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**Examining Acculturative Stressors  
of the International Student:  
Following Study Abroad Students  
in South Korea and Morocco**



Honors Thesis

Chin Yi Chen

Department: Anthropology and International Studies

Advisor: Karen Abney Korn, Ph.D.

April 2014

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## **Abstract**

International students, particularly students studying abroad for a limited period of time, face certain challenges in entering and adjusting to a new cultural environment. This research focuses on different acculturative stressors including language, differences in nonverbal communication, discrimination, and academic pressure. By comparing and contrasting the perspectives of various students with the researcher's experience, this qualitative study provides insight into the lived experience of international students and the research through on-site fieldwork conducted over a year on university campuses in South Korea and Morocco. It discusses the results of the undertaken research and offers suggestions for resolving or minimizing these acculturative challenges.

## **Disclaimer**

The findings and suggestions expressed in this thesis are those of the student and do not necessarily express the views of the University of Dayton.

## Dedication

To my father, who taught me never to give up, and to my mother, whose undying spirit and love will always be a part of me.

## Acknowledgements

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The increasing number of students crossing geographic and cultural boundaries to live in host cultures for a temporary period of time has contributed to growing recognition of the significance of the intercultural adaptation process (Kim, 2001). In 2013, statistics revealed that the number of American students participating in study abroad programs almost doubled between the 1999/00 and 2011/12 school years (Institute of International Education [IIE]). In addition, in the 2011/12 academic year alone, international students attending U.S. higher education institutions reached a high of 764,495 (IIE, 2012).

International students fall into a middle category between immigrants, who have plans of long-term or permanent residence, and tourists, who are commonly in a foreign culture for travel. These students are often defined to be short-term sojourners, who reside in a foreign culture for a planned amount of time with designated goals in mind, ranging from obtaining a degree to improving social status at home (Coates, 2006; Kim, 2001). The short-term nature of their stay, however, also means they commonly experience challenges which can adversely impact the intercultural adaptation process (Kim, 2001).

In this study, the stressors of international students are defined through the experiences of students who studied abroad in South Korea and Morocco. By looking at qualitative data obtained of intercultural encounters between these international undergraduate students and their domestic counterparts in South Korea and Morocco, this study identifies key sociocultural stressors that international students face in the process of intercultural adaptation.

## **Statement of Problem**

Study abroad programs have long been reported to possess many benefits for students: these include a deepened involvement with global affairs; higher levels of personal maturity and independence; and greater cultural awareness (Hadis, 2005; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In contrast, the literature on the difficulties of acculturating to a different environment and the impacts of these stressors belongs to an emerging area of research that has yet to be fully developed (Coles & Swami, 2012). While literature on acculturation and the intercultural adaptation process has existed for a long time, the majority of this research has been centered on immigrants and refugees (Berry, 1970; Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987; Berry, 1997; Kim, 2001; Pedersen, Neighbors, Larimer & Lee, 2011). The stressors that are present in the acculturation process hence require further development and redefinition in order to apply to the case of international students, or in this case study abroad students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). This study contributes qualitative data to existing literature through fieldwork conducted on university campuses in South Korea and Morocco over a year, and will assist in broadening the scope of this literature.

## **Purpose of Study**

Communication has been found to be integral to intercultural adaptation (Myles & Cheng, 2003). Cultural variables influence the preference of certain interpersonal communication styles over others in groups with a diverse mix of individuals (Hall, 1976). These differences often lead to communication misunderstandings, which can adversely impact the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of international students to a host environment by acting as stressors (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). In

examining intercultural communication patterns between study abroad students and domestic students, what stressors affect intercultural adaptation and how are these resolved?

This study focuses on the study abroad student's experience, defining the study abroad or semester exchange student as an international student entering a foreign country. It uses the terms "international" and "study abroad" interchangeably because of the nature of a student entering a country different from his or her country of origin. An emic approach was used in examining intercultural encounters between exchange and domestic undergraduate students in the cultures of South Korea and Morocco. The study took place over a study abroad year in South Korea and Morocco, with additional data collected prior to and after the study abroad period. By using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as my primary approach, I started with general research questions that would assist in my data collection and allowed information from my field notes and interviews with participants to construct the underlying themes that appeared as my research progressed. In this study, I present the experiences and observations of both my participants and me by utilizing narratives and relating the types of stressors and communication styles I uncovered to pre-existing models in a literature review.

### **Research Questions**

Four general research questions assisted in the data collection process, primarily focused on the intercultural communication process among exchange and domestic college students in South Korea and Morocco.

### **General Research Questions**

1. What is the level of nonverbal communication present during interpersonal communication?
2. What are the communication preferences regarding discussion and conflict?
3. What are the cultural values and assumptions within the culture that influence behavior?
4. How does native language play a part in the representation of physical and social reality?

With the initial information I collected through regular journaling, interviews and field notes of my participant observation, I began data coding and analysis. As themes of interest began to emerge, my research questions evolved into the following:

### **Final Research Question**

What are the stressors for international students in acculturating to a new host environment?

### **Assumptions**

This qualitative study relies on several assumptions about the acculturation process of college students who study abroad. It examines a population of students who studied abroad on campuses in South Korea and Morocco. International students are seen as sojourners who construct social situations in order to adapt (Coates, 2006). It is assumed that students would face challenges in adapting to a new environment, based on Berry's (1998) findings that revealed individuals who did not form connections with their host culture were most at risk for acculturative stress. The population studied is a selection of exchange and domestic students at Korea University in Seoul, South Korea,

and Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. This selection of students is not representative of the whole international or domestic student population in South Korea or Morocco.

This study also assumes that stressors can be defined and assessed from the data contributed by the participants and the researcher. These stressors vary in nature from individual to individual and group to group, increasing the difficulty of the analysis of the acculturative process. As the researcher, I have to accept whatever evidence of acculturative stressors provided by my participants and field notes as important, regardless of my personal opinion. I have to also reflect on my own experiences as I play a crucial role in data-gathering, and as my own experiences as a study abroad participant contributed to the collected data. I must also constantly consider and redefine my understanding of acculturative stressors and the nature of intercultural adaptation, as well as the methods I use to record and measure such stressors.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This study spanned a period of eighteen months of data collection interspersed with literature review. It commenced in early April of 2012 and concluded in September of 2013. Four months of on-site field research took place in each of the countries of South Korea and Morocco. A literature review was carried out in the months prior to and after field work. In the data collection sites of South Korea and Morocco informal interviews were carried out in the beginning of each data collection period and selected participants were formally interviewed nearing the end of the semester. The structure of this project was an attempt to illustrate the types of stressors experienced by study abroad students.

The scope of this research is limited to the study of undergraduate students on the campuses of Korea University during the 2012 fall semester and Al Akhawayn University in the 2013 spring semester. This study focuses on the experiences of students who self-identified as international on these campuses – they were studying abroad for short periods of time ranging from a semester to four years. A total of eleven people (three male; eight female) were formally interviewed; out of these, ten were students and one was a professor. Many informal interviews were carried out with ten other students that supplemented the research process. The delimitations or characteristics limiting the scope of this study included the exclusion of graduate students due to field research constraints, as I did not have access to graduate classes. Subsequently, the majority of interactions I observed and participated in were limited to undergraduate courses.

The informants selected in this study were good communicators and provided rich data. I chose interviewees who were interested or enthusiastic about participation on the assumption that such individuals would be more likely to reflect upon and express feelings and understandings. Therefore, the results of this study reflect the standards and practices of selection on the researcher's part and do not express the views or experiences of those not chosen to be included in this project.

Limitations are possible weaknesses in a project (Creswell, 2009). This project included a few limitations relative to the nature of the study. Participants were limited to volunteers with whom I had an established relationship and not all participants engaged in the same manner with me throughout the duration of the study. Some were more personally engaged, while others more formal. Levels of expressiveness of opinion in

interactions differed from participant to participant. Hence, the study's findings are not generalizable in any standard manner.

Another limitation in this study may be Mayo's (1945) introduction of the Hawthorne Effect, or observer effect, which is the effect of the experience of being studied. Individuals may behave differently when they are aware of being observed, and this can apply to the case of formal interviewing, which creates self-consciousness as participants are asked for responses to topics they might not have previously considered as of interest to them (Monahan & Fisher, 2010).

Lastly, the researcher is a tool of data instrumentation in this study, which can pose problems of researcher bias and influence on data collection and analysis. Prior to embarking on research, I sought to establish pre-existing biases. To ensure quality of both research practices and transcribed results, I used Crane and Angrosino's (2002) research as guidelines for my fieldwork as follows: (a) recognizing possible ethnocentric biases, (b) practicing cultural relativism and self-awareness in data-gathering, (c) the presentation of honest statements about the research throughout the research process, (d) the researcher's ethical obligation to maintain the anonymity of his or her research subjects, and (e) rigor in data collection and analysis.

### **Justification and Significance of Study**

The main focus of this study is on the factors that adversely influence the intercultural adaptation process of international students, or sojourners. The data provides qualitative evidence of concrete, lived, individual experiences by the ethnographic other, deemed as the international undergraduate student on a campus in a foreign culture. This



study focuses on the individual and provides a range of perspectives on the stressors that affect the adaptive experience of the international student.

Practically, the study provides international student support staff and administrators a deeper understanding of the types of stressors international students face as short-term sojourners. It allows students who study abroad to realize and resolve these stressors to achieve a more meaningful international experience. Recognizing cultural differences can lead to the avoidance of communication misunderstandings and increase intercultural sensitivity in communication, which is essential for any campus in sustaining the tolerance of diversity and promoting cultural understanding (Myles & Cheng, 2003).

Results of this study contribute to the knowledge base of student affairs professionals, deans, residential coordinators and regular students on college campuses who interact with international students. This study also contributes to existing literature in the international education field by providing qualitative data. A deepened understanding of the perspectives, challenges and reactions of international students in adapting to a new culture allows administrators to better understand the international student or study abroad student's experience. It also enables student support personnel to create campus programs that foster stronger relationships between international and domestic students.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a brief overview of the intended study by discussing the problems, research questions, and justifications that outlined this research. The next chapter provides an insight into relevant literature and concepts that this study is built

upon. The third chapter outlines the methodology of this study, including research design, data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter details the findings of the study, while the final chapter will include the discussion of the findings, conclusions and some implications for practice.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an insight into the theoretical framework that this study can be situated in. It explores concepts that support the understanding of the lived experiences of international students. The literature covered in this chapter draws from disciplines including sociology, anthropology, education, psychology and communication. Included in this chapter is a review of how the concept of acculturation has evolved from its initial focus on migrants to international students, an exploration of the concept of sojourner adjustment, and an examination of some common variables of acculturative stress that form the academic base of this study.

### Acculturation

The concept of acculturation, defined as the process of adapting to life in a foreign environment, was initially conceptualized to focus on the experiences of migrants (Berry, 1997; Pedersen et al., 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Initially a uni-dimensional model, it has since evolved to being defined as a bi-dimensional process which involves two or more cultural groups and their members who come into contact with each other (Berry, 2005). Berry (2005) argued that acculturation caused co-occurring changes on individual and group levels in the form of psychological and cultural acculturation. His view of psychological acculturation referred to the change in the psychology of an individual experiencing a cross-cultural contact situation, while cultural acculturation referred to the change in the culture of the group (Graves, 1967; Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005).

Berry (1997) first developed a stress and coping framework for acculturation: he saw significant changes that individuals had to make in order to adapt as either benign

opportunities, therefore not stressors; or difficulties, which were classified as sources of acculturative stress (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). His framework posits that there are four acculturation strategies: integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization. These have been summarized by Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) as follows:

More specifically, individuals who value both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations are seen to endorse an integrationist approach. Those who cherish cultural maintenance but do not value intergroup relations are believed to adopt a separatist position. By contrast, those who value intergroup relations but are relatively unconcerned with cultural maintenance may be classified as assimilationist. Finally, those individuals who value neither cultural maintenance nor intergroup relations are said to be marginalized. (p. 423)

Ward et al. (2001) further distinguished three approaches to acculturation: the stress and coping model, cultural learning and social identification perspectives. This model differentiated between psychological and sociocultural adjustment, included the necessity of culture-related behavioral skills, and factored in variables of cultural and social identities (Ward et al., 2001; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Other acculturation models that have been developed focus on the host culture as a core factor in influencing acculturation, instead of the host culture as a secondary factor: for example, the interactive acculturation model (IAM) focused on both the attitudinal factors of the migrant and the contact with attitudinal factors in the host culture, as well as external factors such as the influence of government policies on both the acculturation attitudes of the host culture and migrant (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal, 1997; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

## Sojourner Adjustment

International students are deemed to be short-term visitors in foreign cultures whose purpose of sojourning is not establishing permanent residence (Church, 1982; Pedersen et al., 2011). Their process of adjustment is commonly referred to as “sojourner adjustment”, suggesting a more temporary involvement with the host culture as compared to other existing terms such as “cross-cultural adjustment” or “ethnic assimilation” (Church, 1982). According to Oberg’s (1960) theory of “culture shock”, individuals face difficulties adjusting to foreign cultures due to losing familiar signs of social interaction. Culture shock affects individuals in varying degrees and can manifest itself in behavioral symptoms like anxiety, dependence, irritability and a rejection of the host environment (Church, 1982; Oberg, 1960; Pedersen et al., 2011).

Adjustment is deemed to be a psychosocial process through which individuals face changes in existing emotional states, knowledge and attitudes, subsequently influencing their social skills (Hsiao-Ying, 1995). The adjustment process is not limited to a uniform period of time, and adjustment in different domains such as social and academic areas can proceed at differing rates (Coles & Swami, 2012; Zhou & Todaman, 2009). Ward’s research on sojourner adjustment suggested that there were two results of the acculturation process: psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Psychological adjustment referred to psychological satisfaction and well-being in a foreign environment, included variables like personality and social support, and was best interpreted within a stress and coping framework (Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Sociocultural adjustment used the social learning model, suggesting that a significant factor in cross-cultural transitions was a lack

of social skills leading to the inability to interact and adapt within the host environment (Hsiao-Ying, 1995; Searle & Ward, 1990). It was measured using factors like the duration of stay, linguistic ability and perceived cultural distance (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). Cultural distance is defined as the differences between the culture of origin and the host culture (Yan & Berliner, 2013; Pedersen et al., 2011). These differences can be associated with food preferences, traditions, religion, climate and ideologies like collectivism or individualism, and the larger these differences are perceived to be, the higher the possibility of difficulties faced in adjustment (Eustace, 2007; Ward et al., 2001). It is presumed that the larger the degree of cultural distance, the higher the likelihood of experiencing sociocultural adjustment problems (Searle & Ward, 1990; Pedersen et al., 2011).

### **Common Sources of Acculturative Stress**

The challenges experienced by international students may be largely anticipated to be of a similar nature, but differ greatly in the degree which they are experienced (Church, 1982). Existing literature on the acculturative stressors faced by international students include the following: language and culture, academic stress, discrimination, and isolation (Eustace, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2013).

#### **Language and Culture**

Language barriers are one of the first challenges most international students face upon entering a host culture, especially if they are not accustomed to speaking the native language (Chen, 1999). A lack of language proficiency affects the social ability of the international student to interact with peers and educators, which can lead to stressors in other areas such as academics (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The pressure is increased when

accents affect the ability of people in the host culture to understand and communicate with the international student, and vice versa (Eustace, 2007). Also, a lack of background and contextual knowledge related to the host culture and language can impair the adjustment of international students, who may find it difficult to engage in conversations with their host counterparts that involve slang or other culture-related topics (Yan & Berliner, 2013).

### **Academic Stress**

While academic stress is not limited to international students and can be experienced by all university students, it is likely to be heightened for international students due to stressors such as language and a new academic environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Other factors involve differences in teaching styles and student-educator relationships, as well as the pressure of expectations, both self-formed or increased by family or university of origin (Chen, 1999; Eustace, 2007). Expectations of educational services that are unmet have also been found to affect depression and decreased adaptation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward et al, 2001).

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is one of the more significant problems faced by international students in a variety of host countries (Church, 1982). Rhonda Sutton's (2002) focus group study involving international students at North Carolina State University found that international students experienced different forms of harassment and discrimination, some more blatant than others. Within the international student body, it has been found that different groups of students experience different levels of discrimination: students from India, Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America tend to report higher rates of

perceived discrimination in contrast with local or European international students (Hanassab, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Sutton, 2002). This perceived discrimination leads to several reactions, including group-based responses such as the strengthening of identity with others who share the same stigma, or individual attempts to hide that group membership (Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt & Spears, 2001).

### **Isolation**

Cross-cultural differences can affect the creation of strong social bonds such as relationships and friendships and subsequently lead to a deepening of acculturative stress (Eustace, 2007). When international students are unable to establish successful contact with host nationals, higher levels of isolation and loneliness are often felt, increasing acculturative stress (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). These feelings of isolation are exacerbated when students are reluctant to rely on familiar support systems such as family in their home countries as they do not want to be a cause of worry for their families (Davenport, 2005; Eustace, 2007). Some studies have revealed that under these circumstances, most international students tend to turn to co-national or multi-national friendships for social support as these are less stressful in adjusting to (Coles & Swami, 2012; Jetten et al., 2001; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

### **Socio-Cultural and Demographic Variables in Acculturative Stress**

Berry et al. (1987) has also argued that certain demographic variables such as age and gender can predict the acculturative stress of international students. In addition, factors that arise during acculturation such as the length of stay in the domestic culture and existing social support structures are also influences on acculturative stress (Eustace, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). The existing literature on the influence of these



characteristics on acculturative stress therefore also includes the factors of age, gender, duration of stay and social support (Berry et al., 1987; Eustace, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

### **Age**

According to Berry (1997), the age of an individual is an important factor in influencing acculturation. He argued that age positively correlated with the acculturative problems experienced by an individual, which meant that individuals who were younger had fewer difficulties acculturating in comparison with older individuals (Berry, 1997). Studies have also found that older international students have higher difficulties in adjustment to new host cultures – for example, Sumer, Poyrazli and Grahame's (2008) study in international students found that younger individuals experienced less acculturative stress than the older students, possibly because the younger students were more flexible, receptive and socially involved. However, this point is debatable as studies such as Church's (1982) research have also pointed out that younger students may have more acculturative difficulties due to a lack of maturity and challenges in coping with responsibilities. In addition, some research in the area of acculturative stress has also demonstrated that there is no significant relationship between age and acculturative difficulties (Eustace, 2007, Yeh & Inose, 2003).

