ambiguity (F.30), which branches off in different directions. One direction goes from the two-factor cycle to cultural sensitivity (D.17) to self-awareness (D.21), which significantly contributes to availability of social support (G.43). Originally, during Leah’s structuring, availability of social support was in a reciprocal relationship with openness (F.29) and tolerance for ambiguity (F.30). Upon reviewing her structure, she said she saw the availability of social support (G.43) more as an outcome or result and asked if it could be changed. Leah’s final influence structure reflects this change.
From this influence structure walkthrough, one can see how Leah views one factor from Category B, Growing Competencies as the driving force in the characterization of her success while studying abroad in Lille, France. Specifically, her focus on ability to speak the host language (B.10) makes sense given her goals and the importance she placed on learning a foreign language. Leah was proud of her language skills. The pride she took in her language skills was evident as she frequently broke into speaking French during her interview. She often included French phrases to add flair or humor to make a point.

**Mary**

![Influence Structure Diagram]

*Figure 14. Mary’s Influence Structure*

Mary spent six-months of her year-long student sojourn in Paris, France. For Mary, the relationships she made defined her success.

I think the most successful thing… the thing that makes it the best is making friends. All of my classes were 100% in French. The lectures were in French, the readings, the tests are in French. It was the international program; I was the only
American in some of my classes. The majority of my classmates were Chinese. Outside of class, when we were hanging out, because there were so many different people learning French, everybody already knew English. Our common language was English, because everybody was from a different place. Every other week, we would do "this country day." There was a girl from Afghanistan…There was a girl from Sweden. We would go to a Swedish cafe and learn all about Sweden. We wanted to learn about each other and we wanted to eat our way through places. We wanted to make sure we tried everything. When we did eat, it was a lot of carbs. I wanted to experience it. If it involved eating, I wanted to do it. I've met people I never would have met and I am thankful for that. It was the first thing that I said and now it is the last thing that I said, it really was important to me.

During the interview, Mary, was frank and confident in her answers. She spoke enthusiastically about the people with whom she spent her time abroad and prided herself on her ability to make new friends abroad. Equally, she also made a point to state that she went into the study abroad experience as an independent person and during any alone time she became more independent throughout the sojourn. For instance, she noted,

I think I was independent when I got there, but it definitely increased because I went there. There are so many things to do and sometimes my friends had to study. I would go to a lot of things by myself. I would travel alone. Next year, I am going to graduate school, complete opposite side of the country. I am not afraid of being alone, not like I was before. I just have, now, I completely trust my abilities to do anything that I need to do.
Whether it was because of the time with friends or the time by herself, Mary had what she considered a successful sojourn. To understand the factors relating to this section, I will next provide a walkthrough of her influence structure.

An analysis of Mary’s visual structure begins with the two-factor cycle of emotional resilience (A.1) and openness (F.29). This path shows that emotional resilience (A.1) and openness (F.29) significantly contribute to a four-factor cycle including independence (A.3), confidence (A.8), ability to speak host language (B.10), and comfort in social situations (E.26). To explain how Mary believed emotional resilience (A.1) contributed to independence (A.3), she offered,

It does, Yes. An example is of my roommate who didn't have a good time. She was always homesick and upset. She would never go anywhere by herself, not even to the grocery store or to a museum. She always needed someone to be with her. I think there is a correlation.

Additionally, when asked if her openness (F.29) contributed to comfort in social situations (E.26), Mary had a hard time answering and therefore, I started to clarify with a follow-up question of “Did you find that you had to be open when you were interacting with...” Immediately, Mary jumped in,

Yeah, I mean most of the people who go there, they have a similar perspective of what they want to get out. Leaving your country, in the first place, you have to be open to something new. I think they definitely go together. You have to be confident and open to go talk to someone you don't know, but you can learn something you would not have otherwise known. Definitely.
The four-factor cycle including independence (A.3), confidence (A.8), ability to speak host language (B.10), and comfort in social situations (E.26) contributes to self-awareness (D.21).

The second path shows that curiosity (C.13) significantly contributes to the four-factor cycle including independence (A.3), confidence (A.8), ability to speak host language (B.10), and comfort in social situations (E.26) and continues along that previous discussed path. To explain how curiosity (C.13) contributed to ability to speak host language (B.10), Mary provided, “I would carry a mini-French Dictionary when I would be reading on the metro; I could translate if I didn’t know a particular word.”

The final two paths both begin at ability to think critically (F.37). Mary suggested that the ability to think critically (F.37) contributed to her comfort in social situations (E.26). She stated,

When you are speaking in a different language, you have to think critically, all the time. Especially in this social situation, you don't want to say something stupid or look bad for other Americans. I would always be worried, I didn't want them to dislike us so you definitely have to think critically.

From ability to think critically (F.37), one path goes on to behavioral flexibility (F.28), which then contributes to the four-factor cycle including independence (A.3), confidence (A.8), ability to speak host language (B.10), and comfort in social situations (E.26) and continues along the path from that cycle. The last path comes from ability to think critically (F.37), which significantly contributes to ability to problem solve (F.38) and ends at self-awareness (D.21). The more things you can figure out on your own and work through, the better you feel about yourself and the more you know about yourself.
There was one factor, the *availability of social support* (G.43), which Mary selected, but this item did not influence other items, nor did other items influence it. However, Mary provided some details regarding the kinds of social support her program offered. Specifically, she stated,

They had office hours during the day if you needed anything. They had computers, they have phones you could use to call home. If people had little cell phones and there was an emergency while you were out, you could call them and they would help you. The only time that I ever needed them was when we needed light bulbs. They changed the light bulbs. Nothing crazy, nothing bad happened. But if anything bad had happened, we couldn't get in something, they would have come and helped us.

From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Mary views four factors from three categories A, *Self-concept*, C, *Risk Taking*, and F *Flexibility* as the driving forces in the characterization of Mary’s success while studying abroad in Paris, France.

**Dakota**

*Figure 15. Dakota’s Influence Structure*
Dakota was a female 20-year old sojourner who had a clear picture of what she wanted in her study abroad program.

Originally, I planned to go to Australia. I figured: beach, English speakers. I figured why not? But I missed the deadline and I didn't want to go for their winter. So I figured what's another place where I understood the language, where it was warm, had a fun city and had a beach?

Although Dakota’s decision to go to spend a semester in Barcelona, Spain may have been made casually and at least partially out of convenience, the experience had a significant impact on her and “changed her priorities” in many ways.

I think I changed because, I stopped really caring unnecessarily about stupid things, petty things. I learned not everything matters. Spain really showed me that there is a lot more out there and it made me a lot more independent. Traveling through airports on my own, when I didn't understand the language. Being able to find my flight, that is really rewarding. I started out with a whole bunch of people and by the end I was not afraid to go out on my own. They didn’t always understand that, but I think that definitely made it more successful. Also, starting to feel like a local and not as much of an American student made it successful. I think me not wanting to leave proved that it was a success. I also realized being abroad and meeting influential people and people who were able to travel and how much easier their travel was…. It made me want to work harder. To get to that level.

Dakota’s visual structure begins with two separate factors that lead down separate paths. The first factor confidence (A.8) leads to a three-factor cycle including
independence (A.3), self-awareness (D.21), and patience (F.39). Dakota explained how confidence (A.8) contributed to independence (A.3), “I think you have to trust yourself before you can even have the courage to think and act for yourself.”

This cycle connects to a two-factor cycle including tolerance for ambiguity (F.30) and positive expectations are met or surpassed (G.46), which leads to openness (F.29). “You go through any experience and you have a good feeling and it gets you excited for the next one.” The contribution of patience (F.39) to tolerance for ambiguity (F.30) is witnessed when Dakota suggests,

I mean anytime you are asking for directions or trying to say something that you don't know the words for, you have to be patient and a lot of times you want to get angry at them for not understanding you. You can't do that and once you become patient with them and patient with yourself, then those situations become easier to tolerate and deal with.

This path ends at comfort in social situations (E.26).

The next path begins at willingness to take risks (C.12) and continues on to emotional resilience (A.1), which leads to the three-factor cycle including independence (A.3), self-awareness (D.21), and patience (F.39). Dakota rationalized that emotional resilience (A.1) contributed to her independence (A.3) because “it takes those negative feelings or negative experiences to become resilient and you go through it and you realize whatever that issue was, you can do it on your own. So that results in the independence.”

From emotional resilience (A.1), another path continues on to familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs (B.11), which then connects to comfort in social situations (E.26). To explain how emotional resilience (A.1) contributed to comfort in social
situations (E.26), Dakota observed, “Your ability to bounce back makes you more comfortable and less likely to throw up walls.”

Another path begins at willingness to take risks (C.12) and continues on to optimism (A.6). From here, two paths diverge. One path goes from optimism (A.6) to the two-factor cycle including tolerance for ambiguity (F.30) and positive expectations are met or surpassed (G.46) and continues along that path. The final path goes from optimism (A.6) to familiarity with host culture artifacts and customs (B.11), which ends at comfort in social situations (E.26).

From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Dakota views all factors as significantly contributing to or ending up at comfort in social situations (E.26). Additionally, two separate factors of confidence (A.8) and willingness to take risks (C.12) are the driving forces in the characterization of Dakota’s success while studying abroad in Barcelona, Spain.

**Jason**

![Figure 16. Jason’s Influence Structure](image)

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Jason was a 23-year old sustainability major who studied in the People’s Republic of China for 12 months. My interview with Jason was slightly different than my other interviews. It ended with a hug, but that was not the part that was different. Many of my interviews for this dissertation ended with the participant asking if he or she could give me a hug – after talking at length about something that is so special to them and is such a source of positive emotion, it seemed almost natural to need an outlet for that joy. I got handshakes and huge smiles and not wanting to leave and several requests for hugs. This interview with Jason was different because, for one thing, it lasted close to three hours, the longest interview by far, and for another, he spent a good percentage of that time discussing religion. Jason didn’t just improve his Mandarin, and make new friends while studying abroad in Communist China, he “gave his life to Christ.” He called his conversion experience his biggest struggle and biggest victory while abroad:

My time abroad was successful, because I met people that I very much care about, came to understand much more about human life, my own life, and became a much wiser person. It was also very hard, because a lot of my friends and family didn’t understand what I was going through or the choices I was making.

When I asked him about any culture shock he experienced while abroad. He politely warned me that if he “described this it is going to go in a very personal and religious direction. Is that ok?” He described how his conversion to Christianity was, in part, due to being immersed in a foreign environment and recognizing his position of privilege as a study abroad student.

It was something I’d been investigating for a while, trying to make sense of the human condition. I’m sustainability major. I’m prone to seeing dysfunction and I
don’t ignore it. I was already very, very aware of some macroscopic problems in society, but being in China, I started to notice the systemic nature of the problems playing out in a different culture. The things that I was reading—everything I could find online from Tolstoy to C.S. Lewis—it accelerated the process even more and I came to a point where I converted to Christianity while I was there. That process was jumpstarted by reflections that happened in response to what I saw there.

There was one really defining moment. A man, a Turkish immigrant from the Northwest of China… Uyghur, actually. They are treated very poorly by the majority of Chinese people, lots of cultural stereotypes and economic disadvantages and in the area I was living in it was common for them to…hustle people, like a con artist. I saw it happen and I had friends who had experienced it. I didn’t fall prey to it, but one day my friends were all talking and saying terrible things about this guy who had ripped them off. And I suddenly understood maybe why he was doing what he was doing. I actually felt very guilty about everything I have and who I am. I have everything compared to this person. Here I am, essentially on vacation to go learn Chinese for a year. What right do I have to pass judgment on this guy? And so seeing more and more of that kind of stuff more and more acutely aware of my advantages. It made me deconstruct myself to the point where a lot of the assumptions I had about myself fell apart, questioning my privilege in contrast to what was around me.

There was one night where I was reading about Tolstoy and the moral imperative and where he talks about basically what people have to do to make the
world stop falling apart. In that moment, I was hit with…It was the conviction of
sin that I felt. I was instantly aware that not only have I failed to live up to this,
but I will never live up to this and it is impossible to live up to this. I felt so
absurd for thinking that I could. I was acutely aware that there was too much. All
too much suffering, too much pain. It was so heavy on me and knew I was
powerless to (he raises his hands as if to lift or carry a heavy thing) and that the
only answer was that God was the one who could lift it. I had to rely on Him for
any hope or change. I confessed my sins and cried out to God. A few days later, I
read a PDF of *Mere Christianity* that I found online and in the state I was in it
really spoke to me.

I knew some people at the YMCA. They are much more committed to
Christ than the YMCA in the states is. Probably because they had to fight to stay,
they were closed down by the government for many years…I started volunteering
there and was able to hear about a church and I started attending.

Like many other participants, Jason was eager to share with future sojourners
some of what he had learned while abroad.

My advice is to think critically about the culture you are in and to meet people,
any people, because you make connections… I wish that I had spent even more
time with people. Because all the things I did for school. I don’t reflect on them. I
reflect on the time I spent with the people. I miss them.

The level of intimacy with which Jason shared the personal matter of his
Christianity surprised me, but it also revealed that Jason’s success was not characterized
by merely meeting the academic goals he set out with, which were “improving his
language skills and learning more about Eastern culture.” Jason considered his trip a success because of something that happened, which he never predicted. Consequentially, examining his influence structure helps illustrate what factors led Jason to believe he had a successful sojourn.

An analysis of Jason’s visual structure begins with the factor previous experience traveling abroad (B.9). Jason had traveled to Taiwan two years earlier for a month-long volunteer program as a camp counselor teaching English. One path shows that previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) significantly contributes to ability to think critically (F.37). From ability to think critically (F.37), the path moves on to empathy (D.20), which significantly contributes to willingness to take risks (C.12). Jason explained his rationale for why he felt previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) contribute to empathy (D.20):

The first time I went to China I came into contact with people who were very ignorant about the world outside of China and I had to reflect about that and understand why it was. The answer was because they hadn't had the same opportunities that I have to learn and experience things about the world and about things outside of China so it forced me into a position of empathy towards them where I couldn't pass judgment. I had to take a step back and understand what was going on.

A second path shows that previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) significantly contributes to ability to problem solve (F.38). This factor follows a path on to ability to form bonds with locals (E.22), which leads to empathy (D.20) and finally ends at willingness to take risks (C.12).
Several additional paths emerge from the single factor availability of social support (G.43). One of these paths goes from availability of social support (G.43) to ability to solve problem (F.38) to ability to form bonds with locals (E.22) to empathy (D.20) to willingness to take risks (C.12). A second path from availability of social support (G.43) goes to openness (F.29), to ability to form bonds with locals (E.22), to empathy (D.20), to “willingness to take risks” (C.12).

A third path goes from availability of social support (G.43) to openness (F.29) to a two-factor cycle of independence (A.3) and self-awareness (D.21) to ability to think critically (F.37) to empathy (D.20) to willingness to take risks (C.12). Another path goes from availability of social support (G.43) to hardiness (A.2), to a two-factor cycle of independence (A.3) and self-awareness (D.21), to ability to think critically (F.37) to empathy (D.20) and to willingness to take risks (C.12). To understand the possible contribution of independence (A.3) to empathy (D.20), Jason said,

If you're independent, you are more likely to be able to have empathy for other people – even when the social norm in your social group is not to have empathy. That was what happened with some of my American friends with regards to the Turkish immigrant I told you about. They were all very mad that he ripped them off, but I could understand what had led him to act that way, after all the persecution that ethnic group endures in China and I'm sure it is hard to get a wide variety of jobs when there is that prejudice, so he has a con. It is not right but I can see it from his point of view, even when they couldn't or didn't want to.

The final path in Jason’s visual structure begins at contemplativeness (F.31) and proceeds to the two-factor cycle of independence (A.3) and self-awareness (D.21).
asked to explain how *self-awareness* (D.21) contributed to *independence* (A.3), Jason replied,

Yes because as you develop the capacity for self-awareness that makes you able to be more independent. You know yourself better and you can live with your choices. Specifically, with the story of my religious conversion, that was a very independent decision. I did that over the objections of almost everybody that I knew. Hardly anyone that I knew was Christian and people didn't… People were kind of shocked and appalled. I think the independence of the choice was partially because I was thinking so much I had a very high level of self-awareness at that time.

In a moment of meta-communication, Jason remarked, “It is actually… really good to think and to talk about this. To make that connection.”

This cycle of factors continues to *ability to think critically* (F.37), which connects to *empathy* (D.20) and significantly contributes to *willingness to take risks* (C.12).

When asked if self-awareness (D.21) contributed to empathy (D.20), Jason stated,

Yes. There's a mutual reinforcement there. What happened when I saw the guy who was hustling the cake is an example… Looking at all my advantages and everything I had made me think, who am I to judge this guy after all he's been through?

From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Jason views three factors from three categories B, *Growing Competencies*, F, *Flexibility*, and G, *Program Fit* as the driving forces in the characterization of his success while studying abroad in Beijing, China.
Dominique

Figure 17. Dominique’s Influence Structure

For Dominique, her years of traveling had already prepared her for a 12-month study abroad sojourn in Florence, Italy. At times, it seemed the line between pride and arrogance was blurred. For instance, when describing her level of preparation, Dominique stated, “I was already prepared years in advance. It was kinda unfair for me. I grew up traveling.” When considering any challenging times that she may have encountered, Dominique seemed to suggest that it was other people’s faults.