### **Gender**

The research on the variable of gender is mixed as to whether gender plays a significant role in affecting acculturative stress. Some studies have argued that females have a higher likelihood of experiencing greater stress than males due to cultural-related differences such as expectations of gender roles (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 1987). In

contrast, other studies have showed that male students also experience higher forms of acculturative stress related to immigration or academic success (Yan & Berliner, 2013). However, there is also the argument that gender differences do not have a significant relationship with acculturative stress in the overall acculturative process (Eustace, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zimmermann, 1995).

### **Duration of Stay**

Studies have also revealed mixed findings about the effect of duration of residence in a host culture on acculturative stress. Oberg (1960) argued that the longer the duration of stay in a host culture, the higher the potential for positive outcomes of acculturation, as individuals would most likely have passed through different stages of adjustment. With a longer term of stay, higher levels of familiarity with the local social and physical environment would help to buffer the intensity of acculturative stress initially experienced upon entering the domestic culture (Oberg, 1960; Searle & Ward, 1990). Conversely, other studies have shown that the duration of stay in the local community does not have an influence on the perceptions of adjustment, and time may not be a significant factor in affecting the acculturation process (Zimmermann, 1995).

### **Social Support**

Social support is a significant factor in facilitating the acculturative process and can be a way to buffer acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Eustace, 2007). When international students enter a new culture, they leave behind their existing forms of social support such as families and friends, and have to establish new social networks and relationships (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Contact with host nationals has been demonstrated to play a significant role in the successful adaptation of international

students through the development of social networks and required social skills (Church, 1982; Coles & Swami, 2012; Eustace, 2007). Searle and Ward (1990) also found that international students who established forms of social support in the domestic culture had increased levels of host cultural knowledge and identification with the host culture, which subsequently decreased their difficulties of adapting.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an outline of the academic literature on which this study is built, offering some insight into the depth and complexity of the acculturation process. It added to the understanding of the international student's experience by exploring pertinent concepts related to the nature of acculturation and challenges in sojourner adjustment. The academic foundation laid in this chapter provides a base upon which I center the lived experiences of my participants and assists in refining my research design, which will be described in detail in the following chapter on methodology.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter focuses on the research methodology utilized in the study: research design, selection of participants, sampling, data collection and analysis, and accounting for researcher role and bias.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to explore the stressors faced by international students in acculturating to a foreign environment. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) noted the importance of the researcher's perspectives to the research formed through interactions between researcher and participant. This is exemplified through the use of raw data in theoretical memos and a literary writing style to maintain the participants' narratives and to best evocate their experiences. By using a qualitative design, the concerns of international students were allowed to emerge on their own, which formed a better picture of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). The study gives an insight into particular acculturative stressors that is experienced by international students and is not meant to be extended to the entirety of the international student population.

### **Interviews**

Interviewing is a common tool for data collection in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). A mix of informal and formal interviews was conducted over the course of the study. Informal interviews, being unplanned and often accidental, have been found to assist in providing some of the most useful information in a qualitative study (Crane & Angrosino, 2002). In this study, they often occurred in my daily interactions with international students and formed a large part of my field notes. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), informal interviews provide information on "the

meaning of observed behaviors, interactions, artifacts and rituals, with questions emerging over time as the investigator learns about the setting” (p. 315). These informal interviews later assisted in narrowing down and selecting participants for formal interviews that supplemented my research.

Formal interviews involve the selection of specific participants and are generally planned at a designated time and location (Crane & Angrosino, 2002; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). A semi-structured interview format was chosen involving an explanation of the goals of the study, along with pre-planned, open-ended questions. Other questions were allowed to arise as the conversation progressed. One formal interview was conducted with each selected participant individually on campus or in surrounding areas nearing the end of the study abroad semester. These spanned about an hour or more in duration. Choosing an individual in-depth interview over a group interview allowed for the emergence of social and personal concerns that differed from individual to individual. In addition, the qualitative nature of the research process and the initial data analysis and collection led to altered or new interview questions as patterns or themes emerged that deepened my understanding of the subject (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In the aftermath of the interview when I needed further clarification of opinions or when new questions arose, these were asked via emails or private messages in Facebook.

### **Participants**

There were a total of 21 participants mentioned in this study. The sample used in formal interviews for this study involved the selection of 11 individuals in Korea University (KU) and Al Akhawayn University (AU). Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of participants deemed to possess qualities that would maximize the detail

and depth of information to answer the questions of the study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). There were 3 males and 8 females involved in formal interviews, out of which 10 were students and 1 was a professor. Prior to the interviews, I had established working relationships with these participants through informal interviews and daily interactions. I chose participants who were fluent in English, communicated well and who displayed a capability to be introspective and reflect on their surroundings. All participants had either previous experiences studying abroad or were currently studying abroad or teaching in a foreign culture (see Appendix A for a table with more detailed information).

Regarding informal interviews, about 10 students I met throughout my study abroad year were mentioned in this study (see Appendix B for more detailed information). I met the majority of these informants through international student orientations or classes on both campuses in South Korea and Morocco.

### **Context**

This study involved two institutions in two different contexts: Korea University in Seoul, South Korea, and Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. I spent four months in each university in a study abroad year from August 2012 to May 2013. Prior to and after the study abroad year, I studied in the University of Dayton, located in Dayton, Ohio.

Korea University, a private research university located in Seoul, South Korea, was established in 1905 and had two campuses separate from each other, one in Anam and one in Sejong. The campus I attended during my semester abroad from August to December 2012 was the main campus located in Anam. The total student population of

the university numbered around 25,399 undergraduate and 9,896 graduate students, according to 2010 data from the school's website. In addition, about 40% of the classes in the university were conducted in English. Students who studied abroad in the university had the option of international dormitories or living off campus in hostels. The international dormitories were air-conditioned and coed – one offered triples, which were rooms for three students, and community bathrooms, while the other was suite-style and had double and single rooms with semi-private bathrooms. In the second dormitory that I stayed at, females and males were separated by floor, had separate elevators and were not allowed on floors where the opposite sex resided. Students had the option of purchasing a meal plan, but as the streets with food stores and restaurants were just outside of campus most study abroad students chose not to.

Al Akhawayn University located in Ifrane, Morocco, was the first English-language, independent international university in the country to be based on the American system. The school was founded in 1995 and had a student population of 1833 as of 2012 data on the school's website, of about 10% whom were international students. While I was in Al Akhawayn University from January to May 2013, most study abroad students lived in one of many small dormitories on campus, and these dormitories were sex-segregated, which meant females and males were not allowed to enter each other's dormitories. Most international students were paired with Moroccan roommates in double rooms with connecting bathrooms. All study abroad students had to purchase a meal plan as part of their stay in the university, and the campus was relatively isolated, with the nearest eating areas within the range of ten to fifteen minutes walking distance.

## Data Collection

Data was collected for a period of eighteen months, beginning early April 2012 and ending September 2013. Prior to collecting data, I received the approval of the University of Dayton's Institutional Review Board for ethical research practice (Appendix C). For my formal interviews, each participant was given an informed consent form to review and sign, and a second copy to keep for their records (Appendix D). The second copies of the consent forms were provided in digital copies. Before conducting the formal interviews, I explained the purpose of the study and outlined my goals for the use of the results. I also offered a future digital copy of the completed study (Creswell, 2009). Each participant was given the option to choose a pseudonym to ensure anonymity in the final presentation of the research data. I assigned the participants in informal interviews pseudonyms of my own choosing, ensuring that their identities were not compromised.

The first phase of data collection involved on-site participant-observation. Upon arrival at the study abroad site, I began taking notes on a regular basis. My notes were recorded in a journal that remained confidential throughout the research process. I observed interactions between international students, domestic students and professors, selecting three sites at each of the countries I was in for initial in-depth observations. These sites involved eating places on and off campus, specific places students tended to go to socialize, and classrooms where student dynamics were easily visible. These sites were where some of the most prevalent interactions between students took place (Crane & Angrosino, 2002). Besides these locations, my notes also consisted of personal interactions with domestic and international students. Crane and Angrosino (2002)



presented participant-observation to be more than a specific plan of action, more like a way to live in the field where on-site research is taking place. I used this principle in conducting my research. To become familiar with and gain a more balanced view of the challenges experienced by other international students, I cultivated friendships with people, some of who would become key informants in my research (Crane & Angrosino, 2002).

From my participant-observation fieldwork, I selected a few participants for formal interviews. I held face-to-face interviews with each participant. These interviews were conducted at coffee shops located either on campus or close to campus and in student lounges in campus housing. I transcribed the interviews myself and coded the files referencing Glaser's (1978) coding methods, allowing themes to emerge on their own. I used these themes in developing the subsequent stages of research. As my research progressed, I notified my participants of updates or checked in with them if I required the clarification of any doubts.

### **Data Analysis**

The large amount of data included in the study made its analysis challenging. This consisted of the following: field notes I took in South Korea and Morocco over eight months, with about four months spent on-site in each location; informal conversations and events that I recorded as particularly meaningful to my study; and formal interviews.

Using Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory coding methods, I began with the collected data and allowed ideas to develop that were then recorded as memos. Following Charmaz's (2006) approach, I broke my coding into several levels: initial, focused and theoretical. In the initial level of coding, I focused on what the data suggested,

referencing the data closely and using gerunds in my coding (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). I also utilized constant comparative methods of data analysis, comparing several interviewee responses and my field notes to gain better understanding (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). As I did this, my initial research questions began to change. I initially began with the intent of studying differences in intercultural communication patterns between students in South Korea and Morocco. As my analysis progressed, however, I found that these differences in communication affected the adjustment of students, including myself, to a foreign culture and played a role in becoming acculturative stressors.

In focused coding, I used the gerunds I had earlier to narrow my focus and develop the more significant codes I had. I compared between forms of data and data and codes (Charmaz, 2006). I began with descriptive concepts that were later replaced by abstract ones as I continued my data analysis (Glaser, 1978). These generated ideas were referenced by the data and categories were continuously refitted, helping to narrow the focus of the study (Glaser, 1978).

In the final theoretical stage of coding, I attempted to avoid selecting data to fit preconceived themes so that the data could speak for itself (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Following the principle of grounded theory, I allowed the data to guide the theoretical analysis (Glaser, 1978).

From my initial topic of intercultural communication patterns, I generated several themes, including differing conflict resolution styles that affected interactions between students and an emphasis on individualism or collectivism in one culture as opposed to another. Additional themes included concerns with linguistic inability affecting relationships between people, and concerns over the concepts of appearance and

reputation. As analysis progressed, the overarching topic of acculturative stressors of international students was allowed to emerge on its own that encompassed all of these themes.

### **Trustworthiness**

To reinforce the validity and reliability of the qualitative study, I took several measures to ensure trustworthiness. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the criteria used for evaluating trustworthiness should be different from that used in the quantitative tradition (Krefting, 1991). In providing trustworthiness to my study, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model for trustworthiness of qualitative data, which emphasized four factors: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility is established through testing the findings against several groups or persons from which data was drawn (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The confidence of the researcher in the truth of the findings for the subjects, informants and context is essential (Krefting, 1991). In this study, I utilized Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method to compare themes from interviews with multiple informants. I further compared these interviews with field notes that I had taken in all three countries. Due to the length of my study abroad experience, I engaged in prolonged engagement allowing me to check perspectives and to discover more sensitive information as rapport with my informants was established (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability is the ability to apply the findings to future contexts or with other groups (Krefting, 1991). In this study, I attempted to construct rich description so that future researchers may access the data easily. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is more pertinent to the future researcher planning to transfer the findings

to another population or context than the researcher of the original study (Krefting, 1991). As this study aimed to describe the lived experience of individuals, transferability is not as necessary here.

Dependability is defined as the consistency of the findings if the research was repeated with the same subjects or in a similar context (Krefting, 1991). Because qualitative research is often faced with variables that are unexpected, it focuses on the uniqueness of the lived experience instead of identical repetition (Krefting, 1991). This means that dependability is reliant on the methods of data gathering, analysis and interpretation. In this study, I utilized triangulation in ensuring the limitations of one data collection method would be compensated by others (Krefting, 1991). Three forms of data collection took place: informal interviews, formal interviews and participant-observation field notes.

Neutrality was essential to establishing confirmability in the study. In addition to my raw data from interviews and field notes, I utilized reflexive analysis through regular journaling, recording my engagements with my surroundings and the students I came into contact with. I reflected on the correspondences I had with these informants, comparing these to my own experiences and included my own comments, personal thoughts and feelings about these exchanges. I also reflected on my own experience as an international student in the U.S., comparing the initial challenges I faced to the stressors experienced by me and my informants in my study abroad experience to get as much information as possible about the nature of acculturative stressors. The journals I kept included my own experiences, how they affected me and how they translated as stressors on my own experiences as a study abroad student. They also helped me to check the influences of the

stressors I experienced on my data, the most significant stressor being the death of a parent while I was undertaking this research which affected me psychologically and emotionally. Utilizing reflexive analysis was a way to ensure that I maintained awareness of my influence on the data and sustain objectivity in order to get the clearest picture possible of the results I obtained. It also helped me to check researcher bias as the study progressed.

### **Conclusion**

Utilizing a combination of firsthand interviews, intense participant-observation and field notes, this study attempts to display a detailed account of the acculturative experiences of international students in a foreign culture. This chapter elaborated on the research methodology for the study and outlined the research design, participants, data collection and analysis and trustworthiness.

## Chapter 4: Findings

I present the findings from my research in this section. The initial questions guiding this research focused on studying the intercultural communication patterns between college students in South Korea and Morocco. These comprised of the following:

1. What is the level of nonverbal communication present during interpersonal communication?
2. What are the communication preferences regarding discussion and conflict?
3. What are the cultural values and assumptions within the culture that influence behavior?
4. How does native language play a part in the representation of physical and social reality?

In the process of data collection, it became clear that these were factors that affected how students adjusted to a foreign culture. The differences in communication styles between them and their peers from the domestic culture impacted on their psychological and sociological adjustment, inducing stress.

This led me to reformulate my questions to examine the types of stressors that affected international students in adjusting to a new environment. Students currently on study abroad in a foreign country different from their country of origin, or students who had studied abroad previously were also classified as international students as they had to adjust to the foreign culture in a short span of time. When I began examining these stressors, I found that students also varied in their methods of coping, which led me to ask the second research question: How do students adapt or cope with these stressors?

In this chapter, I begin by exploring the qualities and characteristics of stressors faced by international students studying abroad or who had studied abroad on campuses of South Korea and Morocco. Next, I provide data to illustrate how and to what extent these stressors are experienced. As my focus during data collection was on the differences in intercultural communication patterns, there will be linkages between my initial research questions and reformulated questions as I present the data. For example, I will explain how different emphases on punctuality led to dissatisfaction and conflict between students from South Korea and Morocco as some study abroad students viewed the concept of time differently from domestic students in these countries, and some attributed being punctual with the concept of respect. When they perceived others from a different culture being late, they felt disrespected and this impacted on their communication with students from the foreign culture.

I permitted my data to reveal my findings per my data collection methods. In conducting research, the first thing I addressed was the perceived differences in intercultural communication patterns between college students. I examined how the preferences for one style of communicating affected the communication process between students from different cultures. I began to collect information on how these preferences affected their adjustment to the domestic culture and on how these appeared to affect their experiences.

### **Characteristics of the International Student Population**

In the formal interviews I conducted, one of the first questions I asked related to the intent of studying abroad in the specific culture. Some students said they had an interest in the new culture, and these interests were spurred by a range of reasons

including first-hand contact with people from the culture, familiarity with the culture, a desire to be somewhere different and a desire to learn more about the region the country was in.

For example, Claire, an American female student, hosted a Korean exchange student for a year in the U.S. before she chose to study abroad in South Korea. During this period, they became good friends, which led to an increased interest in the Korean culture. Also, Claire mentioned she had become interested in Korean pop culture: she listened to Korean pop, termed as Kpop, and watched Korean television dramas. Similarly, Ashley, another female American, had been in the Korean Student Association in the U.S. and had previous contact with a student from South Korea.

Sandra, who was born in South Korea and returned to the country for the first time since 2004, said she loved the Korean culture and was fluent in the language. Other students were interested in specific areas of learning: Betty, a Nigerian student who attended a U.S. university and studied abroad for a semester in South Korea, said she was interested in the media production in South Korea, while Amy, who was born in South Korea and moved to the U.S. at a young age, had been prepared to go to Morocco since her sophomore year and had a deep interest in its politics.

A few students mentioned studying abroad to explore a new culture. Mary, an American female student, had studied abroad previously in Spain, but was not satisfied with that experience. She chose to study abroad in South Korea because of exposure to its television programs, which contributed to an interest in the culture. Likewise, Samuel, a male South Korean student who had studied in the U.S. for a couple of years, chose to



study in Morocco for a year because he wanted to explore a different culture besides the U.S. and South Korea.