I think I had the hardest time with my roommates actually. Living with roommates who had never been abroad before. I was told from the beginning, I would have to watch what I say. My mother frequently tells me that I come across condescending or snobby and things like that. She tells me that sort of thing all the time. It does make me aware that something I may say may offend somebody and that came to a head very quickly. Me just saying something that I thought was completely normal and they don't say anything about it, but all of a sudden, I was called into administration about something I said or did. That set the tone with the girls I lived with for the rest of the semester. It made it difficult to even have the
conversation with them. They would…never…a couple of them had never been
out of their home state before. Went to college in the city. And for…that is very
hard to connect to after being abroad for so long and having an international
family. So there is nothing really to talk about. It created a lot of tension in the
house. I would go do stuff on my own.

For Dominique, even when discussing a potential problem such as tension among
her roommates, she was able to find a positive outcome. In fact, she provided several
items she learned during her sojourn,

You really learned how to travel. The confirmation that I could live and navigate
new cities by myself is really nice… This study abroad trip was all on your own.
Learn how to cook and manage your money. Being abroad and knowing that it
does work and I can do it is very satisfying. It is relieving. Being able to travel on
my own was something good to figure out. And knowing that I can handle myself.

Even with all the experience she had prior to her sojourn to Florence, Dominique still
considered her year-long sojourn to be successful because of how much she learned there.
To more closely examine what led her to such a successful sojourn, a walkthrough of her
influence structure will commence.

Analysis of Dominique’s visual structure begins with the single factor of previous
time traveling abroad (B.9). Her structure follows a single path. Following the
path, one can see that previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) significantly
contributes to the two-factor cycle containing factors self-awareness (D.21) and openness
(F.29). When asked to explain how previous experience traveling abroad (B.9)
contributed to self-awareness (D.21), she said,
Yes. It often leads to self-awareness. Like I explained earlier with the roommate situation. I would say something that I considered to be blasé or normal and it offended people. I had to be aware about what I was saying. Even now, once I have come back, I have to be very careful about how I talk about my experience. It can be seen as bragging or snobbery. I prefer Nutella, I preview Jonua over Nutella. It is like, no one has ever heard of Jonua. If you say that, it makes you sound like an uptight snob kinda thing. Like, oh I have this awesome thing that you have never heard of and you like it more.

Subsequently, when it came to telling others about her previous experiences traveling abroad, the reaction from others affected how Dominique saw herself:

Yeah. I remember two years ago. A friend of mine went paragliding somewhere around here. Somewhere domestic. I have been paragliding, but it was off the Swiss Alps. You sound like you are trying to one up them, when you say that. Oh yeah, I have been paragliding, but we were in Germany at the time. The point was not that I was in Germany; it was that I went paragliding too.

This cycle contributes to another two-factor cycle containing receptiveness (F.34) and frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44). Demonstrating the significance of receptiveness (F.34), Dominique stated,

I think receptiveness led to frequent encounters with cultural differences. I had never considered the idea of going to Eastern Europe before. It hadn't even occurred to me that Eastern Europe existed for me. There is a travel agency called, Euro Adventures for students studying abroad or people in general who want to go on an experience that is, all cost included type thing. I was on their
website and I saw the Eastern Europe and it was 500 Euros. I hadn't made any
decisions as to what I was going to do my fall break. I called up my friend and
said, let's do this, why not? It is cheap and I have never been there before. So, let's
go.

So, doing that was a sort of gateway to these cultures that I had never
considered interacting with before. There is definitely a stigma about Eastern
Europeans and the rest of Europe and the states as well. Going there, they are very
warm and very inviting. It was an experience, not even all of the landmarks that
we went to like Auschwitz. Having the opportunity to go to a completely different
area of Europe and culture that I had never thought to go to before was a great
opportunity. It was cool.

The path follows to a cycle containing six factors including independence (A.3),
ability to manage stress (A.5), cultural sensitivity (D.17), ability to adapt one’s own
communication style (D.19), willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25) and
behavioral flexibility (F.28). To explain how openness (F.29) could contribute to
behavioral flexibility (F.28), Dominique noted,

If you are not willing to make the effort, you are not going to change anything by
yourself, at all. That was unfortunate because I do remember my roommates in
both semesters would actively seek out English-speaking locations rather than
going elsewhere. They would eat in the touristy area of the city and of course that
is always the shit food….sorry…
When I asked Dominique if her *willingness to initiate contact with the host culture* (E.25) contributed to her ability to *adapt your communication style* (D.19), she provided,

Yes. That makes so much sense. You can't learn the social cues or traditions from being on the outside. You need to make contact at the very least or be integrated into the society to some degree to be able to adapt your ability to communicate.

The reciprocal relationship between these two factors was further articulated when I asked Dominique, “Did your *ability to adapt your communication style* (D.19) contribute to your *willingness to initiate contact with the host culture* (E.25)?” She explained,

Yes. I think a lot of people get blocked by not being able to speak the language. I don't think Italians are a huge culture shock; it is not a huge culture shock going to Italy. Not like it would be if it were India. There shouldn't be as much of a block as there is, but still people do go over and it is just like, you could take six years of Italian, but suddenly not be able to say a word as soon as you are with a native speaker. Being able to get over that block and be like, ‘Ciao’ is very important when you are willing to…when you want to make that initial contact. If you say even the worst accent Italian to somebody who speaks Italian, they will be like, ‘you are trying at least, so I will help you. You are making an effort, so I will make an effort.’ It has to be reciprocal.

The contribution of *cultural sensitivity* (D.17) to the *ability to manage stress* (A.5) is seen her when Dominique noted,

Being aware of the culture definitely gave me less reason to be concerned. So, knowing that I had no idea and being okay with that, did not stress me overly. Of
course there are some situations where you are having a conversation with somebody and something happens and you think, ‘Oh my God, I don't know what to do.’ Usually I was able to cobble something together and say, ‘I am an American!’ To try and fix whatever happened.

This cycle of factors follows on to a single factor *willingness to take risks* (C.12). From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Dominique views a single factor *previous experience traveling abroad* (B.9) from Category B, *Growing Competencies* as the driving force in the characterization of her success while studying abroad in Florence, Italy. In her interview, Dominique kept coming back to just how important her previous trips abroad were in her life. She said,

> It makes sense, because I feel like the previous travel experience is the biggest advantage anyone can have. Having traveled since I was young, there was no opportunity for blocks to form. I have no loyalty or attachment to the States really, just from having these experiences outside of the U.S. and taking in new cultures and incorporating them into my behavior. People sometimes ask me, how do you think your perspective would be if you had never gone abroad before? I can't even fathom the idea of not going abroad. Just cause, it happened when I was so young and during those formative years when you just start to generate those ideas about how the world should behave. It's a marker I think of how your life is going to progress. I have no desire to get married anytime soon. I don't want to stay in any one place for any extended period of time. The idea of living here after college is repulsive to me. Not like, I am so disgusted with this idea, but I do not have any desire to invest here for longer than I have to. I would gladly go
back to Europe very quickly. I am also considering ideas of teaching English in South Korea or Thailand. As long as I can continue to travel, I don't really care what I do and I don't know if I mentioned this earlier. For study abroad, it didn't matter where I ended up as long as I was somewhere. It boggles my mind knowing that some people just don't want to leave their own hometown. There is so much better stuff out there.

Natalie

Figure 18. Natalie’s Influence Structure

Natalie’s interview was energetic and thought provoking, like Natalie herself. She expressed a strong drive to fully immerse herself in a foreign culture. When Natalie went to Rome, Italy for six months, she had a specific goal in mind: “I wanted to be like an expatriate. I wanted to ignore that I was an American and try to totally survive and just speak Italian. Get out of my comfort zone and try new things.” To help her accomplish this, she stated that she had to prepare, that she had to adjust her mindset going into the sojourn,
Just not expecting things to be exactly as you are used to and not trying to force your American expectations that you are comfortable with onto a different culture. Yes, you are going to get frustrated. Things are different. Just taking a step back and observing for a while and then figuring out how to enter after that. Then, roll with the punches. You will go crazy if you try and control the culture. Just trying to see it as neutral as possible. Trying to be a non-American as possible. Avoid tramping all over their sites. I just wanted to keep a low profile and be respectful of their culture. Just figuring out the typical Italian way of doing this, this, and this. As opposed to what I would do. Just to be as respectful as possible.

Natalie desired to separate her “American self” from her “sojourner self” while abroad in Rome. She characterized her sojourn as a success, because she felt she was able to take on the “ex-pat” persona she specified above. To accomplish this, several success factors were at play during her sojourn. To comprehend the relationship between the various success factors she chose, a walkthrough of her influence structure follows.

An analysis of Natalie’s visual structure begins with two factors *optimism* (A.6) and *self-awareness* (D.21). When speaking on the significance of optimism during her sojourn, Natalie suggested,

I think believing the best of each place I would go to and being extremely open-minded and trying not to have any judgment or preconceptions helped me embrace each country with open arms. Expecting the best, even if it didn't happen, made me more motivated to explore and try new things. I tried not, not be naive about things, but try to look for the best in each place I traveled to and each
aspect of Italian culture just to not limit my experience by having these walls of what I would and would not allow myself to embrace or experience. I think, having a level of realism, just being, you know what, this is going to be an adventure and take it as it comes instead of limiting what…I feel like I just threw caution to the wind the whole time. If I fail, I fail. I think having that time limit makes you very almost more ambitious than you would normally. You can keep thinking I only gave this time to make this happen. You become a different version of yourself abroad because nobody knows you. You have no one keeping you in a certain context. You are allowed to explore these different parts of yourself.

Optimism played an important role in Natalie’s sojourn, as exemplified by the quote above. Natalie also believed that optimism (A.6) related to other success factors during her sojourn. When explaining how optimism (A.6) contributed to her independence (A.3), she noted,

Yes. I think just having that mindset made it a lot easier for me to not rely so much on situational things to pave my own path and have that attitude and not have it contingent on people around me or situations. It makes it a lot easier. If you have a negative attitude, the last thing you want to do is try new things.

Optimism (A.6) and self-awareness (D.21) appear on the left most side of the visual structure. Following the influence of optimism (A.6), one can see that it significantly contributes to the three-factor cycle containing factors curiosity (C.13), openness (F.29), and receptiveness (F.34). When asked if openness (F.29) contributed to receptiveness (F.34), Natalie responded, “Definitely. I tried to go in there with no
expectations and soak in everything and learn more than I, listen more than I talk, was my whole philosophy.”

The path from curiosity (C.13), openness (F.29), and receptiveness (F.34) splits into two directions. One path shows that curiosity (C.13), openness (F.29), and receptiveness (F.34) significantly contribute to another four-factor cycle. That cycle includes independence (A.3), willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25), previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) and willingness to take risks (C.12). When asked to provide a rationale for how willingness to initiate contact with the host culture (E.25) contributed to her willingness to take risks (C.12), Natalie asserted,

Yes. I was very, I wanted to make a ton of friends and get to know them on a personal level. I think that desire made it easier for me to start off conversations, botch Italian and attempt to break the ice. But yeah, it contributed. Really cool. Just getting to know someone from a different culture. That is the biggest thing I would recommend to people. It is easy to get caught up hanging out with American students who were traveling. And it is fun to do that. But it is easy to get in this bubble than a different culture and not really try to get to know people.

This path shows that independence (A.3), willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25), previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) and willingness to take risks (C.12) significantly contribute to frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44), which ends this path.

A second path from the previous three-factor cycle of curiosity (C.13), openness (F.29), and receptiveness (F.34) shows that they significantly contribute to cultural sensitivity (D.17), which leads to self-reflection on cultural experience (F.32) and also
ends at frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44). Natalie specified that curiosity (C.13) contributed to cultural sensitivity (D.17) in that,

I think just wanting to know as much as I could about the culture and knowing that having that sensitivity was the best way to get the most authentic experience and the best interaction with locals. I think definitely was a motivator.

Going back to the left-most side of the visual structure, one can see that self-awareness (D.21) significantly contributes to other factors through two paths. When Natalie describes how self-awareness (D.21) contributed to self-reflection on cultural experience (F.32), she presented an idea of being able to look at one’s self in a unique manner,

I think just learning so much about myself, throughout the experience and seeing the parallel between what I am experiencing and learning things, just being in a new situation, you are outside of your comfort zone and new things come to the surface. A lot of dealing with, oh, why do I act that way? I think getting locked out of your life and seeing your life from that outside perspective and being just in a general sense is just kind of cool to learn more about yourself and understand yourself a little more.

The first path moves from self-awareness (D.21) to cultural sensitivity (D.17), which then proceeds to self-reflection on cultural experience (F.32). This path ends at frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44). The second path coming out of self-awareness (D.21) proceeds directly to the four-factor cycle containing independence (A.3), willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25), previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) and willingness to take risks (C.12). This path also ends at
frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44). When I asked Natalie to explain how self-reflection on cultural experience (F.32) contributed to her frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44), Natalie claimed,

Yes, because as things were going well and I was having small successes of going to the grocery store, or ordering at a restaurant, or finding my way around, and as those things were positive, I was gaining confidence and I was like, I can do this and it is fun once you get past the initial shock.

The second path coming out of self-awareness (D.21) proceeds directly to the four-factor cycle containing independence (A.3), willingness to initiate contact with host culture (E.25), previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) and willingness to take risks (C.12). This path also ends at frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44).

From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Natalie views the factors she selected as significantly contributing to frequent encounters with cultural differences (G.44). Two separate factors of optimism (A.6) and self-awareness (D.21) are the driving forces in the characterization of her success while studying abroad in Rome, Italy.

Reed

Figure 19. Reed’s Influence Structure
Reed, a calm and cool 21-year old with a surfer style who spent six months on his student sojourn, attributed his success to his personality and his choices and that “Effervescence and optimism are a part of me and nonjudgmentalism is a choice. Someone with a different attitude would not have made it.” Being effervescent and optimistic were some of the driving forces in the Reed’s characterization of his success while studying abroad in Barcelona, Spain. Even when Reed was pickpocketed during his trip, he claimed that his effervescence and optimism helped him navigate the situation,

I kind of have a natural effervescence so I feel like that led to optimism after the situation where getting pickpocketed you could be really pessimistic about that at that point and want to go home, but because I have a natural vivacity it gave me a positive outlook.

His choice to be nonjudgmental helped him deal with the differences he encountered.

Americans in Barcelona… people think that they are not nice people because no one's really smiling at you but that is just like the culture. After a while you realize ‘wow’ and then you start like getting used to it and stuff. I feel like if you’re closed-minded going into the experience you won't be able to recognize nonverbal differences. Like you will just think that the stuff they do is stupid and that's not the mindset you should have.

Reed was able to set aside judgments and as a result, he was better able to deal with new experiences. Knowing that he might run into different situations than what he was accustomed to might have also helped his adjustment. Speaking on this, Reed commented,
I mentally prepared myself to be in uncomfortable situations, not being able to communicate with people and stuff like that. I guess you probably can't but... I guess it is just a personality-type. I guess I'm like okay with uncomfortable situations but I know people for example one of my friends that actually visited me in Barcelona he was getting so frustrated with the language barrier and stuff.

And it's like ‘You need to calm down, man. This is their country so...’

When Reed’s friend visited him, it revealed that not everyone prepares the same way to visit a new culture or country. Reed took some pride in his awareness and tolerance of the cultural differences.

For Reed it was important to find a balance between being on his own and spending time with other people.

I wanted to know a couple people, when I went abroad. I wasn't good, good friends with them, which I think is a good thing, to not go with your best friends. Because I wanted the whole experience. I wanted to branch out so if I was going with people that I was stuck with, I would be with them a lot and this way I could meet people I could do my own thing. I ended up becoming best friends with all those kids that I hardly knew but at the time that was my thought process. You have to go out and do things. It is supposed to be about exploring and getting outside of yourself and I feel like if you were just with your best friends, it would be too much like you were here (in the U.S). But I didn't want to be all alone and not know anyone. So it was a good mix.

After only a few weeks, I felt like this is my home now. Because I knew my way around. I walked to school, I took the metro everywhere, and once I got
used to the setting, I felt right at home. My parents came later and that was cool for me because it was like that was where I'd been living and I knew everywhere to go and that was pretty cool.

Reed’s shift in what he considered “home” was something similarly expressed by some of the sojourners I interviewed and something I personally experienced when I studied abroad. Also, he remarked that it was exciting to have family come visit. Like other interviewees, there is a pride or ownership over this new city that is felt by the sojourner when one shows visitors around the host city.

Despite Reed’s laid-back and positive attitude and defining his sojourn as a success, he admitted that it wasn’t always easy:

It's just like putting yourself out there like I feel like I grew a lot as a person even though that's probably cliché, but I definitely did experience difficult situations. I mean if you're not exposed to that kind of stuff you're never going to grow.