Other students I encountered who studied abroad mentioned academic and financial-related motivation. For example, Madison, a female American student who was studying abroad for the first time, said that she wanted to go to Australia, but her university did not have exchange programs with universities in that country. She chose to study abroad in Morocco instead, as there were classes related to her major that she could receive transfer credit and financial assistance for. Likewise, Seth, an American male student interested in studying Arabic in an immersive environment, had Morocco as his only choice due to travel limitations imposed by his university on countries in North Africa and the Middle East at the time.

### **Differences in Intercultural Communication**

Upon beginning my research, I asked each of the student participants to describe some of the differences in intercultural communication they experienced between that of their country of origin, the culture they were familiar with, and the foreign culture they studied abroad in. I wanted to know how they understood intercultural communication, and what aspects were particularly significant for them. Most students utilized adjectives and examples to outline their experiences with differences in intercultural communication.

For example, Sandra, who moved to the U.S. from South Korea and who returned for the first time since 2004, used the term “high-context” to compare South Korean culture with American culture. She defined this meaning of high-context:

In Korea, you don't need to finish sentences. People are expected to notice what you mean and show your reaction in some way. But in the U.S., things have to be pointed out, like for example in the U.S. thesis statement. In Korea, essays don't need to mention the whole point until the end. You have to read carefully to understand.

Similarly, Jen, a female Korean student who moved to China and received a U.S. education at an international school, expressed the differences in communication styles as differences in linguistic expression. Like Sandra, she used essay-writing as an example to illustrate the differences in written expression between Korean and American culture:

When you look at academic essays, the language is more sophisticated, more passive. When writing English essays, we're always expected to use more active sentences. In Korea, we're more descriptive and it's more like how I did it, but in the U.S., it's focused on what I did.

Ashley and Claire, both female American students studying abroad in South Korea, mentioned humor as a factor that influenced intercultural communication. Claire said, "Americans are more sarcastic and that doesn't translate very well." Betty, a female Nigerian student studying in a U.S. university who chose to study abroad for a semester in South Korea, described differences in conflict resolution styles as part of intercultural communication:

In Korea, conflict is scary, because direct conflict is avoided but it's still made to seem passive. In Nigeria, we are blunt, more expressive.

Sunny, a female Korean student who lived in the U.K. and the Philippines for several years before returning to South Korea, and Mary, a female American student

studying abroad in South Korea, brought up individualistic and collectivistic tendencies as differences relating to intercultural communication. Mary noted that students in the U.S. didn't care as much for someone else's opinion, but in interactions with Koreans she found they were more reserved and observed how others reacted. She thought this might be because the U.S. culture was more individualistic as compared to the community-based Korean culture. Similarly, Sunny linked this self-consciousness to a need for being accepted into a community but also pointed out that communication styles differed between regions of South Korea. She said, "In Busan, people are friendlier and less self-conscious, but in Seoul, they are more appearance-focused."

Jacob, a male professor from the U.S. teaching in Morocco, mentioned body language as a factor in intercultural communication. He said, "Hand gestures are very important in Morocco. They emphasize with their hands." Amy, a female student studying abroad in Morocco who moved to the U.S. from South Korea when she was about thirteen, outlined the initial differences she perceived as mostly physical. She said, "I like hugging people and I'm really touchy with my guy friends in the U.S. but not here."

In contrast, Samuel, a Korean male student studying abroad in Morocco, cited personal space as one of the things he noticed immediately. He said, "I can feel the other person behind me when I'm standing in line. They are so close, it is uncomfortable."

Comparing Samuel's observations with Amy's made me realize there were different levels of physical closeness within communication, some of which were acceptable while others were not approved of. Amy described attempting to greet a male Moroccan student she'd just met in a club and being forcibly pushed away. She had

attempted the “Darija kiss”, the Moroccan greeting between friends and family by air-kissing both cheeks. Her recount also made me wonder about the appropriate levels of intimacy between sexes in Morocco. Between males, Samuel mentioned handshakes as a common form of greeting between himself and Moroccans, but also notably said that hugging was rare and he thought it was adapted from Western television programs.

Comparing both accounts also raised the possibility of cultural identification influencing intercultural communication behaviors: while both students were ethnically Korean, Amy had spent a far longer time in the U.S. and identified herself as American, while Samuel studied abroad in the U.S. for two years and identified himself strongly as Korean. In referencing this idea with my field notes and informal interviews, I found that most international students I encountered related their sense of cultural identity to expectations of how people should communicate and behave. When these expectations were not met or differed from the cultural reality that they were exposed to, they began to feel or display signs of discomfort, which sometimes accumulated and became an aversion to a specific aspect of a culture.

As I identified characteristics of intercultural communication that particularly affected students attempting to integrate into a foreign cultural environment, I began also to examine other stressors that affected the adjustment of these students, some of which lay outside intercultural communication and included difficulties related to discrimination, academics and finances. In order to understand these acculturative stressors, I attempted to determine the characteristics of the international student community I was dealing with in order to develop a more comprehensive view of problems that might be individual or group-specific.

### **Acculturative Stressors**

As I discovered more about the differences in intercultural communication experienced by students, I began to explore the effects these differences had on them. As they related their experiences with intercultural communication to me, most students inserted their opinions of the differences they encountered and expressed some form of discomfort subconsciously through terms they used in their description. These experiences were examples of the acculturative stressors that influenced the students' adjustment to the host culture.

#### **Language**

Most international students I encountered mentioned language barriers as the first pressing problem they faced. In the context of South Korea and Morocco, the majority of the students I interviewed or observed spoke English fluently or considered English their native language. These students on short-term study abroad programs raised this as a pertinent issue: they had little or no knowledge of the language used in daily conversation and were unable to communicate effectively with their peers in the other culture. In addition, most of these students took classes conducted in English, with the exception of foreign language classes at the basic or intermediate level.

**Impact on intercultural relationships. *Communication difficulties.*** Language barriers played a prominent role in communication difficulties and affected the formation of positive relationships between students from different cultures. Most international students who studied abroad were fluent in English. For those studying abroad in Morocco, they found that most Moroccan students in the university were similarly fluent in the language, while international students who studied abroad in South Korea

discovered that their Korean counterparts tended to be more uncomfortable in expressing their ideas in English and resorted to speaking Korean more often.

Samuel pointed out that he did not really mind his Moroccan classmates speaking in Darija, the Moroccan dialect made up of a mixture of Arabic and French, if they were in project meetings. He said:

My Moroccan friends speak to me in English. If I were in a project and not close with the other members, they might speak Darija because they're more comfortable in it. But that's ok. I picked up some Darija too.

In contrast, students who studied abroad in South Korea mentioned the language barrier to be more visible. The Korean students they encountered were not as comfortable in expressing themselves in English. Fear of embarrassment was cited by both Korean and American students that I interviewed. Sandra pointed out that many Korean students were uncomfortable in English and afraid of being judged on their English ability, which was why she thought they avoided communicating in English. She said:

They know about grammar in English, but they are so focused on grammar and not making mistakes and having people looking down on them that they don't want to talk. It's about self-perception, about others judging them. They are afraid.

Likewise, Claire mentioned that even though she was interested in the culture, she was embarrassed to speak Korean to another Korean student. She said:

I prefer to speak English because I'm more comfortable in it. I think it's the same with Korean students. They're more comfortable in Korean. I respect them when they try and speak English to me.

This fear of embarrassment and language inability led to difficulties in the establishment of intercultural friendships. Mary pointed out that she did not have friends who were Korean in some classes, despite the majority of her classmates being Koreans. She said, “It’s difficult to approach them.” However, she also mentioned that in classes which she had friends, they were fluent in English and that allowed for smoother communication.

Mary’s account led me to observe that sharing a common language played a major role in the formation of cross-cultural friendships for many international students. In addition, I also discovered that multinational friendships were more prevalent between international students because of the shared ability to communicate in English.

***Humor.*** Many students cited humor and the use of sarcasm as factors which caused problems in making friendships. Ashley said, “The key to friendship is humor and a common language to fit in.” She noted that what was defined as humor differed greatly between cultures and did not always translate, citing as slapstick humor as an example that was found in the U.S. but not necessarily accepted in other cultures. She said that American humor was more sarcastic and focused on the physical.

For Jen, differing senses of humor were a potential source of conflict in intercultural communication. She mentioned a situation in which she was with a group of students, and one particular male student made a sexual joke. She said:

I was shocked. In Korea, people don’t make jokes like that. They never talk about one’s sexual life, at least not directly like that. I think the laughing points differ between cultures. Also, talking about someone’s parents in jokes is insulting – Koreans will really get into a fight over that.

For Jen, these differences could also mean being disrespectful or even offensive, which posed potential problems to intercultural communication. Jacob and Amy also pointed out that sarcasm in particular was not taken as well in Morocco due to its risk of being misinterpreted. Jacob said:

I'm a little more informal with students. But I don't use sarcasm all that much. It's taken at face value here and they sometimes find it offensive. I might use a little bit of irony though.

**Impact on academics. *Inability to understand class lectures.*** Students who studied abroad in South Korea arrived in the university with the assumption that their Korean peers would be fluent in English and that class discussions would be conducted solely in English. Most did not expect the frequent use of Korean by their professors or classmates in lessons. Mary described her first day of one particular class that gave her a “shock”:

I was the only international student in the class. The professor walked in and started speaking in Korean. I was stunned. I wondered if I was in the right class. I raised my hand to check if I was in the right class, and I was. It was supposed to be conducted in English! I asked him to translate everything he just said into English for me. He did after that but when Koreans asked questions in Korean he answered them in Korean and they didn't translate it for me unless I asked.

To Mary, it was unfair that the class was conducted in a language she did not understand, even though on the syllabus it stated it was taught in English. She felt like she was dismissed as a minority and attributed these feelings to her professor's actions, which increased her visibility as an international student.



*Effect on group discussions.* Most international students studying abroad participated in group projects required of classwork. For many of them, the language barrier excluded them from understanding what was going on and prevented effective communication with their classmates.

*Exclusion.* Betty's feelings of being excluded involved group projects that were required as part of her coursework. While taking a media theory class, she was often left out of group discussions by her peers.

I tried in the beginning to ask questions and to participate but I just gave up because they left me out. I only have a minor part in the presentation and I've no idea what is going on in the project. They talk to each other in Korean for about an hour or two hours, and I'm sitting right there, and I don't know what's going on. And they'll translate maybe two lines into English for me and that's it. I have no idea what's happening or what we're doing in my project. I actually feel kind of bad for them because I can't speak good Korean.

Betty's account provided me with an understanding of her dissatisfaction as an international student unable to participate or learn as a member of a team. She felt useless to the team and relegated to the status of an outsider who was just expected to follow the instructions laid out by the other members of the group. These feelings of inadequacy and frustration had a negative influence on her perception of Korean students and led to generalized assumptions about behavior in the culture:

In Korea, people don't try. They either pretend they can't hear you, ignore you, or if they feel like you would give trouble they're really polite. Sometimes they stare

at you and turn away and talk to another Korean. Maybe they're shy. I don't know.

Betty's exclusion from group projects also led her to turn towards people with common or shared interests and backgrounds, such as other international students and Korean students she met in church. She noted that international students formed a "clique thing", and also observed that she was closest to American students as they were all adapting to the same place and facing the same difficulties in adjustment, despite their different cultural backgrounds.

Betty's observations made me reflect on the role of social exclusion in assisting in the creation of bonds due to a shared foreignness among international students. Many study abroad students, myself included, found that it was somewhat easier to form friendships with other study abroad students due to our common challenges and often a common language of communication.

*Differing understandings of work.* Sandra mentioned that most international students might have trouble with the way group discussions were conducted due to the differing attitudes toward work. Coupled with an inability to understand what was going on, this could lead to added frustration and feelings of isolation. She said:

In Korea, you never talk to strangers but once you are inside certain groups you become very intimate. Chatting in group projects is a Korean thing. Outsiders would feel uncomfortable.

Sandra's clear separation of group versus outsider also made me see that language was one of the many things that made up a group identity. Speaking a common language enforced feelings of belonging and identifying with others, leading to the formation of

social groups and the development of friendships. I began to explore the significance of language in affecting these feelings of belonging and acceptance for students.

**Impact on belonging. *Acceptance.*** Sunny saw spoken language as a defining aspect of culture. Her view of culture was that it had aspects that differed from area to area and group to group. Sunny provided me with an understanding that language was an influence that shaped culture to be different among regions of South Korea, between universities and within communities on a campus. She referred to Korea University as having its own culture:

The KU culture speaks more Korean, not English. They expect foreigners to speak Korean if they want to integrate. I think if international students only speak English it will be more difficult for them to make close friends with Koreans.

Sunny brought up the expectation that domestic students had for others coming into their culture to initiate communication. Her explanation noted the significance of language as key to being accepted into the domestic student community. I experienced this first-hand in trying to join the university student-run guitar club. Along with two American students, I attended the welcome dinner for potential guitar club members held in a restaurant cum bar. When we entered, the leader of the ensemble stepped in front of us and asked if we could speak any Korean. Upon learning none of us could understand it, he looked upset and serious and bowed deeply, informing us politely that it would be difficult to communicate with other members. He said, "Please come back when you have studied Korean harder." At that point in time, we were very upset and this added to the feeling of being outsiders in the domestic culture.

The guitar club leader's statement amplified the exclusiveness of the language – it was a key to becoming a member of a social network and to acceptance. Like Sunny, he indicated the idea of initiative and the expectation that we had to work towards being accepted and becoming a part of the majority. The notion that our individual differences would pose a problem to the coordination of the group and disrupt its collective efficiency reflected the need for standards of conformity to be met, and language was one of these standards.

*Notions of conformity.* Fluency in a language did not always guarantee acceptance into a community. Within the South Korean culture, both Jen and Sandra noted that choosing to speak one language over another was sometimes seen as an attempt to show off that was socially unacceptable. Sandra pointed out that Korean society was homogeneous while Jen said:

We have the term “soybean” in Korea to describe Korean girls buying Starbucks. It means something like attention-seeking. If you use English even if you are Korean, it's the same thing.

Jen's account implied that there was some association between the use of a company's product and one's own reputation, which I found very interesting. She observed that there was an association between Korean students buying American products such as Starbucks coffee, and this meant aligning oneself with a certain reputation which was favorable to some but not to others. Jen noticed that the buying of Starbucks coffee implied an attempt to set a person apart from others by associating his or her self with characteristics of the Western world, and this was seen as attention-

seeking because this individual was attempting to make himself or herself look better than others.

Philip, a male student from the U.K. who had been studying in Korea University for two and a half years, pointed out that English, which he saw as characteristically Western, had an elitist standing in South Korea due to its relatively homogeneous society. He said:

I believe there is a pro-white bias, and sometimes I'm treated better because I'm white. It's even quite funny sometimes when Korean elites speak poor English only when I'm around. I just see it as showing off.

Like Jen, Philip attributed status to the use of the English language and implied that the use of English or Western-influenced objects was seen as nonconformist and viewed by others in the community to be an attempt to increase their social standing or their reputation.

Conformity was very important in the Korean student population. Both Jen and Sandra implied that language was linked to physical appearance. If a student appeared to look Korean, there was a social tendency to expect that he or she spoke the language and conformed to social behavioral norms. Sandra noted that other Korean students were not used to her speaking English with them or participating actively in the classroom. She said:

They talk about me for talking in class, because students normally don't want to speak in class or to interrupt it. You're not supposed to draw attention to yourself. They think I'm drawing attention because I'm Korean.

Sandra's observation reflected that English and active class participation, as characteristics of Western influence, were seen as elitist to other Korean students. She felt that her actions were frowned upon by her Korean peers as though she looked like one of them, she did not act as she was supposed to. As such, Sandra pointed out that she was closest to Korean friends who had "experienced both cultures", as these were people whom she felt could understand her experiences without judging her actions.

This made me look again at the formation of co-national friendships, as well as multi-national friendships among international students. Sandra's experiences revealed her social exclusion from the Korean community due to her nonconformist behavior, while Betty's previously-mentioned experience revealed her exclusion from the Korean student community due to her language inability. While Betty turned to multi-national friendships due to her shared foreignness with other international students, Sandra formed close friendships with co-nationals, people who were similar to her.

***Physical appearance.*** While other students who were unable to speak the domestic language fluently and saw their inability as a barrier to communication, Sandra's ability to speak the Korean language and her preference to not communicate in it led to her being isolated from her peers. I referenced her account with my field notes, in which I observed that international students whose physical appearance was similar to their peers in a particular culture were held to different social expectations than international students who were physically very different. For example, a Chinese male student I met in one of my classes in Korea University who was in his fourth year mentioned that Koreans were nice – but nicer to "Westerners" than to "Asians". He said:

You have to appear Korean before they accept you. If you look like them but you don't speak like them, you're not one of them. If you don't look like them, it doesn't matter so much if you can't speak their language.

I found this conversation particularly interesting because it was entirely in Chinese and initiated by the student himself upon his realization that I was fluent in the language. Despite not knowing me beforehand, he made an instant connection with me because of my physical appearance and my ability to reply him in his native language. In a way, I was immediately accepted by him as an equal because I met his expectations of how an ethnic Chinese individual should act, even though I was not from China.

### **Nonverbal Communication**

**Time perception.** One of the most visible differences which caused conflict between international and domestic students was their perceptions of time. While I did not initially set out to examine the concept of time, it was brought up by some of the students themselves and became an issue of interest as I continued my research.

**Punctuality.** In particular, the idea of “being on time” veered greatly between cultures – from arriving a few minutes before the stated time to a few minutes to an hour or more after the stated time. Students from the U.S. were particularly affected by the different emphases on time they encountered in their study abroad experience.