An analysis of Reed’s visual structure begins with two factors. The first factor is effervescence (A.7). Following a path from this factor, we can see that effervescence (A.7) significantly contributes to optimism (A.6), which leads to comfort in social situations (E.26). This factor leads to openness (F.29) and this path finally ends at positive expectations are met or surpassed (G.46). Next, we will discuss two additional paths that begin with previous experience traveling abroad (B.9). One path begins with previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) and proceeds to nonjudgmentalism (F.36), which stays on to optimism (A.6) and continues along the first path presented above. The second path shows that previous experience traveling abroad (B.9) significantly contributes to ability to recognize nonverbal differences (D.18).
From here, two additional paths emerge. One path shows that ability to recognize nonverbal differences (D.18) contributes to comfort in social situations (E.26) and again, continues the first path described above. The second path shows that ability to recognize nonverbal differences (D.18) significantly contributes to a four-factor cycle including willingness to take risks (C.12), curiosity (C.13), empathy (D.20), and receptiveness (F.34). Reed stated that empathy (D.20) contributed to curiosity (C.13) because, “If you see with the locals and everything like that, obviously you want to understand their culture and everything instead of being closed-minded to your own culture. Putting yourself in their shoes makes you more curious for sure.”

When asked about how certain factors contributed to his success abroad Reed had this to say about willingness to take risks (C.12):

I tried to do a little bit of everything. For instance I went sky diving, I'd never been skydiving. I was like "I'm only here once" I tried to do as much as I could. So I guess that's kind of taking a risk. Traveling and traveling by myself sometimes. Being in unfamiliar places, putting yourself in those situations is kind of like taking a risk.

Reed provided some examples where the ability to recognize nonverbal differences (D.18) was very important as well. He stated,

They are so much quieter there. You just have to realize that is just their culture and it is not to be rude and you shouldn't take offense to it. No one is smiling at you, everybody keeps to themselves. That is good to realize that…to realize that it is a difference between the home and host culture and you can quiet down too or not be so loud that you stand out.
The walkthrough continues with the four-factor cycle including **willingness to take risks** (C.12), **curiosity** (C.13), **empathy** (D.20), and **receptiveness** (F.34) significantly contributing to **openness** (F.29), which finally leads to **positive expectations are met or surpassed** (G.46). Reed stated that it did not take long for him to feel that Barcelona was home. This sentiment reappeared when he answered that **comfort in social situations** (E.26) contributed to **positive expectations are met or surpassed** (G.46). For this, he noted,

> Whenever we went anywhere, even our two-day trip to Brussels. When we were coming back we were always like ‘(sighing) It feels so good to be back!’ We felt like we were home, for sure. We were like, oh thank God. Especially because we had a nice apartment, not really nice, but it is always good to be home wherever it is. We just always felt like… It was a big thing to us: always saying ‘it feels good to be back in Barcelona.’ I remember we went to Greece for like a week, that was the only trip where I was kinda over it [being abroad]. I was so glad to be back in Barcelona. It is amazing how that happens.

From this walkthrough, one can conclude that Reed views all factors as significantly contributing to the explanation of how his **positive expectations are met or surpassed** (G.46). Viewing his structure results, Reed could see how, “as a result of those experiences and because of who I am or how I just approached the whole thing, it was better than I expected and as good as everyone told me it would be.”

**Conclusion**

These participant profiles provided some insights into the lived experiences of participants. Additionally, each profile walkthrough provided rationales and verbatim
responses to the paired comparisons generated during the ISM-structured interviews. This allowed readers to understand the myriad of connections between success factors. In the next section, I will provide the most selected items from each category.

**Most Selected Factors from Each Category**

To address research question one which asked, what factors do participants identify as being keys to the success of their sojourn, I examined the most-selected factors from each category. There were a total of 42 success factors, from which each participant was asked to choose 12 that contributed to her or his success abroad. Each of the 15 participants first choose at least one factor from each of the seven categories: A, Self-Concept; B, Growing Competencies; C, Risk Taking; D, Sensitivity; E, Relational Management; F, Flexibility; and G, Program Fit. Additionally, each participant had the opportunity to select an additional five factors from any of the categories. This provided participants the opportunity to identify which success factors they felt were influential in their experience without the restrictions of category. Table 1 displays the top selected factor(s) from each category (see Table 1).

Of all 42 factors, openness (F.29) was the factor selected by the most participants (i.e., 11 of a possible 15 people). Regardless of the specific cultural context, most participants believe that having the flexibility to “not be closed off” to new acquaintances and experiences contributed to the success of the study abroad sojourn. Their explanations include phrases like “getting to know new people,” “facing fears,” “taking every opportunity,” and “ready for anything in those six months.” Sojourners were encountering new situations every day. The willingness and ability to remain open to
what these encounters offered must have helped them endure these possibly stressful conditions.

In every category, except Category E, *Relationship Management*, there was one factor chosen more than any other. In Category E, *Relationship Management*, there was a tie for most selected between two factors.

**Analysis of Influence Scores for Categories Across All Participants**

Using the information provided by the 15 visual structures and the average of the category total scores, several scores resulted (see Table 2). These scores not only summarize the six influence scores for all seven categories, but they help in comparing the roles that the categories played for all 15 participants.

**Comparing Category Position Scores**

A closer look at the overall position and influence scores allowed me to investigate the relationship between the seven categories. Previously, I discussed how I calculated the position and influence scores for the categories instead of only focusing on the individual factors. This allowed me to determine the relationship of categories to one another on a composite or meta-structure. When examining the position (POS) scores of the seven categories, one can see how the categories compared to one another (see Table 2). The category with the highest position score of 4.13 was Category B, *Growing Competencies* and the lowest with a score of 2.26 was Category E, *Relationship Management*. Subsequently in determining how categories of factors may contribute to one another (potential support), Category B, *Growing Competencies* was the category most likely to contribute to the other categories and Category E, *Relationship Management* was the category least likely to contribute to the other categories.
**Comparing Category Influence Scores**

In determining the genuine and potential support of categories, one can rely on the overall influence (INF) score (Broome et al., 2002). Further, when examining the influence scores of the seven categories, one can see how the categories compared to one another (see Table 2). The category with the highest influence scores of 9.33 was Category B, *Growing Competencies*. The next highest influence scores, which were relatively close to one another, were Category A, *Self-concept* and Category F, *Flexibility*. Afterward, Categories C, *Risk Taking*; D, *Sensitivity*; and G, *Program Fit* had the subsequent highest influence scores. Finally, the category with the lowest influence score of -1.68 was Category E, *Relationship Management*. For genuine and potential support, Category B, *Growing Competencies* was (and potentially would be) more likely to contribute to the other categories and Category E, *Relationship Management* was the category most likely to be influenced by the other categories.

**Composite Structure Walkthrough**

![Diagram showing the order of categories based on category influence scores](image)

*Figure 20.* Structure that summarizes the order of categories based on category influence scores.

My second research question asked what relationships sojourner participants perceive among the factors contributing to the success of sojourner adjustment. In an
effort to address this question, the following qualitative description of each category’s influence relationship, according to the sojourners’ responses and rationales, is offered. By examining the boxes in Figure 20, one can see the influence scores of categories across participants. Just like the individual participant structures, items on the left-most side have a higher influence score and would therefore be thought to contribute to the items on the right side of the structure. In the same way, this meta-structure or composite of categories’ influence scores shows how categories on the left influence or contribute to the categories on the right, according to participants. In some cases, themes emerged from the participants’ rationales demonstrating commonalities in their perspectives on the relationship among the factors from certain categories. Between other categories, the participants’ reasoning was unique to their own experiences. To begin, the following section reveals how the participants perceived factors within Category B, *Growing Competencies* as related to several of the other categories.

**Category B. as a driving influence of sojourner success.** The influence scores in Table 1 show that Category B, *Growing Competencies* had the highest influence score among the categories. This suggests that it would contribute to or have the greatest potential for influencing the development of factors from the other six categories. Previous research (Martin, 1987) suggests the severity of culture shock one experiences may be mitigated if the sojourner has either previously traveled abroad, that is, has been through a similar adjustment process before or has familiarity with aspects of the host culture. Particularly, knowledge of the host language can provide an advantage in adjusting successfully (Allen, Dristas, & Mills, 2006; Martin, Sobre-Denton, & Kristjansdottir, 2011; Padilla, 1980). Because of the extended nature of a semester or
year-long sojourn, this competency may occur over time, while one is abroad. According to the participants’ responses, regardless of whether one knew the language on arrival or learned the language through immersion, it seemed to carry significant influence on one’s overall success. *Ability to speak the host language* (B.10) was the most selected factor from Category B, *Growing Competencies*.

Although some study abroad programs encourage some level of language proficiency, most only require that the student take sufficient language training during their sojourn. Even when students already possess some level of foreign language proficiency, they find they improve during their stay. None of the students that I interviewed were fluent in the host country’s language before they left, but all of them reported an increase in their ability to speak the host language by the end of the sojourn. For instance, when participants stated that they “already spoke a little bit of Spanish” or “remembered some French from high school” they were quick to add, “but it got much better being there” or “but now I’m basically fluent.” Several participants offered examples as evidence; others told stories of their linguistic victories, such as ordering dinner in Italian for visiting parents or understanding political humor in Spanish. A few of the sojourners used a numerical ranking system to indicate their progress. For example, moving from about a 2 to about a 4 on a 1 to 5 scale was a common response. All of the participants with whom I spoke reported taking at least one intensive host language and culture course while they were abroad and many of their other classes were taught in the host country’s language rather than English. Some of the longer programs, to China and to Russia, required you to take up to two years of language courses before you got there.
The participants recognized that during their sojourn, knowledge of the host language and their confidence in that knowledge gave them courage to participate in activities or interactions they may have otherwise avoided. This reflects how participants perceived Category B, Growing Competencies could contribute to Category C, Risk Taking. During his ISM-structured interview, Christian stated that ability to speak the host language (B.10) contributes to willingness to take risks (C.12) because, “the risks become less risky if you can speak the language.” Melinda similarly stated that ability to speak the host language (B.10) could also contribute to the motivation to participate in the host culture (C.14) which, she said, “always takes courage.” She went on in her rationale to explain that “The more comfortable you are speaking the language, the more willing you are to participate and take risks and, like new adventures and festivals and activities.”

The participants had a lot to say about speaking the host country’s language, even if it was regarding a time when they felt disadvantaged for not knowing the language well enough. Several of the participants shared “fish-out-of-water” stories, the kind that are typically associated with foreign travel, such as using the wrong verb for “to take… a piece of fruit” in Spanish and inadvertently cursing as a result, believing you are ordering “the roast duck breast,” but receiving “a plate of duck gizzards,” or using hand and body gestures to make “word pictures” and using “a lot of pointing” to order a sandwich or ask for directions. Many were lighthearted and brief examples of misunderstandings or lacking the proper vocabulary, but several participants described longer incidents where the (in)ability to use the host language have had more significant consequences. Hannah
winced as she recounted getting yelled at by a checkout clerk in Russian for “some reason” that is still a mystery to her.

She was just screaming at me and I was frozen and felt helpless. I was totally at a loss for what she was saying. Did I hand her the wrong amount of money? Did she just dislike Americans? I was speaking Russian pretty well up to that point, but in that moment I couldn’t hear a familiar word from her.

Melinda matter-of-factly reported the cultural rules for dancing at a nightclub in Granada, Spain, but the story turned more personal as she described “losing her vocabulary” and being at a loss for how to manage the situation when she was surrounded by some aggressive male strangers, dancing uncomfortably close.

In Spain, you really can't look around or make eye contact with a lot of guys, because they would come over to you and try dancing with you. Even when you didn't they would come dancing over and then it was kind of hard to get away from them. Because they really wouldn't take the hint, ‘No, I'm really not interested.’ It was hard for me to be as confrontational as I needed to be. How upfront and rude you can be to get somebody out of your face. You're getting frustrated, because they won't leave you alone and you're losing it. I was losing my vocabulary. So you end up just saying ‘No. No!’ You get flustered, because you are worried about getting this guy out of my face and your words have failed you up to now, because he is not getting it. And you're searching for what else you can do. The only thing I could remember and say was ‘No.’ I just kept repeating it. Until my [female] friend was able to pull me away.
Jason watched as a fellow American, his friend, got caught up in a common Chinese street scam where a Uyghur-Turkish vendor sells slices of cake.

You point to how much you want, but then he cuts off and gives you a much larger amount, charging you a lot more for the bigger piece. Then when you say no or run away vendor’s big angry friends chase after you with knives and accuse you of cheating him out of his money. It is meant for tourists who don’t speak the language and it is meant to be very intimidating and it works because you pay for the stupid cake and you leave feeling cheated but lucky that you didn’t get beat up.

The vulnerability expressed by these participants in these stories further speaks to the influential role that knowing (or not knowing) the culture’s language or customs plays on one’s success abroad.

Inability to speak the language often created a (real or perceived) separation for the Americans, according to the sojourners. Not being able to “express your personality” or share your feelings the way you can in your native language occasionally prevented or complicated forming bonds with locals. Jason experienced this when trying to make friends with some of the locals in China. “You’re trying to get to know someone and those kinds of stories are hard to tell if you don’t speak the same language.” Christian felt similarly when seeking social support. “If you can’t speak the language and they can’t speak English, you are on your own.”

Several of Hannah’s rationales speak to this separation as well. She demonstrated how Category B, Growing Competencies could contribute to Category C, Risk Taking
when she said that one’s *ability to speak the host language* (B.10) significantly contributed to her *willingness to take risks* (C.12) in that,

> If you cannot speak the language, then you are stuck with the other American students and you don’t actually learn anything. I saw that happen a lot. The Americans hang out with the Americans, the Russians hang out with the Russians. It is sad. I can hang out with Americans at home.

For Hannah, knowing the language results in a freedom that she experienced. This freedom to be engaged with and able to communicate with the Russians enabled her to not feel stuck with her fellow American students. Hannah also believed that *ability to speak the host language* (B.10) contributed to *behavioral flexibility* (F.28) because,

> Limited language skills limit your behaviors. A limited set of vocabulary means that you can only express things in a certain way, I think that you have a tool kit to really adapt your behavior and especially, your verbal responses to things when you speak the language better and I think that can significantly impact how you’re perceived by the host culture.

Although, the participants saw the lack of language proficiency cause separation or vulnerability; they also, very often during the interviews, showed pride in the improvement of their own language skills and cultural understanding. For example, when asked if the *ability to speak the host culture language* (B.10) significantly contributed to *willingness to initiate contact with the host culture* (E.25), Hannah answered affirmatively and her rationale speaks to how much more one can do with advanced language skills.
There's only so much you can do with the ‘cave man language.’ But, when you know you can speak it, when you know that you can speak it well…If you know that you can talk about religion or politics, it is kind of fun to actually go and have those conversations and you show it off and you just… you feel so good about yourself, because you know you can do it and you watch the people who can't do it and you think, "Yeah, I'm capable of this. I can go and then I can do more than just, like, buy half a kilo of cheese! I can ask… I can ask for something specific that I want… I can say that I would prefer in that bag or can I get like a 4th… like some weird measurement, ya know? When you have those skills, you wanna use them. Because you didn't learn them to just keep them in your head.

**Category B contributes to Category A.** The following section takes a closer look at and provides examples of the participants’ perceptions of the relationship among factors from Category B, *Growing Competencies* and the next category on the meta-structure or category influence structure, Category A, *Self-Concept*. Additionally, the relationship among these driving (i.e., leftmost) categories also seems to reflect some of the adjustment literature, specifically the levels of adjustment (Kim, 1998).

Two of the three levels of adjustment that Kim (1998) discusses can be seen in the participants’ rationales for why knowledge of the host language was a key to their success. These include increased functional fitness in carrying out daily routines and transactions and improved psychological health in dealing with the environment. Additionally, a third theme emerged from the participants’ rationales regarding the host language: Knowledge of the host language and familiarity with the culture seemed, in the minds of the participants, to make members of the host culture more receptive to them.
The first of these themes, Kim’s notion of functional fitness, is seen from the participants’ perspective on how the ability to speak the host language (B.10) contributed to many other success factors in several of the categories. Specifically, in describing how Category B, Growing Competencies, could contribute to Category A, Self-Concept, Hannah stated that ability to speak the host language (B.10) contributed to optimism (A.6),

Especially if you are successfully engaging with the language, you’re happier, cause you’re getting more done, you’re not just getting by with whatever you can, I think you’re opening up more opportunities which makes you more excited about being there and you wanna try to continue to do more things.

For anyone living in a foreign culture, there is a functional reason for learning a new language. This idea of getting things done represents a very practical rationale for knowing or learning the language of the host culture. Hannah, like other sojourners sees that knowing the language is a place to start; putting it into action, into a daily routine will help a sojourner more successfully interact with the host culture. It helps her “get things done,” which “opens up more opportunities” and consequently she is happier and more excited. When sojourners know the language, they can make better use of their relatively short time in a place and become more deeply or authentically involved with the host culture. This also means that it permeates many other areas (e.g., less confusion and frustration, more chances for making more contacts, feeling more positive despite challenges or homesickness).

Kim (1998) describes a psychological well-being that is associated with adapting to the new culture. For participant Christian, in his structuring, he stated that the ability to
speak the host language (B.10) significantly contributed to his ability to manage stress (A.5). Several participants expressed a confidence or a calm they felt that came from knowing they could speak the language. For example, Christian explained:

The ability to speak the host language gives you awareness and when you are aware of things, you can deal with them. It is better to have a known quantity over an unknown. It really expands your resources if you can talk to people and people can help you. I knew that I could get myself out of trouble. I knew that if I got lost, all I would need to do is find someone and I could communicate with them to get me out.