For Madison, an exchange student I met in Al Akhawayn University, arriving before or at the stated time was of the utmost importance. Madison was a female American student who was studying abroad for the first time and who had limited experience visiting countries outside the U.S. She openly and constantly expressed her dislike of “Moroccan time”, a term other students coined to describe people's arrival a

half hour to an hour after an agreed time. Madison's aversion to "Moroccan time" was especially evident in a trip that we took with a group of other students to another city.

The morning that we left Marrakesh, we arranged for a cab to pick us up at six in the morning to take us to the bus station, which was twenty minutes away. We arrived at our pick-up spot a little before the agreed time. Half an hour later, the cab was nowhere to be seen, and we were still standing on a deserted street. Madison was by this time extremely angry – she had demanded we take another cab to the station because our bus was due to leave at seven in the morning. Just as she stepped into another cab, our driver appeared. An argument ensued between our arranged driver and the one Madison had flagged down, but we eventually got into our arranged cab and made it to the bus station in time – our bus had also been delayed.

Madison refused to tip our driver, and would constantly refer to that incident and the "lateness" of Moroccans for the rest of the semester, stating that if she were in the U.S. people would always be on time. She refused also to adjust to the notion of "Moroccan time", stating, "I don't want to get myself into the habit of being late even by a few minutes. When I get back to the States, that's gonna be a *big* problem."

For Madison, time was essential – she felt it was extremely important and had to be rigorously followed. Being on time meant being organized and prepared. She liked following a schedule that allowed tasks to be carried out within an arranged period of time: when this was disrupted, she became dissatisfied and uncomfortable, perceiving the disruption in a negative light. Other international students had similar discomfort with adjusting to the different time perceptions. Samuel expressed his frustration with the different concepts of time in the Moroccan university:



When I first came, I wanted to join the soccer team. They said that the practice was at 6:30 p.m. so I arrived a few minutes early at the meeting place. No one was there. I stood there and waited for half an hour. I gave up and was about to leave when they came. 30 minutes late! Oh my God. At least tell me something, you know, so I wouldn't stand there wasting my time.

Samuel's account revealed the different way he treated time as compared to the other Moroccan students. He saw arriving at the stated time as a form of respect, and allowed himself a buffer time to get to the meeting spot, expecting others to do the same. For him, time was a limited and important resource. Samuel also distinguished between varying levels of "being on time". He said, "In Korea when I'm meeting my friends, it is okay to be five minutes late. But for business and teams, you should always go ten minutes early."

Samuel revealed a slightly flexible nature to the Korean concept of time, which was linked to the significance of social hierarchy in the Korean culture. When meeting his peers or social equals, Samuel noted a little more flexibility or allowance given to the stated time. However, in career or work-related situations where a social hierarchy exists, he perceived being early to be extremely important. His reaction to the soccer practice meeting was particularly strong because he attributed the soccer team to be of a similar importance to a business or team-oriented meeting. While his idea of being on time was arrive before the stated time, the Moroccan notion of being on time was to arrive after the agreed time. They perceived time as fluid and limitless: I felt that the best representation of this was in the saying "Insha'Allah", or "Allah (God) willing", a phrase commonly used among Muslim Moroccan students describing the belief that plans would be carried

out if aligned with Allah's wishes. This saying was always invoked when speaking about plans that would occur in the future – if these plans did not work out, this was for the greater good and in part due to Allah's wishes. While international students like Madison and Samuel perceived the importance of time to precede interpersonal relationships, the Moroccans they encountered tended to place an emphasis on relationships over time.

*Time bias towards different groups.* In addition, these relationship-based views of time also differed depending on the type of relationship students had with each other. From my field notes over the few months I spent in Morocco, I experienced being constantly made to wait as an international student. The following example illustrated this:

We were on a spring break trip organized by a university club to the south of Morocco. On the last day of the trip, we stopped at a mall to take a break for lunch before continuing with our bus journey back to the university. We were told to return to the bus at 1 p.m. Two other international students and I returned to the bus at the assigned time and found that our bus driver was nowhere in sight, nor were the other students around. We waited for a while then returned to the mall to find that most of the other students had made a stop at an ice cream store. When we finally made our way back to the bus, it was about 1:45 p.m. We sat in the bus for another 20 minutes growing increasingly annoyed – still some students had not shown up, and one of the American students felt like she needed to go to the bathroom. When we tried to exit the bus, the leader of the club told us we were about to leave, attempting to stop us. We got to the bathroom anyway as the other students were still nowhere in sight. Within the 10 minutes that we were gone, our phones rang incessantly, the club leader repeatedly informing us that the bus was leaving

– ironically enough, when we returned to the bus in a hurry, a couple of other students were still missing. We ended up sitting in the bus for another 15 minutes before they showed up.

This experience, along with others, revealed the different treatments or expectations that people were afforded. International students were expected to arrive at a stated time, while Moroccan students were extended more flexibility. It is possible that this distinction was due to a prioritization of relationships. As international students did not commonly identify with the Moroccan group identity, we were considered to be outsiders as compared to the other students who were late – they were accorded more allowance due to their identity as Moroccans. These varying levels of treatment created a level of animosity felt by some of the other international students I met.

**Personal space.** In my fieldwork, I discovered two types of personal space that affected students. The first, which was more visible, related to physical boundaries: physical distance and the rules of physical contact. The second was revealed through my observation notes and interactions with students, and related to aural boundaries: differing ideas on sonic privacy, and the range of perceptions on what was considered noise, music or just audible elements of daily life.

*Physical boundaries and physical distance.* For some students who studied abroad, differences in the perception and treatment of personal space were among the initial challenges they faced. International students in Morocco who were used to a certain amount of physical distance between themselves and the people they were communicating with often found these changes intrusive and felt uncomfortable with the

close proximity that was prevalent in social settings in Morocco. Amy described one of her first experiences with the Moroccan concept of personal space:

There was just one couch, and the members of my roommate's family and I all sat together on the same couch. We were all really close together. It was kind of crazy.

Similarly, I experienced initial discomfort when I was traveling in Morocco with other students. To get from city to city, grand taxis, trains or buses were normal forms of transportation. Grand taxis were old sedans that traveled with six passengers, which meant two people in the front next to the driver and four crammed into the back. The grand taxi would not leave unless all the seats were paid for or filled. On many occasions, unless we chose to pay for all of the seats, my friends and I would share a taxi with other passengers we didn't know. Any chance of having personal physical space was non-existent, as we would be crammed into the taxi. Having been brought up in cultures where a certain physical distance was always respected, the differences in the Moroccan nature of physical distance made me initially uncomfortable.

In contrast, the concept of personal space in South Korea meant that a certain amount of distance was adhered to, especially in public areas. While taking public transportation such as the subway, I found that people tended to keep to themselves and avoided physical or eye contact with strangers as much as possible, even in peak periods when the trains were crowded. The signs on these forms of public transportation often delimited these physical boundaries as well: one particular sign which I saw often while taking the subway informed passengers not to cross their legs or stretch them out if they were seated in a crowded train, so as to avoid hitting other standing passengers. Physical

space in terms of different color-coded seats were reserved for certain population groups like the elderly and the disabled, and these unspoken rules were strictly adhered to – even when the train was crowded, these seats were always empty unless they were filled by the people in the mentioned groups. Otherwise, sitting in these seats was considered rude and inconsiderate.

This adherence to physical distance applied also to social settings, including nightclubs. Once, Lisa, a female American student whom I was having lunch with, happened to mention the differences in the way people acted in “Korean clubs” and “Western clubs”. She saw “Korean clubs” as clubs in which the dominant customers were Koreans, while “Western clubs” were perceived as clubs with more foreigners. Lisa drew this distinction due to the differences that she experienced while visiting both types of clubs. She said:

In the Korean clubs, Koreans keep to themselves and they maintain their personal space even when dancing. It’s like their personal bubble! I was dancing with this Korean guy and I had a hand on his shoulder, and he was trying as hard as he could not to touch me. It’s so weird. And it’s the opposite in the Western clubs where there are more foreigners, because then there are all these guys who grind against girls.

***Physical boundaries and rules of contact.*** Despite these notions of physical distance, I discovered that there were certain unspoken rules regarding physical contact that students, myself included, had to adjust to. For example, even though Amy’s account noted that physical closeness seemed to be a normal occurrence in public, day-to-day life, other comments she made reflected that this public physical closeness did not necessarily

translate to physical intimacy. Amy mentioned that she liked hugging a lot and was very physical with her male friends in the U.S., but did not attempt to hug people in Morocco, in particular members of the opposite sex. I earlier mentioned in my introduction of Amy her recount of her experience with attempting to greet a male acquaintance with the Darija kiss and being pushed away – this illustrated the particularity of the greeting in that it was meant to be extended to close relatives, family and friends, but rarely used in acquaintanceships and never extended among strangers.

Likewise, while Samuel made the observation that people were physically closer to him in public than he was used to, he also pointed out that there were limits on actual physical contact between individuals. For example, while the Darija kiss was performed between friends and relatives and between sexes, Samuel noted that it was rarely apparent in male-to-male contact. He said:

For guys, there are a lot of handshakes. There's no Darija kiss – maybe only after a long period of time if not meeting. And hugging isn't that common, I think if they do it it's because they see it from the TV.

In the context of South Korea, the differences in physical intimacy sometimes discomforted students. Despite the strict observance of personal physical space in public areas, some students pointed out Korean students were more physically intimate, especially in same-gender relationships.

Jen said that there were “double standards” regarding physical intimacy and physical contact. She said, “Touching between genders is more common than other genders.” Upon comparing my observation notes with her comment, I realized that holding hands among female students were common and a physical way of expressing

emotional closeness, especially if they were good friends. While I did not observe as much physical contact between males, I did notice that male students tended to be more publicly expressive with their affection with females if they were in a relationship. In fact, other students pointed out that there seemed to be a higher prevalence of couples on the street. For example, Alisa, a female American student, said, “It’s almost like dating is a thing here. There are couples everywhere.” I found this very interesting as while public displays of affection were limited to hugging, hand-holding and the like, it was often extremely apparent if two students were together due to their physical gestures such as the male draping his arm around the female and walking down the street, or even while in a café. I also observed that a great deal of the public surroundings and even holidays seemed to be targeted at couples: for example, while I was in South Korea there was the observance of “Pepero” day, a day named after the Korean snack Pepero and similar to the purposes of Valentine’s Day. Students would exchange boxes of Peperos with each other to display affection and love, and restaurants had discounts or meal offers for couples.

*Aural boundaries.* Besides physical boundaries, I also discovered that aural boundaries played an influential factor in affecting students’ experiences while in a foreign culture. Both the cultures of South Korea and Morocco had different unspoken norms regarding aural boundaries, and sometimes these conflicted with what students were used to and had a negative effect on their experiences.

I observed and experienced these negative reactions firsthand while on the previously mentioned spring break trip to the south of Morocco, in which both Moroccan and international students were in a bus for several hours. The bus left at 3 a.m., and I

was expecting to sleep on the journey, as were the other two international students on the bus. What I didn't expect was for a small drum to be produced by a student who began beating loudly on it, and for the other students to begin clapping with enthusiasm and singing at the tops of their voices. At first, we were amused and joined in, but then we got tired, and gradually the amusement became irritation. The incessant beating of the drum and singing continued for the next few days whenever we traveled in the bus. On the last day of the trip, as we were on our way back to the university, the singing and drumming was particularly loud and didn't seem like it was going to cease. The bus stopped for a break, and all the international students got off. Memorably, one of the students said, "God, my head hurts from all that noise. I don't normally feel like this, but right now I really, really want to punch someone." Unfortunately, when we got back on the bus, the break seemed to have re-energized the rest of the students – in addition to the singing and the drumming, they began leaning over their seats, looming over our heads and shouting at each other in order to be heard over the music. Another female international student sitting beside me had reached the limits of her patience. She swore out loud, sat up straight in her seat and shoved the person nearest to her. "Get off! You get on my nerves."

In this case, in addition to discomfort caused by physical closeness, the discomfort caused by the sounds we were unused to added to our irritation. For me, being in a small confined space such as the bus filled with sound that I perceived as disruptive made me claustrophobic, partly also because I was not comfortable with loud sounds, especially the close proximity of drumming. Being brought up in a household and culture where I was used to being as quiet as possible due to the perception of unwanted sound



being intrusive and inconsiderate to other people, I found that my first reaction was to perceive the other students as inconsiderate. However, to the students, the sounds they were making were celebratory and an expression of their enthusiasm – they tried to get us to join in as much as possible by encouraging clapping and singing, and this was meant to go on for as long as possible. As far as I and the other international students were concerned, it was noise and it made our heads hurt, but to them it was music meant to be unifying.

*Sonic privacy.* In addition, the potential intrusive nature of sound affecting one's privacy, or personal aural space, was discovered and mentioned by many students I encountered and my own personal experience. One particular source of conflict which students encountered frequently involved their roommates and their differences in what they considered as noise, music and normal background sound. For instance, Madison mentioned a few times that her roommate disliked her communicating with her family through video calls at night due to her speaking volume being too loud. She said:

She kept sighing really heavily and staring at me. I was like, okay, what? And she said I was being too loud and she couldn't do her homework. So I switched to headphones instead of using the speakers and I kept talking, but she still kept glaring at me. When I finished Skyping she was like, "Can you please talk softer? I can't concentrate." What am I supposed to do, whisper?

While Madison experienced conflict with her roommates due to the perception that she was talking too loudly, other students experienced discomfort because their roommates expressed themselves louder than they did. This was more prevalent in my encounters with students in Morocco as university policy required that they stay with a

Moroccan roommate, while when I was studying abroad in Korea University many international students were placed into single bedrooms or shared apartments with other international students. I found that students who had Moroccan roommates and who were used to a largely silent environment were, like me, discomforted. For example, Alex, a male student from Finland, told me more than once that his roommate, upon knowing he was a heavy sleeper, would invite his friend over to watch a movie and move their desks and chairs around in the room, despite Alex attempting to sleep. Other students commented that their roommates talked much louder on the phone than they were used to, and that sound disturbed their studying or sleep.

I experienced similar sound issues with my own roommate situation. I was used to speaking at a low volume to avoid being disruptive to others, so when she talked at a much louder volume than I did I found it uncomfortable. In particular, she also liked having the background sound of the television on while she studied, and I did not, so I would put in my earphones and listen to music while I studied, creating my own personal sound space that I was more comfortable in. She was very accustomed to sound in her surroundings: her friend would come over, she would leave the television on, and they would be watching something else on her laptop and talking over the sound of the television – for me, it was uncomfortable aurally, especially when I was working on homework, because the sound was so loud it was impossible not to hear it even with earphones in. It was noise to me, but to her it was a normal level of sound that belonged with her surroundings. Sound was meant to be shared.

*Sound as a form of social obligation.* Ashley defined differences in treatment and perception of sound as cultural, and she related this to differences in how people express themselves. She said:

Americans are more expressive. We're very verbal. For example, in concerts, we cheer louder. Here Koreans are quieter. I feel like they cheer when they are supposed to.

Ashley's account also made me realize that sound was also controlled by social obligation. This was visible in several situations in which I observed or encountered the need to control or manage sound in South Korea. Sound privacy connoted respect and consideration for others, and it was a social obligation that individuals had to respect the needs of others, particularly in public.

For example, there was one occasion in which a group of international and Korean students, myself included, traveled to another part of Seoul by subway. One American female student in particular was speaking excitedly in English, and her loud laughter and voice carried throughout the train, which was becoming increasingly crowded. Other passengers began to stare at us, especially her. She didn't notice and carried on talking even though some of the Korean students, while laughing along, told her to speak a little softer. A male passenger who had been sitting and glaring at us stood abruptly and raised his voice, yelling at her in Korean. She was shocked and immediately stopped talking, while the Korean students began apologizing on our behalf. They later informed us that we had been too loud and disturbing the other passengers.

On another occasion, I experienced mild conflict with my Korean housemate. We each had a single bedroom next to each other and shared a common bathroom, and when

I first moved in I was unaware of how thin the walls were. I was humming along to music on my laptop while working in my bedroom one night, and the next morning I discovered a sticky note taped to my side of the mirror. She had written me a note saying very politely and apologetically that she had not been able to sleep the previous night due to the sound I'd been making, and told me to keep it down. After that, I noticed how quiet she was in her own room – I was often unaware she was in her bedroom unless her room lights were turned on. I found this to be a relevant example of how there were certain expectations surrounding the creation of sound. My roommate took special pains to be as quiet as possible so as not to disturb me, treating silence as a form of courtesy and social consideration, and she expected me to do the same in return. Her attribution of social obligation to sound, together with our differing perceptions of what was considering noise versus what was music, caused conflict.

### **Academic Stress**

**Registration problems.** Another area of stress that students faced upon entering a foreign environment was academic-related. For instance, the immediate problems that most students faced in Korea University and Al Akhawayn University included the registration of classes, because these registration processes occurred only when they were at the site of the university they were studying abroad at. This caused difficulties when the classes that students needed for credit transfer were not available or were full.

I encountered this problem myself when I registered for classes in Korea University. Due to being a semester exchange student and not a full-time student, I did not have access to online registration and had to rely on lists of classes from previous years to estimate what classes I would be pre-approved to take while in the university.

After receiving approval for classes I thought I would take in the university, I arrived in South Korea to discover that some of the classes I had planned to take were not available, or not open to exchange students. The physical registration process meant exchange students had to form a line at the international office and wait for student staff to register them for classes. If the classes were not available, these students were placed on a waiting list and told to return the following day. For the entire registration week, I found myself spending an hour to two hours waiting in line at the registration desk, only to be told the class I wanted to register for was full and to be placed on another waiting list.

In addition, the different time zones were difficult to manage, because when study abroad students faced problems regarding the registration of classes and had to email their home universities, it sometimes took days before they would receive a reply. I found this problematic, especially during registration week when I was working on a very limited time span to find new classes to be approved by my dean in the U.S. before I could register for them in South Korea.