When sojourners lack the ability to use the language, they can feel intimidated by the unknown around them or “unaware” as Christian put it, but more than that, it means the sojourners don’t know what they don’t know.

Finally, the sojourners reported several instances of being treated differently, or in fact better, when they used the language. Dominique beamed as she shared that she was often mistaken for an Italian in Florence when she was speaking the language. When discussing how ability to speak the host language (B.10) contributes to hardiness (A.2) Emma said, “If you cannot speak the host language when you get there, you have to try. Because that matters.” This was a common theme among the participants’ perceptions of langue use. Regardless of proficiency, making an effort to use the host language yielded more positive results. Emma echoed this feeling in her rationale stating that one’s ability to speak the host language (B.10) significantly contributed to emotional resilience (A.1):
"If you can explain to people what you need and what you need help with, you are going to be better off.” She reported quite bluntly, “I really think people were nicer to me when I at least tried to speak the language to them."

**Category A contributes to Category F.** Category A, *Self-Concept* contains those factors, which describe the avowed identity of the sojourner such as personal attributes, character, or intrinsic personality. The construct of self-concept, assessed through Category A, *Self-concept* is informed by Kim’s (2005) personality resources (e.g., positivity, strength of personality) and would include many of the items found under Category A, *Self-Concept*.

Natalie provides an example of how Category A, *Self-concept* contributes to Category F, *Flexibility*, in her rationale for how *optimism* (A.6) contributed to *openness* (F.29).

I tried not, not to be naïve about things, but I try to look for the best in each place I traveled to and each aspect of Italian culture just to not limit my experience by having these walls of what I would and would not allow myself to embrace or experience. I think, having a level of realism, just being, you know what, ‘this is going to be an adventure and take it as it comes’ instead of limiting what…I feel like I just threw caution to the wind the whole time. If I fail, I fail. I think having that time limit makes you very almost more ambitious than you would normally. You can keep thinking, 'I only have this time to make this happen.' You become a different version of yourself abroad because nobody knows you. You have no one keeping you in a certain context. You are allowed to explore these different parts of yourself.
Natalie refers to “walls” that could limit what she experienced in the Italian culture. She used her optimism to “look for the best,” or seek out the positives in each of her experiences. Whether it was the realization that she only had a short amount of time, or that in Italy, “nobody knows you,” she was able to explore different parts of her self-concept. Natalie’s positive outlook reflects the optimism that the literature (Kim, 2001, 2005) shows contributes to successful sojourner adjustment.

**Category F contributes to Category C.** Category F, *Flexibility* contains factors related to Kim’s (2001, 2005) *personality resources* that represent participants’ ability to adapt to their surroundings or willingness to adjust their behavior or perceptions. Specifically, the ability to recognize and adapt to communication styles, and possessing an openness to new experiences and acquaintances indicate this flexibility.

In exploring/examining how Category F, *Flexibility* could lead to Category C, *Risk Taking*, Natalie stated *openness* (F.29) contributed to *curiosity* (C.13).

Not that I have no convictions, but I am very…I think it is healthy just to check those thoughts with contrasting thoughts. I have just always been very open-minded to what people have to say. I know it is not going to change what I believe, just to hear what is going on in their heads. I think, just being open to new experiences and trying not to live in fear and what is comfortable, really helped me to embrace that curiosity instead of being, allowing myself to be timid or just not push myself. I think they go together.

Ward, Leong, and Low (2004) argued that openness leads to a greater ability to successfully enter and manage intercultural interactions in new locations. When Natalie allowed herself to be open to new opportunities, she found that it gave her a heightened
interest in what others had to say. In other words, Natalie may have increased her maximum threshold of uncertainty, which often results in a greater interest for interacting with strangers during her sojourn, as suggested by anxiety and uncertainty management (AUM) theory (Gudykunst, 1995, 2005). She admitted that this did not mean that she would necessarily agree with the opinions of others, but she experienced less fear and reservations when she was at least open to the thoughts of others. This finding also supports the notion of AUM in cross-cultural adaptation (Gudykunst, 1995, 2005). Natalie’s ability to at least limit her fear, as explained in her rationale regarding the relationship between openness and curiosity, may have played a pivotal role in her feelings of success regarding her study abroad trip.

**Category C contributes to Category D.** Category C is labeled *Risk Taking* and speaks to the internal motivation that prompts the sojourner to move outside of his/her comfort zone. This category is based on several factors and involves taking chances (Kim, 2001; Taylor, 1994; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). *Sensitivity* is the label for Category D. This contains factors from the literature relating to one’s recognition of his/her own communication style as well as that of others. This category relates to one’s intercultural identity (Kim, 2001) and one's cultural competence (i.e., one’s ability to regulate one’s own behavior appropriately and effectively) (Spitzberg, 1989; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989) in connection to the behavior of host culture (Ward, 2001). This sensitivity or self-awareness increases the more individuals travel. Martin (1987) found that those individuals who had traveled abroad for three months or longer reported greater perceptions of ability in awareness of self and culture compared to those individuals who had no experience traveling abroad.
An example of how Category C, Risk Taking contributes to Category D, Sensitivity, can be seen when Christian stated that his motivation to participate in the host culture (C.14) contributed to his self-awareness (D.21).

Once you are outside of your comfort zone, you have to think. You think first of all about your environment, because you are not familiar with everything. Which makes you think around you and then also engage in new experiences makes you reconsider yourself or reconsider how you are evaluating your experience. One certainly pushes the other.

Christian demonstrates this reciprocal relationship between motivation to participate in the host culture (C.14) and his self-awareness (D.21) when he offered, “One certainly pushes the other.” Ward et al. (2001), in their description of sociocultural adaptation, propose a moving from low to high self and cultural awareness. Here, Christian’s rationale for the relationship between these two factors may indicate a clear sign that he is following the process of sociocultural adaptation explained by Ward and colleagues. In fact, his drive or motivation to interact with the host culture is actually feeding his desire to check or reconsider himself.

In a related explanation, Natalie stated that her curiosity (C.13) contributed to her cultural sensitivity (D.17),

I think just wanting to know as much as I could about the culture and knowing that having that sensitivity was the best way to get the most authentic experience and the best interaction with locals, I think definitely was a motivator.

Similar to Christian’s example above, Natalie exhibits the same mindset. She also speaks of her drive to know as much as she could about her host culture. Her self-awareness
(D.21) comes from a clear understanding that the more she knows about her host culture, the more likely she was to get what she herself considered “the most authentic experience.”

**Category D contributes to Category G.** Whereas categories A through F each represent some aspect of the sojourners' characteristics, knowledge, and/or abilities. The factors from Category G, *Program Fit* relate to the nature of the sojourn program and host culture or environmental factors (Kim, 2005). Category G, *Program Fit* includes availability of social support (G.43), which assists sojourners with their psychological adjustment during their sojourn (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Social support has been linked to cultural adjustment during the transition period to a new culture or locale (Hechnova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002); this effect is amplified when the social support members are those of the host culture and not one’s own culture. Category G, *Program Fit* also includes the factor positive expectations are met or surpassed (G.46). Sojourn expectations and environmental factors are an important part of the adjustment process (Gudykunst, 1995, 2005; Kim, 2005), and when sojourners' expectations are met or surpassed, they rate their experience as more successful (Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 1995).

According to the meta-structure or comparison of categories’ influence scores, (see Figure 20), Category D, *Sensitivity*, contributes to Category G, *Program Fit*, which contains factors related to the nature of the sojourn program and the host culture conditions. Although participants selected factors from Category G, *Program Fit*, as contributing to their success, often during structuring, participants had difficulty articulating exactly how these factors related to other factors they had chosen. As a result,
there are two visual structures where a factor from Category G, *Program Fit* is not connected to any path on the structure. Therefore, while the influence scores indicate that Category D, *Sensitivity* contributed to Category G, *Program Fit*, there are no significant rationales by the participants explaining why that is. Instead, I will provide an example of how Category D, *Sensitivity* influences the next category in the meta-structure, Category E, *Relationship Management*.

During her structuring, Olivia stated that *self-awareness* (D.21) contributes to the *ability to form bonds with locals* (E.22). “I think self-awareness…you have more confidence and you are aware of your feelings so you can know who you want to talk to. Yeah, I think it does make you more outgoing.” Olivia illustrated that self-awareness can actually lead to more confidence.

**Category G contributes to Category E.** Finally, Category E, *Relationship Management*: This category reflects research including a culture learning perspective (Kim, 2001; Taylor, 1994; Ward et al., 2001), the effects of interacting with members of the host culture throughout the acculturation process (Berry, 1974; 1980) and the effects of interacting with members of the host culture and sojourner adjustment (Church, 1982; Kim, 2005). Category E. *Relationship Management* contains factors that speak to a sojourner’s management of their interactions and relationships with others. Specifically, if and how sojourners voluntarily interact with members of the host culture is included. In examining how factors from Category G, *Program Fit* contributed to Category E, *Relationship Management*, a rationale from Olivia is provided. When asked if *positive expectations are met or surpassed* (G.46) contributed to *comfort in social situations* (E.26) she answered, “Yes, because the more I met people the more I figured out what
was socially acceptable, how interactions worked—knowing what to expect and how to act myself made me more comfortable in social situations in groups.” Olivia’s comments here reflect some of the work done by Taylor (1994) who used educational learning theory to describe intercultural adjustment. Taylor argued that adjustment is a transformative process whereby the stranger develops an adaptive capacity (i.e., functional fitness), altering his/her perspectives to effectively understand and accommodate the demands of the host culture. As Olivia determined what was acceptable in her host culture, she was able to understand what the host culture demanded of her, meet those expectations, and this led to a higher sense of comfort in those situations.

**Additional Findings**

The major findings previously presented in this chapter address the proposed research questions. Through my analysis of the data, several themes emerged, yielding additional findings of interest to this dissertation, which I offer in the following paragraphs. First, I present two examples of additional success factors that emerged from the data (e.g., participants’ rationales and stories) rather than as a result of the literature review. *Ability to manage language fatigue* and *creation of connections with other travelers* seemed to play a significant part in the overall success of many of the sojourners. Next, reactions to the ISM-structured interviews brought unexpected findings: Seeing their visual structure resulted in some euphoric reactions by the participants as well as an increase in self-awareness.

**Ability to Manage Language Fatigue**

Participants’ stories and rationales revealed that they could feel the physical, cognitive, and emotional effects of constantly encountering difference. This physical
manifestation and feeling of their experiences is reminiscent of the embodied
Encountering differences and navigating the culture was both a mental and physical
exercise. It often made the sojourners aware of the limits to their behavioral flexibility.
Hannah reached her threshold for politeness towards the end of her three-week trip
through Azerbaijan at the conclusion of her sojourn in Moscow.

In these cultural experiences you learn a lot about the way you adapt to certain
things. You learn how much strange food you can eat before you’ve just had
*enough* or you learn how many times in Azerbaijan you can listen to a speech on
how bad Armenia is before you just can’t do it anymore. You learn how many
hours you can spend drinking tea before you just have to be done.

For some participants, the routine actions, taken for granted at home, become
stumbling blocks abroad. Confronting these numerous and usually unexpected
differences can result in exhaustion or cultural fatigue for the sojourner. “The time and
energy required for these adjustments leave people fatigued” (Donahue & Parsons, 1982,
p. 359) and cultural fatigue can result. This relates to Bennett & Castiglione’s (2004)
notion of embodied ethnocentrism. That part of culture and culture identity is an
emotional feeling of comfort, which often disappears when one is in foreign cultural
contexts. This emphasizes the emotional aspect of making cultural transitions, and in the
case of some of the participants I interviewed, may contribute to physical and mental
deterioration. Melinda reported, “After a while, I was burned out. I missed being
comfortable.” Leah experienced this her first month in France.
One thing that I noticed was that I was so tired like the first month. So exhausted. And my roommate too. We just slept so much. Everything takes so much energy. Like reading a street sign, trying to figure out how the traffic lights work, trying to figure out how to open doors, everything is just different, maybe not everything, but most things.

For many of the participants, it was often the minute, but constant differences that caused the most irritation and, in some cases, embarrassment. Leah recounted a running joke she and her roommate had about how they “couldn’t get any of the doors in France to open.” She continued:

Even if it's just small differences. Things that you don't think about, like opening a door… Catherine had the hardest time opening doors, in France. I don't know what it was… They're just weird. Sometimes the doorknobs are different. A lot of them have old skeleton keys. Sometimes you would think you turn the knob to the right when really you have to turn left. It is a difference you wouldn't be able to read about and no one's going to prepare you for the fact that doors are different there. The old halls that we took classes in… I just remember their front door was… It had a knob and it looked like you were supposed to pull it or something, but you were really supposed to push it and turn it, I guess, and every time we went to class, Catherine couldn’t get it to work and we looked ridiculous. And there was a line piling up behind her and I'm like, "Catherine just open the door."—like whispering to her in English—and people are giving us weird looks… oh man… stressful.
A frequently mentioned source of cultural fatigue was the intense immersion into the host language. Their classes, interactions with local businesses and, in some cases, their home life were all conducted in a foreign language. Many of the participants who did “home-stays” were asked to only speak the host language in the house. For Leah, it was mainly enforced around the dinner table. “I think it does help you learn the language…This made me understand things about the way they lived.” For Melinda’s home-stay, it was a hard and fast rule for the entire house. “My roommate and I would have to sneak and whisper in English, even up in our room.” Mary spent six months in France on her own, but then did a home-stay for six months in Spain. “We [Mary and her roommate] couldn’t speak English because no one would have been able to understand us.” Similarly, Emma avoided speaking English at home out of respect for Madre because she “had strong feelings about it” and “it was her house.”

Participants complained of getting worn down from all the code switching and having to stay vigilant in order to function in a foreign culture. Leah explained, "There is no autopilot when you study abroad. You have to figure it all out. Everything requires active thought. Usually, it is interesting and keeps your attention, but sometimes it is totally confusing.” That confusion keeps participants actively focused in a way that they need not do in their native tongue. Mary admitted, “It is tiring because you can speak the language, but it is still a second language. I have to think about it.” Leah had similar experiences: “I can understand when people speak French to me, but it's a second language and it's like I have to focus. Sometimes they'll use the conjugation that I'm not super familiar with and I'll have to think twice.”
When every word choice takes extra thought, it can be exhausting and it can further limit what you have the ability to communicate. Participants worried about misusing words and offending or losing face. As Mary put it: “When you are speaking in a different language, you have to think critically, all the time...You don't want to say something stupid or look bad for other Americans. I would always be worried.”

The participants managed this language fatigue in different ways, but mostly they sought refuge away from the host language or in finding opportunities to use their primary language. Emma explained:

In Europe, people who do speak English speak with a British accent. It's weird how much I missed hearing the American English sound. I got off a train in October and there was a big group of Americans from California. I heard them and I was like, without even knowing them, ‘wow, friends!’

Hannah used self-reflection outlets such as journaling and blogging. She pointed out that, “Sometimes I needed distance. Sometimes I had to just either interact only with Americans or just not go anywhere for a couple of days to figure out why I was reacting the way I was.”

In those times where the language fatigue was particularly severe, participants often sought out members of their culture with whom to use their primary language and according to Chris, “stop thinking for a while.” Participants who found ways of managing that particular stress credited some of their early success to it. Melinda had a reliable way of finding relief from her feelings of language fatigue:

Usually, when I needed a break, I would have to find a fellow American. Me and an American friend or usually my roommate, we went out and just had bouts of
conversation in English. We were just like, ‘Yes! It's so good! We know what we're saying, we know where we’re going, we get all of the references!’

Emma used a similar strategy of assembling with her English-speaking friends to manage her physical symptoms of culture shock and language fatigue:

Not speaking a word of the language the first two weeks, I had a massive headache. I couldn't understand a word anyone was telling me. After those first two weeks, I started understanding. It just started to make sense. That being said, we did still have ‘English time’ at the beach at 5 PM. We could speak English for an hour. That helped with the headaches.

Olivia was able to rely on her social support as well but, they were her international friends.

If I was wasn't feeling confident or having a bad day or when I got a bad test grade, it made me feel like, ‘I don't want to speak this language, because I already think I'm bad at it right now.’ Usually when I was that tired of speaking it, I would just get so flustered that I ended up making complete nonsense. They were like, ‘It's Ok. We can talk English for a little bit’ and I could give my brain a rest.

International friends and fellow sojourners were often described by the participants as sources of interest, relief, education, humor, and as people with whom deep bonds were forged.

**Creation of Connections with Other Travelers**

The participants’ rationales and stories revealed that although much of their adjustment success was due to skills they gained and discoveries made on their own. They also revealed that having the social support of friends and “travel buddies” was
important to sojourner success. This was first suggested by Mary who sojourned for 12 months in both Paris, France and Barcelona, Spain. Mary noted, “I think the most successful thing, like, the thing that makes it the best is making friends. If you can't make friends, then, well… I had a roommate who was miserable the whole time because she couldn't make friends.” Similarly, Natalie, who spent a six-month sojourn in Rome, Italy, confirmed,

I am best friends with these people now because when I hang out with them, or think about them, I don't just think this is Ellisa or Dan." I think, "This is people I went to Amsterdam with" or "the people I learned Italian with." I did everything with them. It is so much more. You are in this new place with them. They are intense relationships.