Matthew, a German male student I met while in line, said before arriving in Korea University he was unaware that the registration process would be so frustrating. He said:

I haven't been able to get any classes that I need to be transferred. I don't know what's going to happen now, if I will go home or if I will spend a semester here for nothing.

**Coping with schoolwork.** Some students encountered difficulties in coping with their schoolwork while they were abroad, be it understanding school assignments, being unable to handle the amount of work given, or the academic pressure to do well.

*Problems related to foreign language assignments.* For instance, students taking classes which were not in their native language, such as students taking a foreign language class, faced language-learning problems that differed from students who were only taking classes in English. As I took introductory language classes in Korean, Modern Standard Arabic and French while studying abroad, I was able to observe and also face the difficulties that others students faced in learning a new language. For instance, the Korean and Arabic writing systems were both completely different – hangul, the Korean writing system, relied on phonetic letters that formed intelligible characters, and the Arabic script was written from right to left and was an abjad, in which symbols were mostly made up of consonants where the reader would fill in the vowels themselves. In addition, all three languages had sounds which were not present in the English language, as well as different grammar systems.

In the Arabic language class I was in, one American female student found it particularly embarrassing because she was having trouble pronouncing the different sounds of two of the consonant symbols in the language, the guttural “gh” versus the “kh”. Our professor had us individually pronounce each of the Arabic symbols in the classroom, and he refused to move on to the next student until she had managed to pronounce them successfully. For students in intermediate and higher-level language classes, their difficulties were slightly different – they mentioned problems with

grammar, including remembering the use of different tenses, or problems with expanding their vocabulary and speaking fluently.

Learning difficulties varied from student to student. For instance, I didn't face much of a difficulty learning the writing systems or pronunciations of Korean, Arabic and French, possibly because I had prior experience in learning how to write and speak in Mandarin and Spanish, and I could relate my knowledge of the vocabulary from the latter to the newer languages I was learning. Some of the Korean terms, for example, shared similar, though not identical, pronunciations with Mandarin, like the term "sport". I also personally enjoyed learning how to write and speak in Arabic and I had had prior exposure to the language from students from the Middle East I met while studying in the U.S. However, I had difficulty in recalling vocabulary terms, and I would sometimes confuse a word in one language with a word in another, for example in Spanish and French, which I found frustrating.

*Academic pressure to do well.* The pressure of doing well also varied between students from different universities. In the context of language classes, some students were required to take these to fulfil an arts or foreign language requirement, and so faced more pressure to do well. Students who were taking language classes for a language minor or major were also planning or required to continue with the language-learning after they returned to their home universities, which made it a necessity for them to complete their classes to the best of their ability so they could ascend to the next level. In contrast, I chose to take these language classes out of personal interest. My university's credit transfer policy also differed from other universities: while the classes that some students took transferred back to their home universities as grades which counted towards

their grade point average, mine transferred as class credits and did not affect my existing grade point average. Hence, I felt that I encountered less academic stress than other students I encountered.

***Difficulty in managing school workload.*** Certain students I met also mentioned how the new languages they were learning affected their management of schoolwork. Seth, an American male student who was taking a basic course to Arabic and an advanced level course in French, pointed out that learning Arabic disrupted his ability to learn French. He said:

I have to focus so much on learning Arabic that I'm not concentrating hard enough on French. It's annoying. There's also so much work in Arabic class, I'm always spending so much time working on it when I could be reading for French or for Middle Eastern politics. It was a bad idea to take Arabic with French right now... I might do Arabic in the future, but right now I really want to concentrate on French and learning Arabic is really not working.

***Responsibility in group projects.*** Some students faced problems regarding group projects, particularly regarding the idea of responsibility. For example, Madison, who preferred to finish schoolwork ahead of the assigned deadline, found it difficult to work with the other members of her group for a presentation. She said:

I'd prefer to do everything myself – I mean, I don't care if I'm the only one doing it. I told my group mates last week that they were supposed to send me their parts on Friday so I could put them in our slides and edit them, and they still haven't done it. Our presentation is like in two days and I've been emailing and emailing them about it. You know what, I'm just going to go ahead and do it by myself.



Samuel faced a problem of a similar kind. His group mates would leave him to do all the work and he perceived this as irresponsible. He said:

The students don't have any responsibility in group projects. If everyone gets the same grade for one project their responsibility goes down. They made me do all the work, like Photoshop and editing. It's so unfair! I heard that in the Writing Center here they just dump their work and leave.

In addition, Samuel also drew a link between cultural habits to work responsibility. He said:

In Korea, age is important. If one is older he or she becomes the leader. There is social pressure to not say anything and to not volunteer yourself, so we decide the leader based on age. We automatically assume responsibility if we are the oldest in the group.

While Samuel noted that age was a form of determining responsibility in South Korea, I also compared his account of being made to do all the work to Mary's description of group projects in Korea University. While she was studying abroad in South Korea, Mary noted that she had heard horror stories of her friends who were international students in group projects. She said:

I didn't have this experience, but I heard of other people who were in group projects and made to do everything. I heard that all the Koreans spoke Korean and told the international students to do the presentation in English because they were fluent in it.

From both Samuel and Mary's descriptions of group projects, I discovered that part of the academic stress faced by students who were studying abroad and considered

“international” included a form of discrimination. This seemed to manifest itself in different forms: previously, I mentioned Betty’s exclusion from her group project due to her inability to speak Korean, while in this section I found that international students also faced difficulties of the opposite kind – being made to do most of the work when they were a minority in a group.

### **Discrimination and Harassment**

Perceived harassment played a prominent role in accentuating the acculturative stress of many students who studied abroad. In particular, racial discrimination, sexual orientation discrimination and sexual harassment were factors that had a pronounced effect on the study abroad experiences of students.

**Racial discrimination.** As the students I encountered were from a range of ethnicities, I found that perceived discrimination was one factor that appeared consistently across the accounts of these students. Certain students said they faced visibly more discrimination than others. For example, students of a darker skin tone or who had Asian features spoke of being discriminated against at one point or another in my conversations with them, whereas students of lighter coloring made little to no mention of racial discrimination. In fact, sometimes the opposite happened – these students were told that they were “very pretty” and “beautiful” by members of the domestic population. I observed this first-hand on different occasions in both South Korea and Morocco while I happened to be on trips within cities in both countries. For instance, while I was in the subway with another American female friend who was fair and of slender build, a complete stranger who was observing our conversation asked her where she was from, commenting that she was very beautiful. Likewise, while I was in a group of students

traveling within Morocco, Madison's blonde hair and fair skin attracted a lot of positive comments and remarks from people.

In contrast, the attention that other students received seemed to be comparatively more negative. Betty attributed her feelings of being avoided to racial discrimination, pointing to the media as a medium which propagated stereotypes. She related these feelings to both her experiences in South Korea and the U.S. She said:

It depends on what kind of international student you are. African-Americans aren't so easily accepted, but white people are portrayed as what people want to be. There are standards and African-Americans have to conform to that standard.

Some of these acts of perceived discrimination were more explicit than others.

For instance, Samuel said he experienced a lot of discrimination during his one-year study abroad in Morocco. He particularly disliked the "Chinese eyes", which people enacted by pulling the outermost corners of their eyes apart in an exaggerated gesture to make them almond-shaped. Samuel perceived this gesture to be a form of discrimination. He said:

I hate it. They keep doing it, like it's supposed to be funny. Once when I was in a club a girl I didn't know came up to me and did it. I was shocked, I was like what? Why are you doing that?

Alex, who had a female friend of half-Chinese descent working with the Peace Corps in the south of Morocco, also perceived the gesture of "Chinese eyes" as discriminatory. He said:

I think it's so much more difficult for her than for people who are white like me. Every time I talk to her she's complaining about the "eyes" that they keep doing

and all the racist things they say. At least for me people just think I'm German or from somewhere in Europe and they don't do anything.

As a student who appeared Asian, I also experienced what I felt to be harassment of another kind. While I did not experience the "Chinese eyes", I was often presented with comments that targeted my physical appearance or made assumptions about my ethnicity. Some of these were passing remarks that happened while I was walking around on the streets of cities in Morocco in a group of friends who were predominantly American. People would call out random Japanese phrases or constantly address me as "Hey, China!" or "Hey, Japan!" in a bid to get my attention. While sometimes these comments were friendly and I understood them as attempts to draw my attention as a customer, there were other incidents in which I was definitely uncomfortable because I felt like I was being singled out. These incidents sometimes took place on campus.

Once, as I was walking back to my on-campus dormitory from the school café at around eleven at night on a weekday, a car filled with people pulled up next to me as I was on the sidewalk. I recognized the music it was blasting instantly as "Gangnam Style", the South Korean song that had only recently gained international attention at that time. I ignored the car and kept walking, but it followed me. The people in the car began whooping and calling out, "Arigato! Konichiwa!" and other random Japanese phrases. I was the only person on that sidewalk, and at first was mildly irritated, then afraid for my own safety, and then those feelings translated into anger. I never looked back at the car once, but as I turned into the pathway leading to the entrance of my dormitory the car stopped, unable to follow me any further. The whooping and calling did not cease until I was inside, and I only began feeling safe again when I was in my own room. At that

point, I was tired, frustrated and angry, and later that night unleashed those feelings into my writing, focusing on ignorance and discrimination.

Some students also spoke of what they saw as aggressive discriminatory incidents, which had a pronounced influence on their study abroad experience. For instance, Seth, who was born in Haiti but moved to the U.S. as a child, mentioned many incidents that he perceived were racist. In part, I discovered that this perception could have been triggered by one extremely unpleasant incident that he was involved in which he told to other international students, including me. In the first two months while he was in Morocco, Seth became close to and later entered a romantic relationship with a Moroccan female student. They went on a few dates together. Nearing the end of their relationship, they were on a dinner date in a restaurant cum bar, and as they were having dinner Seth said he noticed a group of Moroccan men at the table next to them staring. They began to make comments in Darija, which Seth could not understand but his girlfriend could. She ignored them, and the men stood, went over to their table and began yelling at her. Seth said:

I asked her what they were saying and she didn't want to tell me. But yeah, at that point it was blatantly obvious they didn't want her hanging out with a black man.

I was just, whoa, okay. It was right in my face.

As Seth later on joined a group of students I traveled with regularly to other parts of Morocco, I observed that he had increasingly negative comments for the way he was treated, and this extended to a growing dislike of the country and its culture.

Other students also spoke of things that, while not perceived to be explicitly discriminatory, were considered to be uncomfortable. Amy, who was born in South

Korea but spent many years in the U.S. and considered herself an American, said that people always asked her for her origins. She said:

I say I'm from the U.S., and they'll ask, but where are you really from? Where is your origin? It's hard for them to believe I'm American.

**Sexual orientation suppression.** Some students who were homosexual or bisexual and normally open about their sexual orientation back in their home countries found that they had to hide or minimize their sexual preferences when they were studying abroad. One particular female student I met from the Netherlands who had a preference for women said that in South Korea, she felt that being a lesbian isolated her from others. She felt that people avoided her, and she avoided them too – she would often go exploring the city on her own.

Mary, who had friends who were homosexual, said that she felt in South Korea homosexuality was denied. She also pointed out the prevalence of expectations regarding beauty and behavior for females in particular, and said:

There's this expectation of how you should look and behave in Korea. Big eyes, smooth skin, long thin legs, and all those plastic surgery ads. Your reputation is really important here.

Jen also noted the promotion of one standard of beauty in South Korea which could be perceived as restrictive to international students. She said:

It's like a cultural thing. Appearances are important, and plastic surgery is really common. For girls it is one standard of beauty, but for guys it's less, it's more like height and how tall they are.

**Sexual harassment.** Some female students mentioned sexual harassment as affecting their perspective of the country they were studying abroad in, as well as their adjustment to their new surroundings. For example, Sally, an American female student studying abroad in Morocco whom I traveled with to other cities in the country, said that she disliked the way men would whistle at females on the street. She saw this as a type of objectification and a form of harassment. Sally said:

I'll miss it here when I leave, but I definitely won't miss all the harassment. Oh yeah. Not the random guys whistling at me. I'll be happy to run alone outside again without having to worry about my safety.

Sally's account also reflected her frustration with the loss of independence that she was accustomed to in the U.S. When we arrived in the university, one of the first things mentioned to us during our orientation week was not to walk alone outside the boundaries of the university, especially after dark. We were informed to always travel in groups and have at least a male student with us, especially when traveling to other cities. While not everyone followed the second suggestion, most international students traveled with at least one other person.

Sally also experienced two other distinct incidents related to direct sexual harassment. The first one occurred when she was walking through a crowded marketplace in the afternoon with a group of students. As she was making her way through the crowd, she felt a hand grab her behind. She turned immediately and stared at the people behind her, but was unable to tell who it was due to the crowd.

The second incident occurred at night, while Sally was returning to the university from an eating place off campus. As she was walking through the park with another

female friend, they felt someone behind them. Upon turning, she saw a man walking relatively close to them. They picked up their pace, and he followed, beginning to make sounds that they identified as sexually explicit. They ran back to the university, not stopping to look if he was still following them.

These incidents affected Sally's feelings of safety and comfort, particularly when she was in public. Interestingly, she also attributed the harassment she faced to having blonde hair and being "white", and felt that these factors made her stand out as a foreigner in Morocco.

Other students were also uncomfortable with the way they perceived women to be treated. For example, Seth's experience with the men who shouted at the Moroccan girl he was dating adversely affected his views of the Moroccan culture and the treatment of women. He perceived it as discriminatory towards women and compared his experience to that of the U.S., which made him speak more favorably of the former.

In addition, many international students learned about and spoke of the protests regarding Article 475 of Morocco's penal code during the semester that I was there. Article 475 at the time allowed rapists of underage females to evade punishment by marrying their victims, and was shocking to many international students, who could not comprehend why this would be allowed. A few months before I arrived in Morocco with other international students, a female victim had just committed suicide after marriage to her rapist, and the debate was highly talked about among the Moroccan students. In a way, this debate cast a negative light on how international students, particularly those who were female, viewed their safety in the country. It also shaped the growth of



negative perceptions regarding the way they were treated by adding to the accumulation of environmental factors they had to adjust to when entering the country.

### **Personal Factors**

Several other factors that contributed to acculturative stress included factors that were personal and applicable to individual students, such as relationship and family issues, financial worries, health-related factors and dietary habits.

**Relationship problems.** The strain of being away from family, close friends, or partners sometimes took a toll on students who were studying abroad, particularly if they were unused to being away for a sustained period of time. Some students found being away from close family and friends added to their homesickness and made adjusting to the new culture difficult. Other students in romantic long-distance relationships found that problems in these relationships adversely affected their study abroad experience.

***Long-distance relationships.*** Mandy, an American female student studying abroad in Morocco whose boyfriend was back in the U.S., found their long-distance relationship problematic. She said:

He doesn't have Skype because he doesn't have a laptop and we can't talk unless it's on the phone, and it's always me calling him on my Moroccan phone and using up my call credit. It's never the other way around. And it's so awkward talking in front of my Moroccan roommate because she understands English too and I just don't like it.

Mandy's account provided me with insight into the stressful nature of long-distance relationships as it outlined other barriers other than distance, including the absence of privacy and the Internet in assisting communication. Mandy's account also

reflected her view that the lack of effort on her boyfriend's part was linked to her having the financial responsibility to constantly spend money on buying credit for her phone in order to make international calls. I observed also that Mandy mentioned language as a barrier not because she was unable to communicate with her roommate, but because her roommate could understand whatever she was saying and this led to an absence of privacy in Mandy's conversations with her boyfriend, which primarily took place in the dormitory. Because Mandy only spoke English, she wasn't able to understand her roommate's conversations in Darija, Arabic or French, and so she felt disadvantaged when she had to communicate personal things in English to her boyfriend or her family.

*On-site relationships.* Some students entered romantic relationships with other study abroad students or domestic students in their study abroad site, which directly affected their study abroad experience. When problems arose in these relationships, students found that their perceptions of not only their study abroad experience, but of the domestic culture, were significantly affected.

For example, Seth, who experienced what he perceived as racially discriminatory acts while he was dating a Moroccan female student, also experienced the relationship breaking down in the middle of his study abroad experience. He pointed out that he spent a lot of time with her and less time with other students while he was in a relationship, which meant that while other students were more familiar with each other and had established friendships, he had not done the same.

When Seth's relationship ended badly, it affected his perception of his study abroad experience. Initially, he had planned to stay in Morocco for the summer, but his failed relationship in part changed his mind and he decided to go to France instead. He

said, “I can’t wait to get out of here. It’s just been a really bad experience, there are so many bad memories, and I feel like this has been a huge mistake.”

**Family.** Besides relationship issues, family issues which arose while students were away from home also served as stressors in their study abroad experience. For instance, a female American student who was studying abroad in South Korea received news of a hurricane that had hit her state in the first couple of weeks she was in the country. She had difficulties calling her family because of a power outage caused by the hurricane, which made her very worried. Until she managed to reach them, she was unable to focus on enjoying her study abroad experience.

Family-related issues were a prominent stressor for me during my study abroad experience. Shortly before I left for South Korea, my mother was diagnosed with the final stage of cancer and her condition worsened as I was abroad. While I was in the middle of my study abroad semester in Morocco, I received news that she was critically ill and I had to make arrangements regarding classes before I was allowed to take the estimated 20 hour flight home. She passed away as I was on my way to the airport in Morocco without my knowing. I received the news when I arrived at home a day later, significantly jet-lagged, and was immediately taken to the funeral that lasted another three days.