While also commenting about the individuals with whom she interacted during her six-month sojourn, Ginny provided some details about how she relied on her social network,

They were going through the same things I was. Having friends there is the biggest stress relief. They were going through some of the same things I was and so we could talk and help each other out that way. I’m someone who needs to vent or cathartic release with someone who understands. When someone understands me. I feel better. That was a big thing for me.

Interestingly, the participants reported more often that they formed bonds with fellow travelers (e.g., international students) rather than locals, even when they were living with the locals (e.g., homestay). Sobre-Denton’s (2011) research argues that the social support of “third culture” networks are really important during cultural transitions.
The social support network is not made up of just the host culture contacts nor just the home culture friends, but a third group containing a mixture of people from other countries and friends you meet along the way. It is this “third culture” network that can be really facilitative in sojourner adaptation. These bonds seemed to be formed over what they found they had in common with someone who was experiencing a foreign culture and only there for a short time. These characteristics seemed to supersede the differences such as country of origin and even native language. In describing her favorite part of the sojourn, Mary recalled, “I made two or three really good friends and they were each so different. One was from Sweden, another is from Tennessee. I never would have met them and I am thankful I did. It really was important to me.”

Leah explained how it was almost inevitable that travelers would bond. “No matter where you go and where you are from, you find someone and have a connection. You just very quickly find those connections with other travelers: Other European kids and Americans.” When I asked why she thought that was, she answered: “You are only there for a short time. You only assimilate to an extent and have less in common with the locals than you do with the folks who are passing through.”

Melinda described how there was comfort in sharing these new experiences with someone who was just as “out of place as you” and how fast these intercultural friendships could start: “You can tell a lot from body language so I was able to pick them out from other people. ‘Oh that person is really uncomfortable, must be another foreigner like me’…go over and make friends with them (laughs).” Ginny also recognized how many opportunities there were for forming these bonds while abroad. She studied in Seville, Spain, but found she had some trouble communicating only in Spanish with
locals. She found more in common with other international travelers. “Because of the language barrier you can’t always show your personality. That was hard. But with the other travelers, couch surfing, they all have the goal of meeting others. You bond through sharing cool travel stories.”

Natalie too, felt it was easy and enjoyable to talk to other travelers, though, for her, and other participants, it was also particularly rewarding that many of the other student travelers were from all over the world. “It was really cool just getting to know someone from a different culture and to share things about your culture.” This interest in bonding over cultural differences can be seen in Mary’s group of international friends that would take certain days to celebrate and learn about each other’s cultural backgrounds and customs, as noted above. “We would have Swedish day or Afghanistan day…” It can also be seen in Hannah’s wish that she had brought pictures of where she lived in the U.S and gifts from her home state to share with her friends from Azerbaijan.

According to the participants, making international friends is a key to sojourner success. After all, study abroad is not just about learning one new culture; it is, in part, about being exposed to a wider variety of customs, perspectives, and people. Natalie stressed the importance of breaking away from your comfort zone when it comes to who you spend time with.

That is the biggest thing I would recommend to people. It is easy to get caught up hanging out with the American students you came with. And it is fun to do that. But it is easy to get stuck in this bubble rather than a different culture and not really try to get to know people.
Participants’ Responses to the Methodology

An unintended consequence of these interviews was the participant-reported increase in self-awareness from reflection on their success. Additionally, expressions of positivity and gratitude were shared in overwhelming measure from the participants as a result of the face-to-face, ISM-structured interviews. In the following paragraphs, I present several of the participants’ reactions to both the in-depth interviews and their response-generated visual influence structures. This is useful as a testament to the additional benefits of this methodology and adds another layer of insight to understanding the sojourners’ experience.

Two common problems among returned sojourners are 1) a shortage of appropriate interpersonal communication outlets for sharing their experiences and 2) an inability to easily incorporate their new intercultural identity into their “old” lives. This seems to be due, in part, to participants “lacking the words” and “opportunity” to properly process their experiences and growth from the sojourn. Their experience as sojourners can be so grand and complex that they, as Christian pointed out, struggle putting it into “satisfactory words” in brief or casual conversation. Participants reported feeling like they would “lose” it. Leah suggested, for example, that she would have to “pack it away” as part of her past rather than “wear” it as part of her current identity. This contradiction between what they feel (i.e., interculturalness) and how they are perceived (i.e., the same as before they sojourned) based on their inability to express their new identity, is what seems to amplify and prolong reverse culture shock.

The ISM structured-interview offered sojourners the chance to share their stories and process their experiences in a systematic and still personally adaptable way. The
participants were able to focus and recall specific memories and feelings by restricting the scope of each question to a pair factors. The visual representation of their sense-making was a powerful tool to help them take ownership of their success and “gave them the words” to talk about what made it happen.

**Emotional transformation.** Throughout the interviews, participants reported experiencing symptoms of reverse culture shock (e.g., longing to return abroad and feeling out of place in their home culture). Mary was just one of many participants to use the exact phrase, “I just miss it all the time.” Natalie lamented, “no one understands.” She felt isolated as a result of how the sojourn changed her. Dakota, too, felt she was cut off from some people since her return. “I have to be careful about what I say to people who didn’t go. It is hard coming back. You have less to talk about with them. They get annoyed.” Jason, seeking connection as well, said “there needs to be a group or venue or a way for people who have that experience to talk about it and relive it.” Others wished for a change to their current situation as a way to feel better, such as longing for graduation or planning another trip. For example, Olivia admitted, “I get really nostalgic, I check flights all the time. It isn’t helping.”

Over time, opportunities for in-depth, interpersonal conversation about their sojourn experiences diminish. People with whom they traveled often live far away and the community immediately around them may not be able to relate to or be willing to engage in the discussion. They often get tired of hearing about what took place without them and negative feelings may result. Feeling “quieted” about their experiences was expressed again and again by the participants. For example, Emma voiced that feeling...
when she said, “Thank you for talking to me. I love talking about this stuff. No one listens anymore.” She went on to explain,

Most of my friends don't want to hear about it anymore. I try to be sensitive. If they asked about it, I would talk about it. Some of them…I got that vibe…I’ve had to deliberately keep my mouth shut. I don't want to be mean. They are still my friends, but this was a big part of my life. It is hard not to be able to talk about it.

She was not alone in that struggle. Leo expressed that he was “homesick” for Italy, but did not expect any sympathy from the people around him. “I had to stop talking about how I want to go back. It sounded like I missed Europe more than I missed my friends and family.” He felt that although this was “probably true,” it seemed inconsiderate or would be hurtful to them. Christian similarly explained, “You are essentially saying you want to leave them…again.” Ginny felt that she had outgrown her “old” life, “My world got bigger.”

There was a stark contrast to the sadness many had reported feeling earlier in the interview due to “feelings of reverse culture shock.” By the end of the interview, many of the participants were visibly elated. They were laughing and smiling and some were bouncing in their seats as they animatedly retold stories. There was a positive energy in the space that was felt by most participants and me. Some did not want to leave when the interview was over or they just wanted to tell “one more story.” Several asked for hugs or offered handshakes and all of them enthusiastically assured me they would be willing to meet again, “for more help with your project.” I believe joy this was, in part, due to a love of the subject matter and similar experiences shared by the participants and me. For
example, I can relate to Ginny’s sentiment that, “traveling is the most powerful thing in the world. If I had a million dollars, I would spend it all traveling. I don't need a car or a house.” I could also relate when Christian said,

When I came back, I wanted to tell everyone everything. That is one reason I wanted to do this [interview] is to share my experiences so that way other students can learn from my experience and give them a better head start.

It was evident that many of the participants were happy to have the opportunity to talk at length about their travels, but they also enjoyed taking on the role of expert or informant to talk about sojourners and the practice of study abroad in general. Leah noted, “It is so exciting to talk about. I love it. I could talk about this for six hours…” and Natalie shared, “I was so thrilled to be able to talk about this. I could talk about this forever, all the time. Do you want to get coffee sometime?”

Reactions to seeing their visual structures. The magnitude of positive and grateful reactions by the participants was an unexpected and fulfilling aspect of conducting this research. The surprise and enthusiasm they displayed in the “reveal” of their completed visual structure at the end of their interview was particularly satisfying. Upon completion of structuring the last two factors, the ISM software responds with a message that “structuring is complete” and the visual structure is ready to be viewed. I explain that the software has produced a map or visual representation of their perceptions of the influence of their success factors, according to the answers they gave during the semi-structured interviews. Several themes emerged from the responses to the interviews, the structuring, and the resulting influence maps.
Their responses ranged from delight to awe, but every participant volunteered that, to some degree, the visual structure resonated with them and accurately captured their sojourn experience. For example, Chris shouted, “The structure is absolutely true!” It impressed Emma, “That is a neat little program! It really makes sense.” Natalie remarked, “I think that is really interesting. I think it is very accurate. It is cool to see how your personality contributes to your experience” and Leo said, “I can definitely see how all of these lead to the those five.” Christian offered, “I like the program and the algorithm. I think the map looks cool.” Some were even more specific about what they liked about it and how it related to them. Mary explained, “Definitely. This is very accurate. I think it looks really good. I like that self-awareness is the last box.” Reed’s reaction was similar,

I think it's pretty accurate. I definitely think 'optimism' and 'ability to recognize nonverbal differences' are the two biggest…Yeah, I think this is very accurate.

'Positive expectations were met or surpassed' were the result of all of those things. That's really cool it really sort of seems to make sense.

**Excitement about having a product to show others.** Some individuals got very excited at the thought that the interview resulted in a product that could tangibly be held onto and, moreover, could be shown to others. For instance, once she saw her influence structure, Olivia was quick to ask, “Can I keep a copy of this? It is a good thing to talk about in interviews. They always ask me what I have learned.” And Natalie could hardly contain her enthusiasm, “Can I get a copy of this? I would love a copy. Everyone is going to flip out over this.” She wanted to show her family and friends. Mary commented after seeing her visual structure that it made her sojourn look “like a sound investment.” These
participants appeared to see the influence structure as proof of what they had accomplished or gained during their time abroad.

**Increased self-awareness due to self-reflection.** An unexpected consequence of these interviews was the participant-reported increase in self-awareness from reflection on their success using the ISM software. Rather than just asking participants to answer some questions and leave, I thought sharing the visual structure with them would give them closure. It led them instead to some fresh insights about themselves and their sojourn.

Melinda’s final thoughts about the interview and the visual structure are good examples of the satisfaction and revelations expressed by most of the participants. “It was great doing this. I love talking about my experiences over there. The structure looks exactly right. Just being open-minded and optimistic resulted in me being able to do all this stuff and self-discovery; self-awareness was one of my main goals for traveling abroad and that says that that was what resulted.”

Natalie studied her visual structure and I got a chance to hear how she was processing its fit into her lived experiences.

I think all of these were developed, curiosity, openness, receptiveness and self-awareness, or just this whole box are the entire time leading up to the trip, the daydreaming. Maybe a little bit of the optimism and a little bit of the self-awareness from previous travel. I think that self-awareness was probably one of the biggest things that grew. Just learning so much about myself and learning why I do things, I think personal development was one of the main things I experienced and maybe this box of all the things I actually did, gaining
independence, taking risks, learning more about the culture, just reiterated my passion for traveling and paved the way for, ‘okay, I just lived here for three months, I could totally live abroad for a more extended time.’ Putting more substance into my daydreams of living and working abroad (she looked up suddenly)…I think it totally helped paved the way for my future plans.

Mary said she felt more ready to head off to graduate school across the country next year. “I’m looking at this and I just have… I completely trust my abilities to do anything that I need to do.” The structure’s order resonated with Dominique, “It makes sense, because I feel like the previous travel experience is the biggest advantage anyone can have…(she points at structure) and it was my biggest advantage.”

Olivia expressed some realizations as she contemplated her visual structure and in particular her rightmost factor, optimism (A.6):

No, I think that everything is where it should be. I like that this is the outcome. If it were maybe back here, I don't think it would have worked. Honestly, it is weird, I feel like I am more of a positive person when I came back. I literally have less negative feelings towards things. I don't know how it happened, but I do. I feel more positive and have a better outlook on life than before I went. Actually, I am just starting to apply for jobs now and I am looking at a company called CEA. Do you know them? It is like ISA, a study abroad company based in Tempe. Cultural Experience Abroad. If I never studied abroad, I would never have considered this company. I want to motivate people to travel and talk to students. I am excited; I hope that I get it.
Sojourner advice for study abroad offices and future sojourners. Feeling inspired with a sense of empowerment from their new insights, participants continued to generate ideas. They had suggestions and projects to help other returned sojourners such as support groups, training courses, and peer mentor programs.

Participants expressed a desire to have the Study Abroad Office offer something like the ISM-guided interview “earlier, right after they returned home.” Specifically Christian said, “I would recommend as students come back, maybe within the first month or two months, get them to do this interview when its fresh.” Hannah agreed and explained, “You have all of this new knowledge and new awareness. Some people start to feel quieted about it. Some start to lose it.” In order to not “lose” it, Natalie suggested, “You need like support groups, which can give you a chance to stay in touch, or reunions…”

Some suggested that this type of “debriefing” could help returned sojourners better analyze and “interpret” what they went through and be better prepared when asked about their experience. Often when sojourners are asked “so how was your trip?” they are not sure how to respond, because they think the other party only wants bullet points or highlights and because they may not have the words to adequately, but briefly articulate the magnitude of the experience. So their answer often gets reduced to a simple, but inadequate one such as, “great!” They could instead, as Natalie suggests, talk about, the skills that you gained. If you put any of these on a job resume, you could say, I can put all of these into practice. Do you have any idea how marketable this is? We are not really teaching study abroad students to market those skills they developed or how to express them in a job interview.
Emma, Olivia, Leo, Leah, and Reed also believed this interview and the structures would help them in the future to “articulate” what they gained and why it was so “great.”

As Natalie continued, it became apparent that she thought her study abroad coordinators could have conducted a similar task to the ISM guided interview used in this dissertation. She insisted,

I wish they had done something like this, maybe not to the same level of depth, but something like this when we had gotten back. This would have been nice to do. I know they do some things like that, but there is a lot to process from these experiences. I am so fascinated that I could never have put this together, but through questions, you can be look, ok, this makes sense. It would be a nice ribbon on top, to be like, ‘that is what I accomplished in this experience.’ I wish everyone could do this.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings from my ISM-structured interviews with student sojourners and specifically addressed my two research questions. I introduced each sojourner through a participant profile and presented an extensive summary of his/her influence structure. Then, the most selected factors from each category and the scores across categories were provided. The composite-structure comparing the influence scores across categories was analyzed and presented two emergent success factors and the sojourners’ reactions to the visual structures and interviews.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides further analysis of this dissertation’s goals, its findings, and
the implications of those findings. I begin with a brief restatement of my research goals,
the methodology used, and I summarize the major findings from this study. Next, the
strengths and limitations of this dissertation are presented. Finally, I provide some
suggestions for future research and implications for various constituencies are discussed.

Restatement of Goals and Methodology

This dissertation sought to examine sojourner adjustment success by utilizing a
fresh approach for collecting and analyzing perceptions of the sojourner participants.
Previous research studies in this area have relied mainly on quantitative survey designs,
traditional methodologies, and researcher-generated models. This dissertation relied on
in-depth, participant-driven, semi-structured qualitative interviews using a software-
assisted method for data collection and analysis called Interpretive Structural Modeling
(ISM). ISM had previously not been employed in this area of research. By committing to
a participant-centered research design, which specifically gave voice to the sojourners’
sense-making and understanding of their successful adjustment abroad, I attempted to go
beyond what had been done in the past and add both academic and practical information
to the area of sojourner adjustment. I gave returned study abroad students the chance to
systematically reflect on their sojourn experience and identify factors from an informed
list that were personally relevant to their success. Additionally, I asked participants to
provide their perspectives on the relationships among those factors reported in the
literature, commonly believed to influence successful adjustment. This allowed me to
connect the participants’ reflections on their lived experience with the existing literature on sojourner adjustment.

**Major Findings from This Dissertation**

This dissertation sought to answer two research questions. First, what factors do participants identify as being keys to the success of their sojourn? For the first research question, there are several findings that are helpful in addressing this question. First, the most chosen items from each of the categories were: **optimism: possessing a positive outlook** (A.6), **ability to speak the host language** (B.10), **willingness to take risk** (C.12), **self-awareness: knowledge of one’s own character, motives, and feelings** (D.21), **willingness to initiate contact with host culture** (E.25) and **comfort in social situations: feeling relaxed in a group of people** (E.26), **openness** (F.29), and **availability of social support** (G.43). Across all seven categories, I found that **openness** (F.29) was the factor most selected by participants in their explanation of a successful sojourn.