The prolonged distance I experienced away from my family during that period added to my personal feelings of worry and frustration, which accumulated with time. I also found the arrangements I had to make with the school exceptionally frustrating, because I was made to go from office to office to settle paperwork, which delayed my departure by two days and caused me significant regret. I perceived this to be inefficient,

insensitive to my needs and found myself subconsciously blaming the administrative process. In addition, during the three weeks I was absent from school in Morocco and settling things in Singapore, I had to catch up with assignments and tests in Morocco over email with my professors so I would not be behind when I returned to the university, which translated into additional stress academically.

**Financial issues.** Financial issues affected some students more than others, depending on their socio-economic background and their ability to fund themselves during their study abroad. For some students, financial issues meant not being able to spend on necessities like food, and luxuries like travel or transport to other parts of the country.

***Limits on spending.*** Many students who studied abroad spent a lot of money on the first few weeks they were in the new culture on food and travel. Some of them, realizing they had been overspending, found that they had to restrict their expenses on certain things. For example, Daniel, an American male studying abroad in South Korea, spent all of his scholarship allowance on food and drinking, a form of socializing with other students, within the first month. His scholarship allowance was given in separate amounts, so for the next few days he had to rely on borrowing from other international students for cash.

Other students faced financial limitations on what they could spend on, as when they studied abroad they were unable to work as per usual and had to rely on their savings. This sometimes led to self-exclusion from social events and self-isolation. Cassie, an American female studying abroad in South Korea who had a limited budget, often would be unable to join other students for dinner off-campus because of her

inability to spend. She would frequently eat by herself in the school cafeteria or eat kimbab and ramen, foods which were cheaper but not necessarily healthier if regularly eaten.

***Financial transactions and social obligation.*** Some students discovered that financial transactions, such as borrowing and lending money to other students, posed problems to them in their relationships with others. For example, Samuel, who was in Morocco, said that he lent his Moroccan roommate about a 100 dirhams but he never got the money back. He said, “I kept asking but he keeps saying, next time. In Korea, it’s like breaking promises if you do that. People will always give it back.”

Samuel’s comparison of money to promises made me see that financial transactions such as borrowing had an element of social obligation to him, which might have differed from how his roommate viewed the same act. When this social obligation was not fulfilled and things that were deserved were not returned, this caused Samuel a certain amount of frustration. He eventually gave up and due to other problems with his roommate ended up switching rooms.

**Health.** Many students encountered problems regarding food and health. These ranged from falling sick to being unable to adjust to the food regularly consumed in the domestic culture and played a major factor in affecting their study abroad experience.

***Dietary restrictions.*** Dietary restrictions as well as health issues like falling sick directly affected the ability of students to enjoy their study abroad experience. For instance, students who were vegetarian and unable to communicate their needs in the new culture had difficulties getting food they could eat or were restricted to a limited variety of food. In South Korea, I met a female American student who was a strict vegetarian and

constantly unable to participate in the group dinners that were conducted with our Korean buddies due to them mostly involving meat, which she could not eat. Other students who were unable to eat pork or beef due to religious restrictions also faced difficulties, as these were types of meat that were very prevalent in dishes. Often, they had trouble communicating their dietary restrictions to their hosts.

Some students temporarily adjusted by changing their diet. For example, Sally, who studied in Morocco and who was a vegetarian, decided to adjust by beginning to eat chicken. The changes in her diet led to her stomach reacting differently to how she was eating, and she faced a few problems regarding digestion in the beginning of her stay.

***Falling sick.*** While adjusting to a new environment, some students experienced difficulties such as illnesses and injuries. These health-related difficulties affected their ability to go about daily activities, in turn impacting on their study abroad experience.

Health problems related to food ranged from being unused to the types of food, like spicy food, or to its improper handling leading to food poisoning. Other problems that were faced were unexpected health issues that students could not figure out. For example, Eva, an American female studying abroad in Morocco, experienced a sudden skin rash all over her body which lasted for a couple of weeks. She was unable to find its cause, and when she went to the school's health center was prescribed medicine that she was unable to read or understand either. She eventually attributed her rash to something that she'd eaten.

Similarly, I fell sick a couple of times and faced injuries such as a sprained ankle and muscle in both South Korea and Morocco. I visited the hospital in South Korea, and also went to the health center in Morocco. In both situations, it was difficult for me to

communicate with the doctors or the nurses because of the language barrier, and they were unable to understand or communicate their thoughts to me as well. For example, when I sprained my ankle and went to the school's health center in Morocco, both the doctor and the nurse asked if I could speak French or Arabic, because neither of them could speak English. We struggled with communicating with each other as we were unable to express ourselves. Eventually, they prescribed me medication which I was unable to read and which I'd never used before to reduce the inflammation of the ankle, but upon taking the medication I experienced side effects and was sick for the next few days.

***Food consumption and habits.*** For some students, adjusting to the different types of food and habits associated with dining contributed to the challenges they faced while abroad. For Mary, adjusting to the spiciness of South Korean food took her a while. She pointed out that she was not used to eating spicy food and it was not that prevalent in American or Puerto Rican cuisine, which she was more accustomed to. Mary was also initially not used to the eating utensils that were provided: most Korean eating places only provided chopsticks and spoons, no forks, which meant students who had very little experience with using chopsticks had to learn them. While spicy food and new eating utensils were hurdles that she eventually overcame, Mary found sharing food from a communal plate harder to get used to and perceived it as unhygienic. She said:

It's gross if someone dips the spoon they're eating with into the food that everyone is eating, sticks it in their mouth and puts it back into the big pot. Eww... it's ok if you use a common ladle and eat from your own plate, but I don't like it when people share food like they do here. No wonder everyone gets sick if

one person is sick! In the U.S. everyone has their own thing of food and that's so much cleaner... even when I'm with my boyfriend I don't share food. I don't like it.

Mary's account revealed different ways in how food was perceived in both South Korean and American culture. She was used to individual portions and the idea that each person had their own share, and no one was to touch someone else's. In South Korean cuisine, however, most dishes came in big portions and were meant to be split in groups with individual rice bowls, reflecting the communal nature of the culture. Mary ended up ordering her own individual serving of food most of the time or separating her food from the others prior to eating.

In Morocco, food was also shared communally from a large dish, with the expectation that people eat with their fingers. This practice of eating with one's fingers with bread took some difficulty for students who were unaccustomed to this, and I was one of them. During a particularly memorable lunch where a Moroccan salad and a Berber chicken tagine were served, I was having difficulty gathering the remains of my food on my plate with my fingers and was extremely full on bread, and picked up my fork to scoop the remaining food on my plate. I was immediately rebuked by another Moroccan female student beside me. She loudly said, "No, no! Put that down! That's not the right way to eat, you have to eat like a Moroccan, like this," and swiped at her plate with bread. Embarrassed and resigned, I put my fork down, feeling somewhat hurt. As I uncovered more about the culture in Morocco, I realized I had not been respecting the boundaries of dining etiquette, where eating with hands was an honored tradition, especially if a communal bowl was present.



Apart from sharing food communally, payment for food was also often expected to be shared – most places students ate at in Morocco provided one bill for the whole table and did not bill each diner separately. This was also present in some eating places I visited in South Korea. For a few students I encountered in Morocco, this took some getting used to. Once, while we were calculating the individual amount that we each had to pay for dinner, Madison, who was used to receiving an individual bill whenever asked, said, “See, if they gave separate checks that would save us so much time.” This again reinforced the idea that time to her was a limited commodity and should not be wasted.

### **The Study Abroad Experience**

The data presented in this chapter illustrated how students experienced stressors that affected their acculturation to their study abroad environment. As a study abroad participant myself who traveled to both South Korea and Morocco, I was able to compare my own experiences in both countries and my previous experiences as an international student in the U.S. with my participants’ experiences. While I embarked on the data-gathering process with the intention of understanding the differences in intercultural communication between college students in the U.S., South Korea and Morocco, I came to find that the study abroad experience and the accounts of my participants revealed more about the challenges they faced as foreigners in a new culture, and that differences in intercultural communication were a factor in these. The experiences of the students and me in this study were unique to each of us, but they shared a common broad base in that we all experienced acculturative stress at some point or other. As a participant observer and also a college student, it was possible for me to obtain observations and accounts of lived experiences from the student’s point of view. Both the formal interviews I

conducted and the field notes and informal interviews were valuable and gave me a degree of access to the study abroad student's experience by experiencing it first-hand.

### **Summary**

The data in this chapter was thematically structured according to the various types of acculturative stressors that students faced in their study abroad experience. The questions initially guiding this research were: 1. What is the level of nonverbal communication present during interpersonal communication? 2. What are the communication preferences regarding discussion and conflict? 3. What are the cultural values and assumptions within the culture that influence behavior? 4. How does native language play a part in the representation of physical and social reality?

As I progressed with data collection, my results indicated that differences in intercultural communication patterns played a small role in affecting students' study abroad experiences, and that most students were more interested in revealing how their study abroad experiences affected them. As the data began leading me in a different path than I originally intended, I reformulated these initial research questions into one general line of inquiry. I then asked: What are the stressors for study abroad students in acculturating to a new host environment? I provided data to illustrate how students, myself included, defined these forms of acculturative stress in their study abroad experience.

In the final chapter, I will provide a concise summary and reflection of my methodology. I will also provide suggestions for the implementation of these results in the practices of educational institutions, faculty and college staff personnel, as well as outline recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Reflection

### Summary and Statement of Problem

The initial questions guiding this research were: 1. What is the level of nonverbal communication present during interpersonal communication? 2. What are the communication preferences regarding discussion and conflict? 3. What are the cultural values and assumptions within the culture that influence behavior? 4. How does native language play a part in the representation of physical and social reality? These questions targeted the differences in intercultural communication patterns between college students in South Korea and Morocco. As indicated in Chapter 4, it became evident during the data collection process that students were more interested in revealing how they perceived these differences in intercultural communication as part of a larger problem in their acculturation to a new culture. It became apparent that study abroad students faced a number of acculturative challenges besides differences in communicative styles, including: language barriers, academic stress and discrimination.

The discovery of these other factors as an effect on the international student's experience led me to redefine my questions to ask: What are the stressors for study abroad students in acculturating to a new host environment? In discussing this question, I also looked at the changes in practice that student support staff on campuses can undertake in order to facilitate the avoidance or navigation of these challenges.

Because I approached this study with the intention of exploring the differences in communication styles affected intercultural communication between college students in South Korea and Morocco, I included in the study some of these mutually agreed-upon factors between my participants and me. I drew linkages between these differences in

communication styles and the presence of acculturative stress. Therefore, some of the findings in this study also provide an understanding of how differences in culturally-influenced communication styles manifest themselves as acculturative stressors for students who study abroad.

In this chapter, I will discuss some of these findings and provide theoretical references for my data interpretation. I will also expand on some of the explanations I gave in Chapter 4, and provide a reflection on the methodology, limitations of the study and guidelines for future research.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Returning to Pedersen et al.'s (2011) definition of international students as short-term sojourners who are temporarily residing in a country for purposes outside of establishing permanent residence, this study defined some of the international student's stressors in acculturation through examining the challenges of study abroad students in South Korea and Morocco. The study abroad student faces similar challenges that an international student does in his or her entry to a foreign country. In addition, most students who participate in study abroad programs do so for only a few months, and the limited period of time that they are afforded to acculturate to his or her new surroundings can lead to a significant amount of stress which reveals itself in different forms during their stay abroad.

#### **Examining Differences in Communication Styles**

One of the first things some students mentioned when revealing sources of acculturative stress was the differing nature of their communication styles in contrast to their peers. Some students pointed out that they believed these communication styles

were culturally-influenced, meaning they were taught that one style of communication as opposed to another was preferable. In this section, I discuss this notion of differences in communication preferences between cultures, including cultural differences such as high-context and low-context cultures, and nonverbal communication such as chronemics and proxemics.

**Perspectives on cultural categorization.** The idea of high-context and low-context communication was mentioned by Sandra and Jen, two students in this study. Hall (1976) defined high-context communication as the embedding of information in subtleties or the physical context, with very little of the actual meaning in the explicit communicated message, while low-context communication was defined as the majority of the information in the explicit message. He pointed out that these forms of communication were not exclusive to particular cultures, however, though one form of communication could be preferred to another. The use of language is one factor which reflects the preference for high or low-context communication (Nishimura, Nevgi & Tella, 2008). Sandra and Jen both illustrated this idea of Korean culture being high-context in nature through examples of academic writing.

Lewis (2005) categorized cultures according to three categories – linear-active, multi-active and reactive, pointing out that while each culture had its own unique qualities, members of cultures had more similarities in interaction with other cultures in the same cultural category than when they interacted with members from a different cultural category. Linear-active cultures were defined as task-oriented, preferring organization, direct discussion and listening and talking in equal proportions (Lewis, 2005; Nishimura et al., 2008). According to the Lewis (2005) model, the U.S. fell along

this spectrum of categorization. In contrast, South Korea was in the category of reactive cultures, which Lewis (2005) saw as ‘listening cultures’, with a preference on compromise, indirect confrontation and accommodation. Moroccan culture was situated in the multi-active cultural category, explained as warm, impulsive, with a preference for roundabout conversations with interrupted speaking and listening (Lewis, 2005; Nishimura et al., 2008). Lastly, Singapore, where most of my cultural upbringing took place, lay in the middle between linear-active and reactive, reflecting a combination of the two (Lewis, 2005).

**Chronemics.** Chronemics is the study of the use of time, focusing on the structuring and perception of time in communication (West & Turner, 2009). Hall (1983) distinguished between polychronic and monochronic time in cultures, suggesting that polychronic cultures preferred multi-tasking, were more concerned with people and the present and saw themselves as in control of time. In contrast, monochronic cultures organized themselves around time and emphasized dividing time into segments for tasks (Hall, 1983). Earlier in the study, I used the example of Madison’s frustration with the Moroccan concept of time to illustrate the misunderstandings and conflict that can occur when students from different time systems meet and interact with each other. My own time system conflicted with the sense of time in Morocco and led me to feel more uncomfortable with the way I perceived tasks to be accomplished, as opposed to my relative comfort with the time system in South Korea or the U.S. Differences in time expectations were also applied depending on whether one was accepted as part of the domestic culture or seen as an outsider. When referenced with the experiences other international students and I had in Morocco following a different time system as

compared to other Moroccan students, it was evident that time systems had some degree of flexibility – they tended to be more tightly applied to foreigners as opposed to members of the domestic culture.

**Proxemics.** Hall (1990) explored many dimensions of space in intercultural communication, including tactile space. He explained the concept of space to include not only what was absorbed, but also what was unconsciously blocked out or become accustomed to (1990). In this study, physical contact and physical boundaries were one of the first observable factors for students in defining the differences in communication and their new surroundings. Amy, Lisa and Samuel all pointed out that they experienced some awkwardness or discomfort regarding the differences in which people viewed personal physical space – for Amy and Samuel studying abroad in Morocco, they felt that their personal space was intruded upon in their interactions with people, while for Lisa, her experience with too much distance between her and her dancing partner in a Korean club made her puzzled.

Personal sound space focuses on the linking of the idea of owning the elements of one's personal auditory surroundings as one's own property, and allows for how overlapping sound spaces change how people perceive their auditory conditions (Fluegge, 2011). Fluegge (2011) also points out that the control of personal sound refers to how people have control over their sonic environment, in which privacy is a pertinent issue. My findings revealed that personal sound space played an important role in affecting the comfort of international and domestic students. Blesser and Salter (2009) discussed the social aspects of the sonic experience through perceptions of boundaries, both physical and social, that could determine the creation of an experienced

environment. This overlapping of different personal sound spaces was particularly significant in students with roommates, as they were in frequent contact with each other within the physical confines of a dormitory room. When different cultural norms regarding acoustic space came into play, the differences sometimes led to conflict in intercultural communication (Blessner & Salter, 2009; Fluegge, 2011).

**Cultural adaptability and cross-cultural skills.** The findings in this study provided some evidence that students with little to no previous contact or knowledge of the particular culture of the area they were studying abroad in had a more difficult time in their study abroad experience as compared to students who had prior contact with the domestic culture. In addition, students who had little to no cross-cultural contact outside of the culture they were brought up in also revealed more difficulties in adjustment. The culture-distance hypothesis, which posits that the greater the gap between the cultural elements students were accustomed to and the new culture they were in leads to more acculturative difficulties, reinforced my observations and experience (Ward et al., 2001). In illustrating this, I also refer to Madison, the American student who was for the first time away from her family and the culture she had grown up in for a prolonged period of time. Madison faced a lot of difficulties in adjustment and her perception of these challenges were influenced by her tendency to inflict the values and beliefs she had known in the U.S. culture upon the cross-cultural experiences she had, which accumulated to create negative stereotypes and assumptions.

**Implications for practice. *Recognizing the influence of culture on behavior and perspective.*** Being aware of culturally-influenced personal values, beliefs and opinions is beneficial to students, faculty and higher education administrative support



staff in cross-cultural interactions that take place within the university setting. Intercultural competence, defined by Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003) as “the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways”, focuses on the role of this self-awareness or cultural worldview that each individual has which affects their construction of their perceived environment and of other people who are culturally dissimilar. These cultural worldviews are continuously altered as people engage in cross-cultural interactions, and as these engagements with cultural differences become more complex in nature, the potential of intercultural competence increases (Hammer et al., 2003).

Conducting two assessments of the cultural worldviews of study abroad students, one prior to and one after the experience, might prove to be useful in increasing the cross-cultural skills and their personal gains from study abroad. One such assessment tool frequently used by individuals and organizations is the Intercultural Development Inventory, a 50-item questionnaire translatable into 13 languages that compiles an individual or group’s report of intercultural competence while also offering guidance to further develop his or her intercultural competence (Hammer, 2012). As intercultural competence and its development is viewed as a continuum, students who study abroad can experience a shift to a higher or lower level of intercultural competence while they are abroad or after they return. In becoming more intentionally aware and reflective of their own mindsets with regard to cultural differences, there is a higher potential for students to build intercultural competence in study abroad.