The second research question asked what relationships sojourner participants perceive among the factors contributing to the success of sojourner adjustment? The participant profiles and influence structure summaries provided evidence, through the rich description of their narratives and rationales, of the relationships participants saw between success factors in their lived experiences. The analysis of category influence, calculated across all participants, also addresses research question two. The participants perceived three categories as the most influential to their overall success as sojourners. These were Category B, **Growing Competencies**; Category A, **Self-concept**; and Category F, **Flexibility**. Their overall scores revealed the highest position and influence scores, meaning factors within these categories may be a catalyst for developing other success
factors. In terms of preparing sojourners for going abroad, this composite analysis revealed what could be prioritized in pre-departure training for impending sojourners.

A goal of this dissertation was to gain deeper insight into the success of the student sojourner. To that end, the participant profiles and influence structure summaries provided additional evidence, through rich description of their narratives, of the ways in which participants saw the various success factors contributing to others (i.e., the relationships among factors).

Analyzing the scores and rationales, rather than just one or the other, provided unique insight into the sense-making of participant sojourners. Analysis of my data was aimed at answering the research questions as well as understanding the participants’ perspectives. This was carried out through a qualitative approach and a multi-method design, of organizing and discovering meaning in the data. The conclusions were consistent across participants and were found to adequately describe and authentically represent the sojourners’ perspectives.

As a result of analyzing the in-depth interviews, visual structures, and my researcher notes, themes emerged that provide insight into the commonalities of the sojourner experience despite differences in one’s program or personality. Additional success factors were developed (i.e., ability to manage language fatigue, creation of connections with other travelers).

An additional outcome of these interviews was the participant-reported increase in self-awareness from reflection on their success using the ISM software. A goal of this dissertation was to investigate and expand the uses of ISM as a method for collecting and analyzing interview data. The in-depth interviews provided an outlet for sharing and
analyzing their experiences, specifically allowing them to take new pride in their accomplishments by seeing them displayed in visual form and to make their stories new again by telling them to fresh ears. There was some potential benefit to the returned sojourners. Often at the end of interviews, the participant has given a great deal of information about his or her life, but not received anything in return (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). But through the transparent structuring process of ISM, participants are essentially collaborators in analyzing their sojourn. Participants shared verbal and nonverbal expressions of positivity and gratitude were shared in overwhelming measure from the participants as a result of the face-to-face, ISM-structured interviews. Additionally, the sense-making that took place though reflection of the significant experiences can leave the participants with a better understanding and deeper appreciation of their sojourn.

**Strengths and Limitations**

This dissertation has several strengths and limitations based on its design. In this section of Chapter 5, I will first address the strengths of the study. Next, I will discuss the limitations that should be identified and could potentially be addressed or modified in future studies. Finally, I will discuss the directions for future research promoted by this dissertation.

**Strengths**

There are a number of strengths of this dissertation. These include the experience of participants, participants who traveled to a variety of cultures, and the novelty of the methodological tools used. I interviewed only those students who had studied abroad in a direct enrollment program, where they enrolled as university students in the host country.
This allowed me to get rich, immersive, lived, and personally charged experiences of adjustment and stories from the participants. Returned sojourners were selected rather than impending or current sojourners. Instead of students trying to predict how the factors in this study may relate, participants were able to report their first-hand experience of how the success factors had related to each other. Additionally, I chose students who had returned recently enough that they were still in school and not so recently that they would not have the appropriate amount of distance from and thereby reflection on their sojourn.

I interviewed college students who traveled to a variety of cultures, but who only sojourned in non-English speaking countries. This allowed me to gather sojourner experiences from various cultural situations and environments which added to the richness of the interview data and also ensured some level of cultural difference regardless country choice (e.g., France vs. Russia).

Study abroad programs vary in how immersive they are in the local culture and I chose students whose program was 1) at least a semester (up to one year) and 2) a direct-enrollment into a local university rather than an American one. This would ensure another level of intercultural immersion in which to compare experiences.

Another strength of this study is the novelty of the method used. At the time of this dissertation, there had not been another study that had participants interpret and structure the relationships between success factors, harvested from the study abroad literature, in this way. This is significant because it allows the participants’ voices to be the expert and provide a new approach to what many quantitative and qualitative research programs have understood as a successful sojourn. Using the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) software as an interview method, I was able to guide the participants
through a systematic and beneficial structuring of how they perceived the relationship of these success factors. Taking apart and reflecting on, and ordering the complex topic of their sojourn through the ISM had edifying results for both the researcher and the participants. This went beyond abstract musings about these factors and related directly to some event or feeling they encountered in connection with the factors. During this structuring process, I asked participants to provide a rationale for why they believed the relationship between success factors was as they indicated, an example of how these factors played out in their lived experience. This use of ISM is qualitatively different from previous uses of this technique and this relatively new technology allowed the participants’ voices and perceptions to be identified and valued.

For a qualitative study to be considered sound, the findings or outcomes need to be member checked. As the researcher, to ensure that I was not imposing my own interpretation of the relationships among factors, I used participants’ own words and decisions. Their visual structure maps are their own perceptions, their own decisions. Moreover, each participant was given the opportunity to revise any relationships or move around any factors that they determined were out of place in their structures, based on their personal experience. Overwhelmingly, the participants confirmed the accuracy of the ISM results and the majority remarked with pleasant surprise and gratitude at the insight it offered them about their trip.

The varied details of the participants’ travels and personalities provide a wide range of perspectives and occurrences. However, although the specific circumstances of their experiences were different, themes emerged due to commonalities in the nature of student sojourning. These themes provide insight and allowed me to compare elements of
the sojourners’ experiences despite differences in their program or personality. As a result, another strength is the ability to use the discovered themes as a mechanism for dovetailing all 15 participants’ study sojourns. This helped to create a larger cohesive narrative regardless of the specific location or circumstances experienced by participants.

There could also reasonably be other factors at work in sojourner success that were not present in the literature examined for the success factor list and so are beyond the scope of this dissertation. A strength of ISM is that it allows for the future addition of elements (i.e., factors) and adjustment to the participant structures. Themes discovered through this study could become additional factors presented to participants in a future study as an extension of the current dissertation research.

Limitations

As there were strengths, there are also a number of limitations for this dissertation as well. These main limitations to be discussed here include how factors could have been presented to participants and the potential need for a focus group.

First, the groundbreaking nature of this research brought with it some elements of trial and error. Pilot studies were done early on and discoveries made there aided in the choices made in the conceptualization stage. Adjustments were made during the formal design phase according to constraints and available resources such as access to participants. Employing a method in an innovative way meant starting from scratch when it came to methodological choices.

The success factors derived from the sojourner adjustment literature were put into categories before showing the list to participants. As a way of starting each interview/structuring with the same initial order (e.g., comparing factors from Category
A, Self-concept to Category B, Growing Competencies and so on.), I asked participants to select one factor from each of the seven categories. This was done to allow for category comparisons across all participants later on. Then, I asked participants to select an additional five factors from any category to allow them to choose with more freedom.

These categories restrictions may have limited participants to select factors that were not actually the most influential in their student sojourn. If I showed participants the full list of 42 success factors, they would not have been bound by the restraint of “one from each category.” However, this would have made comparing the chosen items across the whole group far more challenging and potentially impossible. I mitigated this concern by comparing the categories to each other instead of the success factors themselves. The uneven amount of factors in each category created some additional challenges in directly comparing categories to one another later on. This made it difficult to compare participants’ choices regarding their success factors to one another. An option briefly considered was to have all participants structure the same 12 items. This would have made comparisons of the visual structures easier, but would have eliminated the participants’ choice of items, thus disconnecting it from their lived experience.

Another limitation is that I could have interviewed participants as a focus group after the individual interviewing. This would ideally allow a follow-up structuring with the group. I could have then had participants structure the top selected items. Given that most of the previous uses of ISM have involved groups, it may have been fruitful to see how groups of student sojourners would have structured the top-selected success factors. This could be done in a future study as an extension of the current dissertation research.
Implications

The findings in this dissertation provide some implications for researchers, study abroad offices, study abroad students, and employers. First, I will discuss the theoretical implications of my findings, next I present methodological implications from this dissertation for researchers, particularly those interested in Interactive Management (IM) and Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM). Then, I will examine the implications of this research study for student sojourners and study abroad offices that organize the student sojourns. Finally, I will provide some recommendations for employers based on the findings of this dissertation.

Implications for Researchers

**Theoretical Implications.** The findings from this dissertation relate to and extend previous research within the intercultural communication literature. First, I will discuss how the findings from the current study suggest the importance of language proficiency in sojourner experiences. Second, I will illustrate how the additional success factors that emerged from the participants’ interviews relate to previous research on one’s embodied experience in a foreign cultural context. Finally, I will connect this dissertation’s findings to some relevant research on cosmopolitanism and social support.

**Language proficiency and language fatigue.** This dissertation’s findings suggest that the role of language in intercultural communication warrants more research. The current study’s findings demonstrate the complex and powerful role that language plays in sojourner adjustment. The influence of language proficiency in sojourner experiences is evidenced by how often participants reported *ability to speak the host language* (B.10) as a driving factor in their adjustment success. Their language fluency influenced aspects
of their self-concept, flexibility, and cultural sensitivity. Additionally, in Category B, *Growing Competencies, ability to speak the host language* (B.10) was the most-selected factor as a contributor to adaptation success.

This dissertation’s findings expand the role that foreign language use seems to play in sojourner adjustment. Participants’ rationales revealed that vocabulary knowledge and verbal fluency contributed to participants’ confidence and their willingness and ability to engage with the host culture. For example, Melinda offered, “The more comfortable you are speaking the language, the more willing you are to participate and take risks.” Reciprocally, lack of confidence in their foreign language ability played a role in sojourners’ inability to interact with the host culture. Christian explained that only having a beginner’s understanding of Russian was a challenge. “It made it impossible to do a lot of things at first—when you can only convey information, and you can’t rely on English there in making conversation or sharing your personality.”

This echoes a study by Martin, Sobre, and Kristjansdottir (2011), in which students sojourning in France reported feeling isolated, lonely, and stressed, due in part, to their lack of language proficiency. Their inability to speak the host language diminished engagement with the host culture and resulted in the students feeling cut off from locals and confused by foreign expressions and practices. Similarly, in this dissertation, Leah, felt isolated because, to her, the French language going on around her was like indistinguishable “static.” She explained that it made her feel “alone,” like an “island.” For many of the participants in the current study, when they were less confident in their ability to speak the host language, they were less willing to engage with the host culture. Interestingly, when they did choose to begin communicating with host members,
it was their use of the foreign language that seemed to increase their interaction success. The participants reported that when they attempted to use the foreign language, even poorly, it seemed to endear them to the local population.

Additional findings in the current study extend previous research on the psychological health (Kim, 2005) and functional fitness dimension of adjustment. “The psychological health of strangers is directly linked to their ability to communicate and the accompanying functional fitness in the host society” (Kim, 1995, p. 179). In Martin et al. (2011), the American students in France were suffering from symptoms of culture shock. The student sojourners I interviewed also reported suffering because of the language differences. They were psychologically and physically stressed because of the mindfulness that speaking and listening to the host language required. It caused them headaches, frustration, fatigue, and a lack of confidence.

For example, Melinda was not allowed to speak English in her homestay, so she had to adjust the volume of her voice in her living environment, and she said it drove her “crazy.” Subsequently, she had to find respite outside of her house where she could have “bouts of English.” Emma had “massive” headaches, and she and her English-speaking friends would have to get away to have a daily hour of “English time,” where they “did not have to think” or translate messages. The headache was a physical manifestation of a cognitive stress. It was not just cognitive; it was both physical and psychological.

Conceptualizations of psychological well-being and culture shock in research tended to be likened to a mental state such as depression or homesickness. However, those emotions experienced by my participants indicated that they were affected in a variety of ways: cognition, physiological affects, and the expressive behaviors used to
show others how they feel. Future research could further examine what role language proficiency plays in the psychological well-being dimension of cultural adjustment.

The participants in current study were stressed because of the mindfulness speaking the host language required. There was a physical toll that is taken on them. It was cognitively taxing, but also there was anxiety about being misunderstood or offending. Many of the participants believed that language was tied to how they were treated as well. People were more receptive when they at least tried to speak the host language. The stories from the participants show that there was higher anxiety and more uncertainty when using the foreign language. It often exceeded their maximum threshold of uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005). The anxiety is an embodied toll because sojourners feel it manifest in their physical bodies.

This dissertation’s findings suggest that even when the student sojourners were proficient in the language, they still needed a way of managing the fatigue that came. The language fatigue seemed to affect sojourners regardless of language proficiency. It was still a second language, and therefore required more effort to think and act while using it. This should be investigated further. For instance, future research could more closely explore sojourners with different levels of language proficiency and experience and see if among them there is a relationship between language fatigue experienced. Additionally, an ISM-structured interview study could explore specifically how sojourners manage the effects of language fatigue.

*Embodied experience of adjustment.* The management of language fatigue, discussed in this dissertation, relates to the constructs of an embodied experience. This construct emphasizes the role that our senses and our body play in our adjustment to a
new environment (Kristjansdottir, 2009). Kristjansdottir, (2009) used a phenomenological approach to study the emotional and physical sensations experienced by participants abroad. As a result, each participant’s unique, emotional, and lived experience was valued and explored to contribute to a holistic understanding of the sojourn process. In this dissertation, participants’ stories and rationales similarly revealed that they could feel the physical, cognitive, and emotional effects of constantly encountering difference (e.g., Hannah feeling frozen when the Russian clerk pounded a fist on the counter; Melinda losing her vocabulary when she was uncomfortable with the aggressive men crowding her on the dance floor). Additionally, the results of the current study demonstrate how the participants experienced and navigated the foreign environment around them, not just through cognitive processing, but as a physical presence encountering stimuli. In the process of adjustment, Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) suggest that sojourners should pay attention and learn how their bodies feel in different spaces and cultures. This effort relies on one’s motivation and whether one is driven to experience a new culture in a positive manner. Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) suggest there are attitudes that can help or obstruct adaptation. In this dissertation, participants were going abroad voluntarily and were motivated to see and do as much as they could in a short amount. This mindset made many of them optimistic and open-minded, even in their discomfort. Student sojourners continue to form and shape their identity during the sojourn, and many of the participants reported that they felt “at home” after being in these new cultures for a short period of time. They felt like that could have lived there forever, and that they belonged there. For instance, Ginny stated that she wanted to eradicate American values from her daily behavior and thinking. This relates to
Bennett and Castiglioni’s (2004) concept of embodied ethnocentrism. They contend that people who strongly reflect the spaces in which they live or those whose lived-in spaces strongly reflect them may have a harder time changing spaces. This often leads to an increased experience of discomfort. For example, Dominique, an American participant in the current study, said that America had “no hold on [her] whatsoever.” She felt more affinity to Europe. Dominique reported being able to fit in to her new environment and even being physically mistaken for an Italian. Reciprocally, when Melinda returned home after a year abroad, where she was “used to walking everywhere,” she struggled to readjust to a home culture where “there are not as many places to walk.” She got used to the space and the feeling of walking from place to place and how it made her body feel and look. Melinda’s adaptation while abroad might mean she had more of a re-entry struggle than someone who did not adapt to the host culture environment while abroad.

There are cognitions and attitudes that act to either help or obstruct (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004) one’s cultural adjustment. That is the essence of Category D, Sensitivity from this dissertation. This category refers to one’s attitude and awareness in the host culture. A key factor in this category is empathy. For example, Leo, said when he was learning Italian, he was not just learning the mechanics of the language, but the “emotion of it” and that was helping him empathize with and understand the Italian people.

Empathy is a significant factor of intercultural competence (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004). In fact, according to Bennett and Castiglioni (2004), “The intentional use of empathy is the key to developing intercultural competence” (p. 260). Even when individuals have not yet endured a particular experience, empathy allows them to access
an understanding outside of their own cultural knowledge. Furthermore, individuals can rely on their bodies as a tool for experiencing empathy. This first requires examining how one feels in one’s own culture. This embodied experience can then be compared to the shift in feelings a person encounters when faced with a different country’s culture. Some participants I interviewed reported experiences that resonate with the notion of embodied cultural adjustment. Ginny explained her earliest experience abroad in this way: “I was surprised to be the same person in a new location.” Hannah addressed that her competence in Moscow came from her self-awareness, “You have to be able to understand some things about yourself to understand the culture. Something I actually found was my awareness as an American.” She continued, “I was able to process those differences much more easily after I realized that I did have an identity: A cultural identity. Separate, very much separate, from the one I was in.” If sojourners actively compare the two sets of feelings (i.e., how they feel in their own culture versus how they feel in the different culture), they can become more comfortable and competent with each embodied experience they encounter.

Future research could utilize content analyses of interviews with sojourners to examine the ways in which sojourners describe their feelings and emotions, as well as their physical presence, throughout the sojourn. This would allow a systematic examination of the embodied experience written about by Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) and experienced by many in this dissertation. For instance, what are the physical sensations student sojourners report in response to culture shock and how do they articulate them? Future research could examine physiological feeling and focus on markers of physiological arousal such as cardiovascular reactivity during moments of
culture shock. In my dissertation, participants often got excited retelling tales from their sojourn and future research could examine whether there are significant increases in heart rate and blood pressure during the retelling of their stories of adjustment and culture shock. If there are cardiovascular reactions, even during the retelling of such stories, it might also have consequential health effects on sojourners.