***Pre-departure cross-cultural training.*** In addition to recognizing their existing perceptions of cultural differences, workshops on cross-cultural training are proven to be

effective in assisting in the adjustment of individuals to a new cultural environment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). In illustrating the importance of such workshops, I refer to my own experience attending pre-departure orientations and classes in the University of Dayton prior to my study abroad. These classes ranged from one-time sessions of two hours, to regular preparatory classes conducted over a few weeks. I found that while pre-departure orientations which assisted me in preparing for departure covered material things such as what to pack and how to access my finances or utilize existing resources in the foreign culture, they did not prepare me for cultural-related concerns such as food practices. Hence, I was equipped with a basic knowledge of the materials I needed, but had to adapt to the culture's practices and expectations as I entered, as did many other students.

I refer to Mary's difficulties with eating with chopsticks as an example – the existence of practical, hands-on workshops in using those eating utensils, or the provision of information regarding food etiquette and habits, would have been useful in facilitating her adjustment to the South Korean culture as chopsticks were often the only eating utensils provided in small eating places. Such preparatory courses informing students with a basic understanding of cultural norms, expectations and practices would be useful in helping them adjust more easily to the foreign culture. These courses also offer a potential for increasing international and domestic student engagement, for example by inviting the participation of international students or study abroad alumni from the culture that students are studying abroad in to help facilitate or answer doubts about cultural expectations and behavior.

## **Examining Social Exclusion in Study Abroad**

I refer to Paltridge, Mayson and Schnapper's (2012) definitions of social exclusion and social inclusion in applying this term to describe the social situation faced by many international and study abroad students. The definition of social exclusion is problematic, vague, has many dimensions and its very meaning can be understood differently depending on the context, and is thus hotly debated between various groups (Paltridge et al., 2012; Silver, 1994). In this study, social exclusion is approached through Millar's (2007) view that social exclusion is at its very foundation the marginalization of individuals and groups in society through the exclusion from not only material needs but also opportunities and freedom of choice. Millar (2007) posits that social exclusion is the inability to participate in the society which they live in, and therefore the opposite of social exclusion has to be participation as opposed to inclusion.

**Neo-racism.** One theory I felt was pertinent to the nature of social exclusion experienced by many study abroad students was neo-racism. Alternatively called new racism, neo-racism is discrimination based on not only race or ethnicity, but also on boundaries including culture and language (Barker, 1981). Neo-racism presents the idea that discrimination is justified by differences of language, culture and national origin, and encourages this exclusion in order to protect an existing group's cultural identity (Lee & Rice, 2007). In my research of study abroad students and my own experience abroad, I found that the inability to participate in the domestic surroundings was largely influenced by differing forms of neo-racism that emerged in within the higher education setting as well as in the host culture.

**Economic, cultural and social dimensions of exclusion.** Paltridge et al. (2012) pointed out that international students faced social exclusion in four dimensions – political, economic, cultural and social. In my study abroad findings, political exclusion did not play such a major role in affecting the experiences of study abroad students, but economic, social and cultural exclusion did affect their well-being. The limited ability of international students to work while abroad affected their economic independence – for students who were accustomed to being financially independent, this was discomfoting as they had to rely on their savings for basic necessities, and also directly impacted their enjoyment of exploring a new culture through travel and food. A higher cost of living, a lower earned income, or both, led many international students I knew to exclude themselves from social activities due to their inability to afford dining out.

I mentioned the example of Cassie, who isolated herself from group activities in the university in South Korea as she had limits on spending for food. This self-isolation was an effect of economic exclusion which closely resembled the experiences I had and observed as an undergraduate in the University of Dayton. A geographically visible example illustrating this form of exclusion was the convergence of many Indian and Chinese international students towards Firwood Apartments, a residential location within ten to fifteen minutes walking distance from campus. The University of Dayton is a highly residential, private campus with most of its student population in the middle to upper middle-class range. Most international students, upon arrival, did not own a car or did not have a driver's license and found housing costs on campus to be significantly more expensive, and therefore chose to live in a location that was slightly farther away but much cheaper, effectively excluding themselves from the student population residing

on campus and at the same time creating an ethnic residential population which began to attract more students of similar backgrounds. These observations I had of international students in the University of Dayton reinforced my understanding of the lived experience of study abroad students I encountered in Morocco and South Korea.

Cultural and social dimensions were other areas of social exclusion observed by Paltridge et al. (2012). Students faced varying degrees of exclusion, from being excluded from class discussions and social activities due to linguistic ability, to being treated differently due to perceptions of them as being outsiders. The nature of studying abroad itself consisted of the self-exclusion from social support such as friends and family due to being overseas. At the same time, students faced challenges with regard to administrative and health services such as registration problems and the inability to fully utilize existing health services. When combined with the perceived unfriendliness of domestic students, they faced a significant degree of difficulty in acculturating to their new environment (Paltridge et al., 2012). In this study, I also found that this exclusion manifested itself in overt discriminatory remarks or gestures which directly affected international students, particularly those from non-Western areas. I also refer to Berry's (1997) and Berry et al.'s (1987) argument that gender is a relevant variable in the formation of acculturative stress. In my findings, I discovered that females experienced sexual harassment as a stressor, which increased their feelings of vulnerability as minority or victimized populations. In contrast, the male participants in this study did not reveal harassment to be a stressor.

My findings also correlated with Lee's (2007) work, which pointed out that such populations tended not to report or retaliate in such situations of discrimination due to

fear of repercussions, and that students generally faced such situations with outward tolerance as opposed to confronting them due to a lack of empowerment. My own experiences of discrimination were strikingly similar to other international students in the way we responded. Seth, uncomfortable with the overt racism he perceived in Morocco, chose to bide his time and talked about leaving the country, while Betty tolerated the exclusion she faced from her Korean group members. Similarly, I chose to walk away and avoid confronting the perceived harassment I experienced as I felt vulnerable as a lone individual as opposed to a group, as did Sally when she experienced sexual harassment on the streets.

**Implications for practice. *Improvement of institutional support.*** Kaufman's (2006) examination of solutions to preventing sexual harassment identified three factors which can be applicable to the exclusion of students – acknowledgment of the problem, effective action and improved training of personnel. In relating Kaufman's (2006) framework to students, the first step institutions need to take is the recognition that the productivity and psychological health of students can be affected by the lack of respect with which they are treated with within or outside the confines of campus, and acknowledging that this respect is a basic right of all students.

Active solutions to address this include the reinforcing of commitment among faculty members and administrative staff to respond with appropriate interventions. Improved working partnerships and communications between institutions regarding the commitment of faculty to include all students in classes equally, or to actively intervene when they perceive problems arising between different groups of students, can assist in reducing some of the social or academic problems that international students face.

In addition, trainings for faculty and administrative staff with regard to handling specific problems that students may face outside of campus such as racial discrimination or sexual harassment can be useful in increasing the amount of institutional support that both the domestic and international student receives. Appointing an in-school translator or interpreter to work with administrative and health services in catering to the linguistic needs of international students who are unable to communicate in the domestic language would be significantly beneficial to facilitating a more comfortable adjustment process.

*Improved outreach initiatives to increase engagement between international and domestic students.* Exclusion from group projects or facing difficulty in establishing strong intercultural friendships with the domestic student population were some points that international students raised in discussing the stressors they faced while studying abroad. When examining my findings, I realized that some of these difficulties faced in communication were due to personal factors such as embarrassment and poor linguistic ability, which affected both international and domestic students in actively interacting with each other. This also led to the preference for co-national or multi-national friendships among international students as they bonded together through a common language and understanding, which further exacerbated an us-versus-them mentality of both domestic and international students.

The implementation of engagement initiatives such as culture-learning receptions or international fairs, where students come together on an equal platform to incite interest in each other's cultures, can target an increased engagement between international and domestic students, lead to better intercultural understandings and diminish the chances of social exclusion as both domestic and international students become more culturally

aware of how to navigate social boundaries. In my study abroad experience in South Korea and Morocco, I discovered that students who had previously studied abroad or who had an interest in other cultures were more open to talking to me and friendlier. This extended to my experiences in the U.S. as an international student – students who had an interest in or prior cross-cultural contact often mentioned their previous experiences or knowledge of other cultures when engaging in conversation, and were on the whole perceived to be easier to communicate with as opposed to students who did not know how to start a conversation.

### **Examining Academic-Related Stress**

In my findings, I discovered that academic stress regarding the registration process, difficulties in coping with school work or with understanding class lectures played a role in affecting the amount of stress that study abroad students faced. Some study abroad students faced additional pressure to do well because of the policies regarding class credit transfer between their home institutions and the exchange institutions, while others faced stressors related to intercultural communication and differences in the notion of responsibility in group projects.

**Academic stress in college students.** The academic-related stress faced by me and the study abroad students I encountered was not completely different from the academic stressors that college students face. College students face several obstacles in the educational process, and when such negative experiences are prolonged, these have been shown to impact negatively on their motivation and performance (Struthers, Perry & Menec, 2000). Carveth, Gesse and Moss suggested that academic stressors were influenced by the view of students on the knowledge foundation that was needed and the



amount of time they had to build this foundation (as cited in Misra & McKean, 2000). In my findings, study abroad students taking foreign language classes, in particular those introduced for the first time to a language such as Korean or Arabic, frequently expressed their frustration with the difficulties they had in learning the new writing or speaking systems in a short period of time.

**Coping with academic workload.** Folkman and Lazarus studied two ways of coping that students had in confronting academic stress: Problem-Focused Coping, which involved diminishing or erasing the stress of an event or its effect and occurred when students believed that their problems could be resolved, and Emotion-Focused Coping, which targeted reducing the negative emotions of a situation when students perceived that it had to be endured (as cited in Struthers et al., 2000). Struthers et al. also hypothesized that students, instead of using general routine coping strategies, had favored coping techniques that they tailored to different academic situations. In my findings, I discovered that this was true of both the students I encountered and me. For instance, both Samuel and Madison encountered issues with group projects, but while Samuel quickly became frustrated with the lack of perceived responsibility he viewed his group mates having, Madison automatically assumed the entire project on her own as it made her feel more comfortable when she had everything under control.

**Implications for practice. *Inter-institutional engagement and partnerships.*** Improved inter-institutional and intra-institutional engagement would be conducive to reducing the academic stress that students face. Some factors that can be included in the facilitation of smoother partnerships between institutions, for instance, are policies regarding registration and credit transfer. For instance, shifting the registration of classes

for study abroad students from an offline and physical process to an online registration system would be more efficient and less time-consuming for students. The likelihood of stress related to getting into classes or uncertainty about the academic process would also be reduced, subsequently diminishing one difficulty of the adjustment process for study abroad students. In addition, class credit transfer policies should be made clear to students prior to their study abroad, and the pre-approval of classes that will translated into credit in home institutions would make this credit transfer process easier. Besides pre-approving classes, there also should be a certain amount of flexibility given by institutions in the event that such classes are filled, or not available, and other previously unapproved classes have to be substituted.

Also, class catalogs and class requirements should be mutually agreed upon and supported by the faculty and the institution. I underwent the University of Dayton's class pre-approval process before studying abroad, and I found this extremely useful in easing some of the academic worries I had about classes that I could take overseas. However, when I actually reached the campuses of South Korea and Morocco, I found that their class catalogs had changed and the classes I had pre-approved were not available or off-limits to international students. In South Korea, coupled with the physical registration process, I spent a week in back-and-forth emails to my home institution and faculty and administrative staff within the Korean institution. It was difficult to get the credit I needed transferred as both institutions labelled their classes and course levels differently – for example, while a communications course I took in South Korea was treated as an advanced level class there, it only transferred as a basic level credit to my home institution because I had difficulty in getting it approved for credit transfer due to the

different titles and numbering of courses. I later had to retake the same class when I returned to Dayton despite it covering the same course material, adding to my academic pressure upon re-entry. If there was better communication and clearer interpretation of the different course materials in both institutions, this might have been prevented.

*Academic-related support on campus.* Training workshops or courses for faculty members focusing on intercultural competence and how to manage the needs of international students would be helpful in improving both the flexibility of faculty members in dealing with students from different backgrounds, as well as ensuring a smoother transition for international or study abroad students to an unfamiliar academic system. I use the University of Dayton as a reference – in order to address the burgeoning international student population on campus, the university began conducting workshops to refine the skills of faculty members in addressing international students' needs, and also created new positions such as an international student counselor to assist with the school's learning support center.

Hurtado, Carter and Spuler (1996) found that affiliations developed between students and their peers significantly influenced their social and academic adjustment, particularly if they developed affiliations with upper-class students or resident advisors as these groups tended to provide stronger support systems for positive academic change. Most study abroad students in Korea University were enrolled in the Korea University Buddy Assistant program, which paired Korean students and international students in language practice and exchange. International students taking Korean language classes who wanted to practice Korean and learn about the culture and Korean students who wanted practice with conversational English could arrange to meet in informal sessions

outside of class. These sessions took place weekly, and these students tended to become good friends by the end of the semester, sometimes organizing study sessions together. Such similar peer-related support systems, besides facilitating the social adjustment of students to the new culture, would also be beneficial in assisting students with a degree of peer-to-peer academic support.

### **Examining Psychological Effects in Study Abroad**

The nature of study abroad is considered to be a significant event that often involves students facing and confronting new psychological experiences (Cushner & Karim, 2004). In my findings, such psychological challenges included effects on mental and emotional health such as depression and anxiety due to homesickness, the stress of maintaining long-distance relationships and the helplessness that students faced while away from their families.

**Homesickness.** In examining college students who live away from home, homesickness is commonly associated with anxiety, depression and loneliness (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Harrison and Brower (2011) found that increased levels of homesickness of study abroad students impacted adversely on the ability of students to adapt and embrace their study abroad experience due to depression, insecurity and feelings of isolation. Thurber and Walton (2012) mentioned several risk factors for intense homesickness which were common to both domestic and international students separated from their families, including age, little prior experience of separation, high perception of distance from home, a high reliance on family support and an insecure attachment to parents. In contrast, students who were chronologically older, had more exposure to physical separation, felt supported by their families and who made

friendships with host nationals were less likely to experience homesickness (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

In my findings, I discovered that little prior exposure to being away from home, as well as a high reliance on parents as support, proved to be some of the factors which increased the acculturative stress of study abroad students. In particular, the absence of social support and friendships in the foreign environment deepened these feelings of isolation and stress. I refer to Madison as an example – as one of the study abroad students I met with comparatively little experience being away from her family, Madison had a much harder time adjusting to the Moroccan culture, not only because she was far from home but because she also faced a lot of conflict with her roommate. Madison even remarked to me at one point in time during the study abroad semester that if she had not made friends with other international and study abroad students, she would have been severely unhappy.

**Long-distance relationships and communication technologies.** Bowlby (1980) posited that partners in romantic relationships were assumed to be a factor of stability for each other (as cited in Jimenez, 2011). In long-distance relationships, however, such romantic relationships have to deal with the factor of distance, in which both partners are physically separated from each other by geographical distance while continuing a close relationship (Neustaedter & Greenberg, 2011). In my findings, most study abroad students who were in long-distance relationships utilized video chat systems to communicate with their partners back home, which included Google Hangouts, Skype or Facebook. Emailing and international phone calls were less common between students in long-distance relationships, and emailing in particular was considered to be a less

immediate form of communication as compared to video chat, which included “face-to-face” contact (Kirk, 2013). International phone calls, which only one student made, were costly as compared to using video chat systems, which were free.

Most students in long-distance relationships developed routines of communication utilizing video chat systems, most commonly centered around time differences and whether their roommates were present or not. The factor of time differences was challenging for students. As a point of reference, I refer to my experiences with these time differences in relation to the geographical locations with which I communicated: between South Korea and Dayton, the time difference was about 13 hours, while between South Korea and Singapore, this time difference was an hour. In contrast, between Morocco and Dayton, the time difference was 4 hours, while between Morocco and Singapore this time difference was 8 hours. While I was attending school in Dayton, the time difference between Dayton and Singapore ranged from 12 – 13 hours. This meant that I often structured my communication routines around these time differences, affecting the way I organized my time. However, due to my previous experiences with time differences, I was also significantly more comfortable with this restructuring as compared to other students.

For some students, the location where these video chats took place affected the quality of their conversations with their partners and subsequently their long-distance relationship maintenance and their psychological stress. For example, students who cared more about the presence of someone else in the room when they were carrying on a conversation with their partner saw this as a privacy concern. I refer to Mandy, who was uncomfortable with communicating her thoughts and worries to her boyfriend over Skype

because her roommate could understand everything she was saying. Mandy also faced other difficulties such as the frequent disruption of the video chat system that adversely impacted her communications with her partner and frustrated her. She also viewed her partner's lack of motivation to initiate communication with her as a sign that he was not trying hard enough in the relationship, leading to an added amount of psychological stress.

**Psychological effects due to loss.** Umberson and Chen (1994) studied the effects of loss on adult children concerning a parent's death, positing that such life events disrupted the adult child's psychological well-being as parents were one of the common sources of emotional support for children. The amount of distress and disruption to the lives of these affected adult children depended on a range of factors including the saliency of their relationships with their parents, gender, and past social interactions with the deceased parent (Umberson & Chen, 1994). I experienced these emotions related to distress when my own mother passed away without my knowing while I was studying abroad in Morocco. As I had a relatively close and salient-positive relationship with my mother, I experienced intensely the adverse psychological effects associated with her death – in addition, as she was already on the decline while I was abroad, the geographical distance also affected the amount of stress I personally experienced as a study abroad student. However, this amount of stress, which was increasing and intensified in the period of time before and immediately after her death when I flew back to Singapore for a few weeks, was also temporarily reduced when I returned to Morocco to continue the rest of the semester. Some of the factors affecting this mediation of stress involved social support from the friends I had in Morocco and the possible geographical

distance which provided a form of detachment from the emotional distress I had faced in Singapore.