**Cosmopolitanism and social support.** From this dissertation, there are also several implications for theoretical frameworks that focus on social support. For instance, Sobre-Denton’s (2011) work on cosmopolitanism found that groups of international students built social support networks, which aided in the adaptation process. Cosmopolitan theory suggests that humankind consists of a single global community, where human share identities across the world at a macro (global) and micro (local) levels (Nussbaum, 1997). This dissertation signifies the importance of third culture networks into a new context. A third culture network is one where the individuals who make it up are neither part of the host culture nor part of one’s home culture. The network is made up of individuals who meet along the way during one’s sojourn.

In this dissertation, a theme that emerged from the participants’ rationales and stories, *creation of connections with other travelers*, is an example of the development of a third culture, and it adds to our understanding of cosmopolitanism. Specifically, to form their own interpersonal network, the sojourners in this study showed that they did not need an imposed or structured setting or online forum (as utilized in Sobre-Denton’s 2011 study). The sojourners in the current study were able to form third culture relationships even through fleeting relationships or chance encounters. For instance, Ginny referenced forming a network with individuals she met through couch surfing or
people she met in a hostel. Participants reported meeting a fellow traveler or groups of
travelers, and they immediately formed a tight bond. The shared feeling of being transient
or feeling new to the culture seemed to unite strangers. My findings suggest those “third
culture” networks can be found or formed anywhere, and they still have a lasting impact.
During the interviews, participants were still talking about other travelers that they met,
however briefly, during their sojourn. Participants described these bonds with other
travelers as “friendships” and “connections” vital to their sojourn’s success. Natalie
considered the “people I went to Amsterdam with” or "the people I learned Italian with"
as her best friends. “I did everything with them. It is so much more. You are in this new
place with them. They are intense relationships.” Leah explained why even fleeting
encounters often resulted in deep connections: “You are only there for a short time. You
only assimilate to an extent and have less in common with the locals than you do with the
folks who are passing through.”

Cosmopolitanism suggests a desire to expand beyond a nation state, learn a new
culture, and adapt to the new culture. This desire to see the world and be part of it
manifested in many of my participants’ reported reasons for going abroad and their
definitions of success. Cosmopolitanism seems to be what the travelers had in common,
and that helps in forming bonds. In a cosmopolitan social network, individuals teach each
other about their cultures and share cultural information with other network members
(Sobre-Denton, 2011). This is reminiscent of when Mary reported that she had “this
country day” with lunches and activities, where the members of their social/academic
group would introduce their individual culture to the group and the group would celebrate
it.

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Further, the work on cosmopolitanism (Sobre-Denton, 2011) suggests that individuals find a cosmopolitan perspective after they have engaged with individuals from multiple cultures. During this period of engagement, the individuals socially support each other, encourage cultural learning between each other, and together experience adaptation in their host culture. This newfound cosmopolitan standpoint is then ready to be reapplied in the future, even when the group moves away from the third-culture network. “This cosmopolitanism manifests itself in an attitude of heightened tolerance, openness, and acceptance for other cultures by group members” (Sobre-Denton, 2011, p. 87). This growth, personal development, and cultural learning can be seen in my participants’ visual structures and their reactions to them. The characteristics (e.g., factors) such as tolerance, openness, cultural learning are the ones (or are similar to the ones) that the sojourners developed as a result of the sojourn.

Finally, Sobre-Denton (2011) found that the international group of students in her study provided to its members a space where they could be comfortable or unrestricted enough to act freely. This form of social support was valuable as it was found to mitigate some of the identity crisis stress, which might otherwise accompany the adaptation process. In the context of a third culture community, there is comfort without relying on creating a fortress of the home culture. The third network group’s support minimizes the temptation to retreat back to old home practices. The focus in these third culture groups is often on mastering this host culture with each other’s help. Ginny explained that these networks of other travelers and sojourners were “the biggest stress relief” because “they were going through the same things I was, and so we could talk and help each other out that way.”
There are many potential areas where future research can extend the work of cosmopolitanism. First, there is potential for examining an online study abroad sojourn network. That is, what would happen if sojourners from around the world were all a part of an online network? This examination of the effects of a long-distance third culture may offer some insight into the potential ways that even those individuals, who only know each other online, may help each other adjust to their respective new cultures. Do online-only or long-distance third cultures have the same benefits while abroad as face-to-face third culture networks? Can one duplicate the power of the third culture using only online channels?

Another area for future research is the role of naturally occurring third cultures (i.e., those formed with people one meets randomly at hostels, the market, in classes, etc.) versus program-designated third cultures (e.g., networks set up by the study abroad program) while abroad. Additionally, social support is one reason why sojourners form third culture networks, but the amount and type of support varies. Adelman (1988) defined weak ties as impersonal, yet supportive relationships. Sojourners likely create and experience numerous examples of weak ties including: landlords, shopkeepers, postal workers, neighbors, and coffee baristas. Therefore, a question of interest could be, what role does these impersonal connections or weak ties play in a sojourner’s adjustment experience?

Kim (2005), suggests that home culture social support early on in the adjustment process can help, because sojourners can complain about the host culture together, but ultimately this becomes counter productive. To investigate the role of various social networks over the length of the sojourn, future research could examine home, host, and
third culture social support, longitudinally, though the use online diaries. Online versions of the structuring software could be employed to examine how sojourners perceive and describe the relationships among these diverse social networks and their influence on adjustment success.

**Methodological implications.** This dissertation utilized a specific methodology and facilitated dialogue technique called Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM). This use is novel, because it takes a process used primarily with groups and applies it as a system for semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. The ISM software is designed to work in the Interactive Management (IM) process. The system underlying IM draws upon a number of group concepts from other theories such as: creativity, generating, clarifying, and examining ideas, and group productivity. To generate the most productive group communication environment, IM uses three phases including nominal group technique (Delbeq, Van De Ven & Gustafson, 1975), idea-writing (Warfield, 1990), and Interpretive Structural Modeling (Warfield, 1990).

ISM has been successful in allowing participants to sort through complex problems such as workplace diversity, diversity on college campuses and organizational vision statements. Broome, DeTurk, Kristjansdottir, Kanata, and Ganesan (2002) used ISM to help members of a multinational corporation address barriers to effective communication in culturally diverse work environments. Further, Broome (1995) reported how a Native American tribe was able to collectively map out problems they were facing with creating an organizational vision statement with which their members would agree.
Regardless of the specific context, IM offers a range of tools useful in handling complex problems. Broome (1994) reports that the primary challenges in managing complex problems are reducing or eliminating disorganization and effectively dealing with large amounts of information. Therefore, elements of IM, specifically ISM, appeared to be useful in helping participants sort through the large amounts of complicated information they possessed in their minds regarding their study abroad sojourn and what made it a success.

As a result, in this dissertation, as a semi-structured interview guide, ISM was quite useful in dealing with the complicated process of getting individual student sojourners to recall and speak about what made their trip abroad a success. Instead of broadly asking general questions about their sojourn or requiring participants to generate a list of factors on their own, or rate the influence of certain factors, all of which methods other studies have utilized, I was able to systematically facilitate a dialogue with each of the sojourners about their sojourn and allow them to draw from a comprehensive list of factors and their own lived experiences to reveal how the factors contributed to their success. I incorporated the previous research conducted by intercultural scholars to inform my list of factors (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007; Church, 1982; Kim, 2001, Martin, 1987; Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 1995; Ward & Searle, 1991; Ward & Chang, 1997; Ward, Leong, & Low, 2004). This allowed me to bring an already-supported list of factors to my participants. This may have assisted participants during the interview by focusing on what resonated with their sojourn and kept them from getting fatigued during the factor structuring. Participants were able to quickly and easily select the 12 key factors that they believed contributed to their successful sojourn.
Subsequently, when I entered the factors into the ISM software, it began a process by which participants were able to see visually, at any point, which two factors were being compared to each other. Once participants concluded, for example, whether or not factor A contributed to factor B, they were asked to offer rationales for their answer. This provided an organized system of interviewing the student sojourners.

This current dissertation is proof that the ISM process can be successfully used in an individual interview. As a result, this dissertation opens the doors for expanding the uses of ISM as a method and widens the types of studies where ISM can be utilized. Although ISM is typically used for groups, here it was successfully used with individuals. At the time of this research, ISM had not yet been utilized for individual interviews or served as an interview guide or used to investigate sojourner adjustment.

Methodologically, one could use ISM as the protocol or structuring guide of any one-on-one interview, where the topic is complex.

The current dissertation’s research could be extended and built upon in several ways. One way would be to turn several of the emerged themes into new success factors. For instance, some of the new factors informed by this dissertation would be one’s ability to manage language fatigue or the creation of connections with other travelers. Then, participants could perform a restructuring using existing factors as well as these new factors suggested by this dissertation’s interviews with participants. Moreover, participants could actually identify their own factors that contributed to their success and could structure those as well.

In addition, instead of using returned sojourners, this study could be replicated with impending sojourners who had not yet traveled abroad. This might involve asking
participants to predict what might be influential to their success. In a longitudinal research design, participants could also be asked to return at the end of their sojourn and then their pre-departure and post-sojourn structures could be compared. A variation of this could even include asking participants to check in at various points throughout their sojourn. An online or virtual ISM program could be created and participants could be asked to identify factors as they encounter and use them and then structure the sets of success factors at various intervals during their sojourn and when they return. If an online diary or journal component was included, participants could provide the rationales for the connection between factors in real time, from wherever they were in the world. For example, if someone experienced optimism (A.6) contributing to ability to manage stress (A.5), they could log into a website and record their reactions in the moment. This sort of longitudinal, in-the-event application would also periodically bring to the mind of the sojourner the different factors, leading the sojourner to pay attention and utilize the factors while in the field.

Another alternative for future research would include structuring factors in a group setting instead of an individual one. Now that this dissertation study has identified the top selected items from the participants in this study, we could invite groups of participants together and have them create group structures. Participants could also take part in an idea-generation stage where they provided a set of factors that they would subsequently work with. In something akin to an online chat forum, a group ISM structuring could occur over the Internet, which would allow participants to be anywhere in the world and still be a part of the structuring process. If researchers collected both individual and group influence structures, structures could be compared to each other for
similarities and differences. This might provide some insight into the role that groupthink plays in actual sojourner adjustment or perceptions of sojourner adjustment.

Furthermore, the implications for future research can be extended to additional contexts. Besides study abroad students, other transitions in life might also make good use of the methodology of this study. For instance, future research could examine returned soldiers to better understand their adjustment struggles. If researchers use ISM to interview soldiers one-on-one who identify their return as successful, it might identify those factors that could be used to help those soldiers who had not yet made the successful transition back to civilian life. This would provide a necessary vehicle for helping these soldiers better transition to non-military life. For those interested in health communication research, researchers could use ISM to interview patients who are successfully managing life after serious illness or amputation. Similar to the returning soldiers, this research could help medical patients discuss their recovery and also help inform others of the factors that lead to successfully emotional and physical recovery.

**Implications for Study Abroad Students and Coordinators**

There are also a number of practical implications for both student sojourners and the offices that arrange the study abroad programs, which organize their trips abroad. First, I will focus on what this dissertation might mean for those students who might study abroad.

**Implications for impending, current, and returned sojourners.** Although, it might be common sense that one’s ability to speak the host culture’s language is important for student sojourners, this dissertation’s findings suggest just how important participants’ view its role in their success. For instance, participants selected the *ability to*
speak the host language (B.10) as one of their top success factors and the category it comes from as the most influential among all the categories. In addition, the rationales from the sojourner participants suggest that there are multifaceted reasons why this factor is important for success. They support the idea that the becoming more fluent in the host language creates more confidence in one’s ability to use the language, manage stress, interact with and form bonds with locals. I do not want to discourage anyone from studying abroad and imposing stricter requirements may limit the enrollment numbers in certain programs. However, this dissertation demonstrates that although language requirements for students studying abroad vary, it is hard to argue the positive and significant impact that having a solid (or growing) working knowledge of the language has on other areas of adjustment. Future study abroad students should consider either taking a foreign language course before they leave for their trip or taking seriously the in-country language course early on into their sojourn in the host culture.

The second implication for study abroad students involves the establishing and monitoring of their goals while abroad. Students should be honest with themselves about what their goals are for the trip. This will determine how much preparation they need to do, which subsequently can help them manage their expectations. For example, Dakota suggested if students are just looking to “bum around” Europe or hang out with their American friends on an Australian beach, then even minor issues (e.g., misunderstanding the nonverbals of a member of the host culture), or a homestay where the host-parents have strict rules about which language can be spoken and who can visit during mealtimes, may be seen as a huge annoyance or hindrance to their goal of fun.
On the other hand, if someone is looking to immerse himself or herself in a completely foreign environment or live somewhere without many other Americans, he or she would have a better chance choosing less cosmopolitan, smaller cities or countries other than western Europe. For example, given her goal of living like a local, Natalie would very likely have been disappointed if she only hung out with her American friends, whereas Dakota’s main goal was to be someplace warm and fun, and she “couldn’t live without Starbucks.” If study abroad students want to live life as a member of their host culture, this changes the experience and it represents a qualitatively different goal. For instance, Leo said about living in Florence, it wasn’t just about the mechanics of the language; he wanted to learn the emotion to empathize with the people he was meeting. Future student sojourners need to be honest with themselves and the abroad coordinators about their goals and the experiences they want to have. Student sojourners should ask themselves what they want to do and what they want to get out of their sojourn. Are they looking for an adventure or to develop certain skills? Even if they do not know what to expect, they can set some simple goals for themselves (that can be adjusted over the life of their sojourn) such as buying groceries or ordering a coffee in a new café.

During the interviews, several participants spoke about the types of information they received before departing on their trip. Although participants purchased or received guidebooks and advice sheets, most participants stopped short of actually absorbing (or even reading in some cases) this information. Many participants left their materials at home or lost them. Almost everyone I spoke to made reference to how true those materials ended up being. Therefore, a suggestion for student sojourners is instead of going through the materials, because there is little chance of that happening, save the
materials, and bring them with you so that when you realize that you do need them, and they do relate to what you are going through, they will be available.

Another implication deals with one of the top-chosen items, which was optimism (A.6). Many participants stated that the idea of optimism really helped them endure or bounce back from whatever challenges or episodes of culture shock they were going through. By optimism, a few viewed themselves as naturally optimistic but more meant something closer to “optimism due to the temporality of the situation,” such as, “I am only here for six months so why not” or “I am only here once in my life. I am going to make the most of it.” Some participants explained their optimism as willing to endure less-than-ideal conditions after a readjustment of their priorities, discovering that things they thought would be important, they realized they could do without. Still others gained optimism from other factors such as their curiosity, their tolerance for ambiguity, or their motivation to interact with host culture. Student sojourners should recognize that while it is not always easy to be optimistic in the face of culture shock or homesickness, keeping a focus on remaining positive and flexible can help them achieve their goals of learning and doing more given the short-term nature of the average study abroad sojourn. The most often cited regret I heard from participants was missed opportunities (e.g., “I kick myself and say ‘why didn’t I just pay the 16 euro and go inside the Coliseum?’”) to try new things (“Now I wish I’d tasted the duck gizzards because when else am I ever going to have French duck gizzards in France?”). They all said, “Try everything” and sometimes it is optimism that allows (or convinces) you to do that.

A final implication for future study abroad students deals with responding to emergencies, problems, and dangerous situations. This topic surfaced multiple times. For
instance, sojourners can be more mindful about personal security, like keeping spare copies of passport and credit card numbers, having a reserve of travelers’ checks or cash in case one is mugged, not setting down bags and not being in a place that feels dangerous. These are not new pieces of advice nor are they limited to sojourners, but the students I interviewed, despite “knowing” these tips, believed that it would not be something that would affect them. They did not have a plan for if things went wrong because they had not anticipated it would go wrong. Everyone who had a story of a terrible encounter, that is, being mugged, being a victim of fraud online, getting injured, or being harassed by local men, all said the same thing: “I never thought it would happen to me.” The interviews showed that it is a long scary process to bounce back from something like that. The ones who were able to bounce back the fastest had something of a backup plan in place. Future sojourners would be advised to talk with many returned sojourners and ask about the bad times as well as the good and learn from their mistakes (and how they managed them).

Some advice regarding safety applies directly to future female sojourners. Every female that I interviewed had stories about how the men in the host culture were far more aggressive than what they were used to, ranging from annoying to terrifying. The American standards of politely declining, or what participants viewed as typical American female behavior (e.g., ignoring until he gets the hint, or saying no with a gracious smile), did nothing to dissuade unwanted advances. Most stories from the female participants involved Middle Eastern or Spanish men as the aggressors. Female students need to be prepared, because they may have to display more assertiveness (or aggressiveness) than they are typicallyaccustomed to here in the United States. Instead of
simply advising students to avoid “dangerous areas” or avoid making eye contact, we need to educate them about cultural gender differences, cultural conflict differences, and give them phrases or physical maneuvers to enact when someone advances or encroaches on them in the first space. They need to be empowered that with the knowledge that cultural relativism (e.g., “Well, it is just how they are over there” or “It is just part of their culture”) does not give anyone the right to invade their personal space or make them feel uncomfortable after they have said no. Because internationally, American girls could be perceived in a way that may be incongruent with their personal identity, this information needs to be communicated to sojourners

**Implications for study abroad coordinators.** Any study abroad program could share the implications/advice that I just gave study sojourners in the previous section. However, here I offer study abroad programs some additional information crafted for them specifically. For example, study abroad programs need to educate female sojourners on the ways to deal with aggressive men in foreign countries. Given the repeated feedback from the female sojourners in this study, it is not enough simply to warn female sojourners; study abroad programs need to specifically offer strategies and the ability to actually practice scenarios.

First, some advice regarding the way in which information is disseminated to your abroad students: No one is reading your paper materials, fact sheets, brochures, or even emails. The students I interviewed identified videos and in-person presentations as their preferred method of receiving and retaining information. There was also a suggestion of an interactive chat line where impending and current student sojourners could log on from anywhere in the world and ask questions as they occurred to them. This could be
similar to a live help chat that many online stores and services provide. One participant likened it to the Arizona State University library’s “chat with a librarian” online program.

The findings from this dissertation can inform the way we prepare impending sojourners to go abroad. The original results produced here present a holistic view of these success factors. Study abroad offices commonly use existing theories and models or discuss factors isolation. The composite influence structure provides insight into how these factors work together and affect one another. Sojourner participants reported being advised by their SA offices to be open-minded and participate in the host culture, but the driving success factors found in this study would suggest that it may be more successful to first have an understanding and familiarity with the language, and to establish a mindset of supporting self-characteristics such as hardiness, independence, or optimism.

The second major implication for study abroad programs deals with what they do when student sojourners return from their trip. Many participants stated that their biggest complaint against the study abroad programs was the lack of program support after the students returned. Everyone who returned had developments and insights and they were very eager to share them in two ways. One, returned sojourners desired to speak to future sojourners and lend support and wisdom. Second, returned sojourners simply wanted to relive and recount the joys, triumphs, and humor of what they experienced. For student sojourners, there is an element of pride, because their experiences were very cool and out of the ordinary. They desperately want to talk about this. Whether it is something as simple as, “I tried this food no one has ever heard of” or as profound as “I changed my life” or “I found my calling.” They feel, “I did this, I know how to do this,” and they should be taught how they can carry these host-culture discoveries, growth, and
developments into their home-culture life. Study abroad programs should encourage sojourners’ ownership over these experiences and new skills, and then provide an outlet for their desire to share those experiences with people. Having those experiences acknowledged or appreciated by others is important; moreover, it feels good and can make for a smoother return transition.

The validating and sharing of their experiences may be just what sojourners need after such a life-changing event. In a somewhat joking manner, Natalie equated the cultural transition experience to “coming back from serving abroad in the military”:

And people who were there just get it. But when you come home, you are separated from your buddies and no one else knows what it was like at war. Ok, it is not as drastic as the military, but to your senses it almost is. You need posttraumatic support groups for the transition, which can give you a chance to stay in touch, or reunions or something or meet other people who know what it was like.

More than a few of the other participants echoed this idea with the way they felt upon returning home. They stated that it changes you, something akin to a veteran (but nowhere near the totality of that experience, stress, honor, or danger). For most students, no one in their family had that experience; therefore, they longed for opportunities to share what they went through with someone who wanted to hear about it and could relate to it. Leo, like others, shared that it was hard to keep talking to his family about wanting to be somewhere else, somewhere his family wasn’t. Study abroad programs are poised to offer these opportunities.

The problem with not providing some outlet or community in which returned sojourners can share or take ownership of or get acknowledgement for those experiences
is that those amazing and unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences that help define who they become are lost. These experiences have the ability to reshape their identity to an intercultural one. Returned sojourners may get depressed because they are not putting their intercultural identities or skills into practice. Those skills fall away, the memories become distant and all the valuable growth that came out of the stress of transition gets pushed to the background. It is not capitalized the way it should.

Further, if students were taught how to promote themselves, if these experiences and skills could be put on a job resume or if sojourners were taught how to talk about them during job interviews, they may have a better chance of getting the job offer compared to someone who had not traveled abroad. Skills such as managing stress, problem solving, open mindedness, or a willingness to initiate contact with members of a foreign culture are immensely marketable. If students could be taught how to promote themselves or advertise that they developed these skills, employers would start to recognize that students who have this experience are ones that they may want to hire. This would only seek to raise the reputation of any study abroad program.

**Implications for Employers and Companies**

As the world continues to become increasingly globalized, the pressure on companies and its employees to meet the demands of a more intercultural economy also increases. Subsequently, some research suggests that international employment assignments will also rise as companies attempt to match an increased focus of their attention on globalization (Hayes, 1997). It is not unreasonable for an organization to spend three to five times their employee’s annual income to relocate an employee abroad (Greengard, 1999; Klaff, 2004). This covers everything from training to housing to
miscellaneous expenses. Even those companies that decide against long-term relocation may still decide to send employees on short-term sojourns (Klaff, 2004). However, not every international sojourn is successful either. “Industry statistics show that 40 to 50 percent of international assignments fall either because the expats come home early or because they leave the company within a year of returning home” (Klaff, 2004, p. 87). The consequences of a failed sojourn include lost time, money, energy, and possibly productivity.

The use of college students somewhat limits the extent to which the findings in this dissertation can be applied. Specifically, strategies for managing international employees are beyond the scope of this study. However, this dissertation suggests some considerations for companies and their human resources departments to contemplate before sending an American businessperson on either short-term or long-term sojourns.

First, I would advise human resource departments to examine the list of the eight most-chosen success factors given by participants. Of particular importance is the role that language played in the experiences of the returned sojourners in this study. For many sojourners, even when they ran into situations where they did not know words or what was going on, people were more receptive to them when they made an effort with the language or they demonstrated the attitude of, “I don’t know it all. I would like to do it your way.” This is respectful and shows they are not trying only to rely on or to impose their American ways on the other person’s cultural expectations. If employees are being sent alone (without family members) or has never been abroad before, some language training informs so many other parts of their experience and often results in greater confidence and a greater feelings of security.
Another suggestion for companies is to find ways to encourage their employee sojourner to engage or interact with locals and their customs on a daily basis. This covers a myriad of experiences with customer service, retail, food service, time management, and rules of etiquette, and could provide insight into the values of the host culture. Particularly, this would be helpful to business people, ex-pats, or someone staying voluntarily in a non-English speaking country.

A final suggestion for employers would be to consider hiring more individuals with study abroad experience. The numerous skills necessary for a successful sojourn were witnessed throughout the interviews in this dissertation. Participants reported exhibiting a range of behaviors such as emotional resilience, ability to manage stress, cultural sensitivity, empathy, behavioral flexibility, and the ability to problem solve. These skills are paramount in navigating the multi-cultural, globalized world in which we live. Employees would do well to consider hiring those individuals who have successfully experienced a stressful and life changing experience such as studying abroad and have come away with evidence of resilience and a toolbox of skills necessary for any occupation.
REFERENCES


Martin, J. N., Sobre, M., & Kristjansdottir, E.S. (2011). The impact of a summer research experience on undergraduate science majors. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 1*(16), 7-20.


Table 1

*Most Chosen Items from Success Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Categories</th>
<th>Most Chosen Item</th>
<th>Number of Times Chosen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Self-Concept</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
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<tr>
<td>B: Growing Competencies</td>
<td>Ability to speak the host language</td>
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<td>C: Risk Taking</td>
<td>Willingness to take risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>D: Sensitivity</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>E: Relationship</td>
<td>Willingness to initiate contact with host culture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comfort in social situations</td>
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<tr>
<td>F: Flexibility</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: Program Fit</td>
<td>Availability of social support</td>
<td>6</td>
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*Note.* For Category E, the top two factors were selected an equal number of times.
Table 2

*Influence Scores from Participants’ Category Summations*

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<th>SUC</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NET S/A</th>
<th>INFLU</th>
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*Note.* POS = Position Score, ANT = Antecedent Score, SUC = Succedent Score, ACT = Activity Score, NET S/A = Net Succedent/Antecedent Score, INFLU = Influence Score.
APPENDIX A

WALKTHROUGH OF SAMPLE ISM SESSION
Items selected: 2, 11, 12, 17, 22, 26, 41 (A2, B3, C1, D2, E2, F3, G6)

Second round of items selected: 13, 14, 15, 16, 21 (C2, C3, C4, D1, E1)

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does “A” significantly contribute to “B”?

| In the context of sojourner adjustment, does | Hardiness (2) |
| Familiarity with Host Culture Artifacts and Customs (11) |

Answer: no
Rationale:

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does

Familiarity with Host Culture Artifacts and Customs (11)

significantly contribute to

Hardiness (2)

Answer: no
Rationale:
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Hardiness (2)
significantly contribute to Willingness to Take Risks (12)?

Answer: yes
Rationale: If you know you can survive or bounce back from a set back you are more willing to take a chance or try something new. The more challenges I faced, the better I got at working through them and once I knew how to do that, the fear of facing a challenge was a less salient part of my decision making to try a new task or take a new route.

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Familiarity with Host Culture Artifacts and Customs (11)
significantly contribute to Willingness to Take Risks (12)?

Answer: yes
Rationale: I think for this one, if you have more knowledge about a place, you can make better judgments about taking risks. You have a better sense of what the outcome may be in taking a risk. I knew (or thought I knew) some things about the language and the customs and it made me more brave and more comfortable saying yes when opportunities presented themselves.
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Willingness to Take Risks (12) significantly contribute to Ability to Recognize Nonverbal Differences (17)?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Ability to Recognize Nonverbal Differences (17) significantly contribute to Willingness to Take Risks (12)?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Hardiness (2) significantly contribute to Ability to Recognize Nonverbal Differences (17)?

Answer: no
Answer: yes
Rationale: I had traveled in High School to the UK so I had seen some of London before I studied abroad there in college. I also spend years watching films, reading fiction and non fiction and absorbing all the London material I could find. The customs part of this item is what I’m saying yes to... Knowing British customs helped me recognize nonverbal differences in communication encounters. I

Answer: yes
Rationale: Initiating contact with anyone could be called a risk. But it is even more so when you are in a new environment, with a foreign language or foreign customs. One needs to be brave to jump in and say hello to someone in a pub or at a university campus or strike up a conversation in the marketplace. It is a greater risk if you don’t know how they will respond.
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Ability to Recognize Nonverbal Differences (17)
significantly contribute to
Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22)
?

Answer: yes
Rational: I learned pretty quickly that Londoners don’t typically smile as much as we do. Customer service is not communicated in the same way there as it is here. Knowing that a lack of a big smile does not mean that the person is angry or mean can give you the confidence to initiate contact. Knowing nonverbal signals can help you decide if it is an appropriate time or situation to initiate contact.

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22)
significantly contribute to
Tolerance For Ambiguity (26)
?

Answer: no
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Tolerance For Ambiguity (26) significantly contribute to Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22)?

Answer: yes

Rationale: Again, if you are more or less comfortable with the unknown or the unexpected, you may be willing to initiate contact in new surroundings. I felt pretty confident doing it because I’ve done it my whole life. I think one of the reasons I can talk to people is the flexibility of my communication style and adaptability for whatever they may say.

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Willingness to Take Risks (12) significantly contribute to Tolerance For Ambiguity (26)?

Answer: no
Answer: yes
Rationale: The ability to observe, adapt and match (as much as I can) to fit the situation gives an advantage to someone deciding to take a risk. The odds are that you can handle (or at least wait out) whatever the outcome will be.

Answer: no
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Hardiness (2) significantly contribute to Tolerance For Ambiguity (26)?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Familiarity with Host Culture Artifacts and Customs (11) significantly contribute to Tolerance For Ambiguity (26)?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Tolerance For Ambiguity (26) significantly contribute to Hardiness (2)?

Answer: no
Answer: yes  
Rationale: These naturally go together in my mind. Being able to remain relaxed and open in the face of vague or incomplete information gives you the ability to endure tough conditions. When I arrived in London, I was hit with the feelings of culture shock all at once and it was almost overwhelming. If I hadn’t been able to handle the new and incomplete information all around me I never would have survived. The experience made me stronger and taught me to stick it out through the challenges.

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22)
significantly contribute to
Opportunities for Frequent Contact with Members of Host Culture (41)
?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Willingness to Take Risks (12)
significantly contribute to
Opportunities for Frequent Contact with Members of Host Culture (41)
?

Answer: yes  
Rationale: Saying yes to social invitations or yes to spontaneous trips all were risks and they all led to more opportunities to interact with members of the host cultures -- more opportunities than someone going on the same abroad program but who said no or was not willing to take risks.
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Opportunities for Frequent Contact with Members of Host Culture (41)
significantly contribute to
Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22)
?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Ability to Recognize Nonverbal Differences (17)
significantly contribute to
Opportunities for Frequent Contact with Members of Host Culture (41)
?

Answer: no

Second round set
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22) significantly contribute to Curiosity (13) ?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Opportunities for Frequent Contact with Members of Host Culture (41) significantly contribute to Curiosity (13) ?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Willingness to Take Risks (12) significantly contribute to Curiosity (13) ?

Answer: no
Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does

Curiosity (13)

significantly contribute to

Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22)

?

Answer: yes

Rationale: I don’t know if it was curiosity alone in my case, but my curiosity was so strong in places like markets or shops that sold things I had never seen before -- I was quite desperate to know more about what things were used for or tasted like or where they came from and I knew the only way to find out was to ask. So the voices in my head that were worried about looking foolish or being frightened of using the wrong vocabulary were all drowned out by very strong curiosity.

Answer: yes

Rationale: I think curiosity prompted me to seek out opportunities, more than someone else on the same program, in order to gain knowledge and experience and information from the members of the host culture.
Answer: yes
I never thought about one of these influencing the other, but seeing them paired like this – yes, I can see how strongly one influences the other. Curiosity was the reason I said yes to things like spontaneous trips or tasting new foods. It superseded my fear of getting lost in the new city when each time I made a choice to take a new street on my route.

Answer: no
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Curiosity (13) significantly contribute to Hardiness (2)?

Answer: yes
Rationale: My desire to know what London was like, allowed me to put up with all the challenges. I put up with knowing that I was going broke, or living without the conveniences that I had become accustomed to like my own car, or familiar foods or missing my family.

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Curiosity (13) significantly contribute to Ability to Recognize Nonverbal Differences (17)?

Answer: no
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Tolerance For Ambiguity (26) significantly contribute to Curiosity (13) ?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Curiosity (13) significantly contribute to Tolerance For Ambiguity (26) ?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22) significantly contribute to Motivation to Participate in Host Culture (14) ?

Answer: no
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Opportunities for Frequent Contact with Members of Host Culture (41) significantly contribute to Motivation to Participate in Host Culture (14)?

Answer: yes
Rationale: The more opportunities one had to make contact the more likely I was to make contact. The more I was able to watch how people communicated and behaved in situations, the more ready and willing I became to jump in and try it.

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Ability to Recognize Nonverbal Differences (17) significantly contribute to Motivation to Participate in Host Culture (14)?

Answer: yes
Rationale: When I could tell what was happening on a subtext level, I was more likely to join in a conversation or interaction. When I knew how to adapt my communication style then I felt like I could contribute without disrupting.
Answer: yes
Rationale: When I wanted to participate I was more willing to do what I needed to do to make it happen... successfully. When I was in Paris, and looking for directions or I wanted to get the local’s advice on where to eat, I was very willing to use my rusty French because I thought it would make them more comfortable speaking in their language to me. I wanted to show them that I would be able to understand them. Even if it was just saying Bonjour when entering a shop. I was hoping it would be seen as making an effort and earn me some good will (and maybe better advice).

Answer: no
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Willingness to Use Host Language
During Interactions (15)
significantly contribute to
Motivation to Participate in Host Culture
(14)?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does
Willingness to Use Host Language
During Interactions (15)
significantly contribute to
Cultural Sensitivity (16)?

Answer: no
In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Motivation to Participate in Host Culture (14) significantly contribute to Cultural Sensitivity (16)?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Willingness to Initiate Contact with Host Culture (22) significantly contribute to Cultural Sensitivity (16)?

Answer: no

In the context of sojourner adjustment, does Opportunities for Frequent Contact with Members of Host Culture (41) significantly contribute to Cultural Sensitivity (16)?
Answer: yes:
Rationale: Seeing the cultural routines and members in action gave me a better sense of what I needed to be aware of in my own communications and interactions.

Answer: no

Answer: yes:
Rationale: I don’t know if I hadn’t studied communication if I would have been attuned to recognizing nonverbal differences, but because I was -- I think it really did help me detect or respond to the differences.
Answer: yes:
Rationale: Again, I think showing them that I was at least aware of the language differences and showed that I was making an effort helped me to be received well. As I got better at navigating language and made fewer mistakes, it became one less barrier between me and them, so yes, bonds could be made.

Answer: no

Answer: yes
Rationale: I think this is true anywhere, but it was true in my study abroad experience. The better you are at detecting and responding to communication differences and changes, the more likely you are to have successful interactions which help in forming bonds.

The visual structure that was created from this ISM interview can be seen below.
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE MATRICES
Hannah’s Response Matrix

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Chris’s Response Matrix

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To: Benjamin Broome  
STAAF

From: Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 07/10/2012

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 07/10/2012

IRB Protocol #: 1205007794

Study Title: Stepping Inside the Box: Analysis of Sojourner Perspectives on Successful Study Abroad Experiences

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.