**Implications for practice. *Provision of institutional resources.*** In recognizing the potency of psychological factors in influencing the study abroad experience, there are a range of institutional resources which could be made available to students. Quigley (2013) suggested several methods which institutions could utilize in prevention and minimization of adverse effects related to psychological health, for example providing students with materials for self-identification of at-risk behaviors in themselves and their peers prior to the study abroad experience, such as taking online learning courses on signs of common mental illnesses or anonymous self-examinations. The availability and accessibility of counseling services in the exchange institution should also be made known to students, and these should include personnel trained to offer counseling support in languages frequently used by the majority of international students, for example in English. The benefits that such resources can offer can be essential in buffering the psychological health of students – for example, Mandy utilized the school’s counseling services when she was frustrated or distressed and found them extremely useful. In addition, the provision of private spaces such as small cubicles located in the counseling center which international and domestic students can reserve for an hour or two might be a possibility to consider in providing areas where students can conduct telephone or video chat communications without fear of disturbance.

Hannigan (2005) also proposed workshops to increase the interaction of incoming new students with each other, in order to facilitate social interaction, as well as increasing the awareness of the available interests and hobbies that can be taken up in the new



environment. For example, students can be introduced to social organizations and clubs that may replace or complement some of the activities they are used to participating in back home, such as religiously-affiliated organizations or sporting clubs. In all three universities I attended in South Korea, Morocco and Dayton, events that promoted the nature of these organizations were held to encourage students in joining social networks.

*Training staff and faculty to deal with crisis situations.* The improved training of administrative staff and faculty members to deal with situations in which a student has to leave school on urgent absence is significant in alleviating the student's psychological stress. A streamlining of the academic system and policies regarding academic absence and the effects on academics should be made clear across the administration, faculty, and between institutions in exchange programs, to avoid miscommunications and time delays which can exacerbate the student's stress. I refer to my experience in obtaining leave from the school in Morocco to fly back to Singapore, the most time-consuming part of my departure. I was sent to several different administrative departments within the university because the staff said they were either not equipped with the authority to deal with the circumstances of absence from school, or had mixed understandings about the procedures that had to be taken in order to ensure I maintained my academic standing as a student.

I also had to fill in a lot of paperwork and send many emails to different professors and departments before I could leave the university, delaying my departure by several days and resulting in a lot of frustration and regret. Better clarification to the university's international office administration and faculty of the procedures to be followed in times of unexpected personal crises would have greatly helped me in

alleviating my academic concerns as a study abroad student. Also, equipping staff and faculty with training in terms of how to respond in these circumstances would be beneficial in the quality of services provided to both domestic and international students.

### **Reflections on Methodology**

The constructivist grounded approach involved the analysis of both the participant and the researcher in the construction and evaluation of data (Charmaz, 2006). This study was characterized by the nature of my interactions with my participants and assisted by my field notes and theoretical memos of participant-observation, as well as my self-examination of my own experiences as a researcher and a study abroad participant. In this project, my existing status and appearance as a student facilitated my data collection and observation of the lived experiences of the study abroad student. Obtaining information in this manner was sometimes easier as I found that the participants I interviewed or came into contact with related to me as another study abroad student who shared similar concerns or experiences that they were undergoing, as opposed to them viewing me distinctly as a researcher and separate from their experiences. Conventional researchers have to attempt to fit in with their research subjects and learn the subtleties of communication in order to present the most accurate information, and I faced less difficulty in this area as I was also a participant in the research (Crane & Angrosino, 2002).

This form of data collection covered several dimensions of the lived experience of study abroad students, but was also extremely tedious and time-consuming as the information I received was continuous and multi-faceted, due to my location and participation as a study abroad student. Because I included both informal and formal

interviews in my research, I was also presented with a breadth of data that eventually I had to analyze to allow the theme of the study to emerge. In addition, I began with a general overview planning to examine the differences between communication patterns of college students in South Korea, Morocco and the U.S., which guided my first few formal interviews. As I redefined the aims of my study, some of the questions I had asked in the initial interviews became less relevant, while other questions arose, and thus not all participants were asked the same fixed set of questions I had started out my study abroad year with. Because I was also moving from country to country, it was also not possible to conduct consistent interviews with a particular participant, and I did not have the chance to spend an equal amount of time with each of the participants in this study.

I also struggled with maintaining the focus of this research. Conversational interviewing meant that a range of topics could emerge, often revealed by students, and I was often intrigued by topics that were mentioned that had little relevance to the initial aim of the project. For example, in my conversation with Sunny, she brought up her experiences with the competitiveness of the Korean education system, such as the public posting of grade point average scores with rankings. This made us digress into a conversation about the influence of the education system on the mindsets of students and fear of failure, and I realized that the nature of the education system itself played a part in affecting the behavioral tendencies of students. It was difficult not to begin looking into these factors and to keep this study on track.

As both a researcher and a participant of study abroad, the stressors that I encountered also affected my ability to keep this research on track. The most significant stressor I encountered was the unexpected passing of my mother while undertaking this

study, which affected me emotionally and psychologically. As I returned to Singapore for a few weeks midway through my research in Morocco to be with family, my ability to continue with my intended interviews was limited, and the amount of participant-observation fieldwork I had was subsequently less than the information I had gathered from South Korea.

Similarly, the broad nature of my data also meant that I had to limit what I would analyze what was considered useful, which was a difficulty for me. I began with intercultural communication patterns in three geographical locations, and this was vast. I initially planned to include the University of Dayton as one of the places in which research took place, but eventually found that it would be difficult for me to undertake research in that location due to time constraints. Also, some of the problems that international students faced entering the U.S. differed from the ones that study abroad students faced in non-speaking English countries, and I ultimately decided that limiting the scope of my research would be more feasible for this study.

### **Limitations and Directions for the Future**

This qualitative research included a small group of study abroad students and one professor, divided between the countries of South Korea and Morocco. Hence, the experiences that these students had were not comprehensive and cannot be generalized to all study abroad or international students. This study calls for additional qualitative research regarding students of mixed cultural identities and professors who teach abroad. It also requires further quantitative surveys on the challenges experienced in studying abroad. The results of this study do not suggest that all study abroad students will face the same kinds of stresses or challenges on all campuses in all countries. Instead, it should be

taken as a measurement of the experienced challenges students may face and invite further discussion.

There were several students with mixed cultural identities in this study. Sandra and Amy were born in South Korea and moved to the U.S. at a young age. Seth was born in Haiti, but moved to the U.S. as a child and identified himself as American, and Eva was a second-generation American citizen with parents from Vietnam and China. It would have been valuable to obtain more data on the nature of stressors faced by these students, as students with these mixed identities also may have faced other challenges regarding the redefinition of who they were and their sense of self and cultural identity.

In addition, there was one professor in this study (Jacob). The stressors faced by faculty members were not taken into account in this study, even though in my interviews with Jacob there were some indications of acculturative challenges that he faced, particularly in integrating within the Moroccan community as a foreigner and bachelor. Future studies involving deeper research into the experiences faced by faculty members teaching abroad would be beneficial in contributing to the literature on acculturative stress.

The duration of time in this study was also a limitation. I spent only four months each in South Korea and Morocco, which limited the results that I gained from my data. Perhaps a year or longer spent in each location would allow me to better understand additional challenges faced by study abroad students and extend the scope of my research to include four-year international students who graduate from a foreign institution with a degree. Increasing the length of future studies in this area would reveal more insight into the nature of challenges experienced by study abroad students.

I found language barriers a significant challenge in this study. I could only interview students who were fluent in English as my grasp of Korean, Arabic and French was not sufficient for the quality of conversation I wanted to have. This also meant that students who were not comfortable with speaking in English refused to participate in interviews with me. By increasing language exposure and undergoing language training, future research in this area would also have a deeper understanding of the significance of language in countering the acculturative stress of students.

### **Summary**

This chapter included the discussion and examination of data through different lenses on the nature of acculturative stressors. These included the examination of differences in communication styles, social exclusion, academic-related stress and psychological effects. The findings indicated that study abroad students experience a wide range of acculturative stressors in their study abroad experience, demonstrating that the nature of acculturation is complex. Likewise, the data also suggested that social support, academic success and intercultural interaction could be significant in buffering these stressors, and this study outlined some implications for practice to create measures of prevention or solution to these stressors. As the number of students transgressing national borders and participating in study abroad increases, this study can serve as a reference point for understanding the effects that acculturation may have on the study abroad experience for students.

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## Appendix A

## Participants in Formal Interviews

<i>Relevant Information for Participants in Formal Interviews</i>			
Name	Country of Origin	Country Interviewed in	Cultural Exposure
Amy	South Korea	Morocco	Moved to the U.S. at estimated age 13.
Ashley	U.S.	South Korea	Became friends with a Korean student in the U.S.
Betty	Nigeria	South Korea	Lived in Nigeria until 18, and lived in the U.S. for 3 years
Claire	U.S.	South Korea	Hosted a Korean student in her home for a year
Jacob	U.S.	Morocco	Lived in Egypt for 6 years, Jordan for 2 years, taught in Morocco since 1996.
Jen	South Korea	South Korea	Moved to China when she was 14 or 15 and attended an American-based school
Mary	U.S./Puerto Rico	South Korea	Previously studied abroad in Spain but dissatisfied with experience.
Philip	U.K.	South Korea	Lived for 2.5 years in South Korea, fluent in Korean.
Samuel	South Korea	Morocco	Lived in the U.S. for 2 years.
Sandra	South Korea	South Korea	Moved to the U.S. when she was 15. First time returning to South Korea.
Sunny	South Korea	South Korea	Lived in the U.K. for 3 years, alternated between living in South Korea and the Philippines for 5 years.

*Note.* The above related information is based on the self-reported understandings of the participants at the time of interview.

## Appendix B

## Participants in Informal Interviews

<i>Relevant Information for Participants in Informal Interviews</i>			
Name	Country of Origin	Country Interviewed in	Cultural Exposure
Alex	Finland	Morocco	--
Alisa	U.S.	South Korea	--
Cassie	U.S.	South Korea	--
Eva	U.S.	Morocco	--
Lisa	U.S.	South Korea	--
Madison	U.S.	Morocco	First time studying abroad for a prolonged period of time.
Mandy	U.S.	Morocco	Interested in Morocco because of a former close friend.
Matthew	Germany	South Korea	--
Seth	Haiti	Morocco	Moved to the U.S. as a child.
Sally	U.S.	Morocco	--

*Note.* The above related information is based on the researcher's interactions with the participants in passing conversations that were deemed significant to the study. Not all participants expressed information related to their intercultural experience or cultural background.

## Appendix C

## Institutional Review Board Application

April 3, 2012

**SUBJECT: “Intercultural Communication Among College Students: A Case Study in South Korea, Morocco and the United States”**

Dear Chin Yi,

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the subject proposal and has found this research protocol is **exempt from continuing IRB oversight as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).**\* Therefore, you have **approval** to proceed with the study

REMINDERS TO RESEARCHERS:

· As long as there are no changes to your methods, and you do not encounter any adverse events during data collection, you need not apply for continuing **approval** for this study.

• The **IRB** must **approve** all changes to the protocol prior to their implementation, unless such a delay would place your participants at an increased risk of harm. In such situations, the **IRB** is to be informed of the changes as soon as possible.

• The **IRB** is also to be informed immediately of any ethical issues that arise in your study.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Best of luck in your research!

Best regards,

**Mary S. Connolly, PhD**

Chair, Institutional Review Board (**IRB**)

Office for Research

University of Dayton

Dayton, OH 45469

[\(937\) 229-3493](tel:(937)229-3493)

Email: [IRB@udayton.edu](mailto:IRB@udayton.edu)

Web site: [http://www2.udayton.edu/research/compliance\\_irb.php](http://www2.udayton.edu/research/compliance_irb.php)

*\*Exempt under 45CFR46.101(b)(2): Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.*

Date of Submission: 3/28/2012

APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION  
~NO HARD COPY APPLICATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED~  
Please Submit All Materials Electronically to IRB@Notes.UDayton.edu

1. PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR [need to add lines]

Name: Chin Yi Chen

Department: International Studies

Contact Phone: 937-304-0052

Email: chinyi.cc@gmail.com

Position in University (if student, must indicate faculty sponsor): Student

Faculty Sponsor Name: Juan C. Santamarina

Faculty Sponsor Department: History & International Studies

Faculty Sponsor Contact Phone: 229-2765  
santamar@udayton.edu

Email:

2. PROJECT TITLE: Intercultural Communication Among College Students: A Case Study in South Korea, Morocco and the United States

3. PROJECT TIME FRAMES - When will data collection begin and end?

Begin: August 2012

End: December 2013

4. PROJECT EVALUATION - For evaluation of your project, please underline or highlight any of the following that apply.

Target Populations Include:

- Athletes
- Children 0-12
- Children 13-18
- Developmentally disabled
- Elderly
- Elected officials
- Mentally ill
- Non-English speaking persons
- Persons convicted of a crime
- Persons in treatment for a physical, mental, or emotional ailment
- Persons on parole
- Persons over the age of 18

ONLY

Persons with English as a second language

- Physically impaired
- Political appointees
- Pregnant women
- Prisoners
- Teachers
- UD staff

UD students

Victims of crime

Type of Data Collected/Method of Storage:

- Archives
- Audio-recordings will be made

- Collection of existing data or records
- Data will be collected anonymously
- Data will be kept confidential
- Data will be linked to participants through code numbers
- Data will be linked to participants through pseudonyms
- Data will be stored anonymously
- During the data collection, participants will be deceived
- Medical records
- Photographs will be taken
- Publicly available data
- Specimens or data collected for non-research purposes
- Participant data will be stored with participant's identity
- Video recordings will be made

#### Site of Data Collection:

- Research will be conducted in a classroom
- Research will be conducted in a health care facility
- Research will be conducted in a public place
- Research will be conducted off-campus
- Research will be conducted on a military or government-operated installation
- Research will be conducted on non-UD campuses
- Research will be conducted on UD's campus

#### Instrument/Method of Data Collection:

- Deception will be used
- Focus groups
- Includes follow-up contact with participants
- Includes interaction with children
- Includes observation of children

- Interviews – e-mail/text/on-line
- Interviews – face to face
- Interviews - telephone
- Non-UD personnel will collect data
- Observation of public behavior
- Oral History
- Psychological tests
- Questionnaires
- Research on established educational practices, using normal educational practices
- Students will collect data
- Participants will be compensated
- Surveys - anonymous
- Surveys – online
- Surveys - paper
- Uses educational or aptitude tests

#### Reason for Research:

- Faculty/Staff research
- Undergraduate honors thesis
- Undergraduate research
- Graduate research – masters thesis
- Graduate research – doctoral dissertation
- Graduate research – non-thesis
- Classroom project
- Other reason for research (specify)

#### Does Your Research Include Any of the Following?

(Check all that apply)

- Alcohol use
- Drug use
- Emotional stress
- Gambling
- Law enforcement
- Public welfare programs
- Sexual habits
- Sexual orientation

5. PROJECT STAFF - Please list personnel, including students, who will be working with human participants on this protocol (insert additional rows as needed):

NAME	ROLE
Chin Yi Chen	Researcher

6. RESEARCH ABSTRACT - In two or three sentences, provide a brief description in LAY language of the aims of this project.

This research project analyzes intercultural communication patterns among college students in South Korea, Morocco and the United States. Factors such as nonverbal communication, responses to conflict, the influence of cultural values on communication styles, and the use of language as a reflection of cultural expectations will guide the project. Fieldwork and research will be done through a study-abroad year during the 2012-2013 academic year with a semester spent in Korea University and Al Akhawayn University respectively, and will be continued in the University of Dayton upon return.

7. RESEARCH QUESTION OR HYPOTHESIS - What question do you hope to answer with your research?

This project intends to provide a comparative analysis into the divergences in intercultural communication patterns across the three different cultures of South Korea, Morocco and the United States. Four specific questions will guide the research:

1. Is there a high degree of non-verbal language present during interpersonal communication?
2. What are the communication styles of college students regarding discussion and conflict?
3. What are the cultural values and assumptions within the studied culture?
4. How does the native language act as a representation of physical and social reality?

8. STUDY POPULATION AND RECRUITMENT - Describe the study population making sure to address the following: inclusion and/or exclusion criteria, numbers of participants, how will participants be approached and recruited, attach electronic copies of advertisements/brochures used for recruitment.

The study population includes college students from South Korea, Morocco and the United States. In the study of non-English speaking participants, this study will limit data collection to results obtained from observation only. In collection of data regarding formal interviews, only informants who are good communicators and interested in participating in this study will be selected in order to generate rich data. Students who are not interested in participation will therefore be excluded from the study through the process of natural attrition.

Informant numbers will be limited to approximately 10 students in each culture. Initial recruits will be selected from a convenience sample of students who have established friendships with the researcher. The researcher may seek out additional participants who display good communication abilities should attrition occur or for the purpose of

fulfilling the researcher's desire to observe a stratified population i.e. get a broader representation of gender, race, international, and sexual orientation.

9. PROCEDURES/METHODS - Describe procedures involving human participants for this protocol. Include electronic copies (if possible) of all surveys and outcome measures used.

In each research location, a minimum of three observation sites will be selected. All sites will be selected in an attempt to replicate similar contexts within each culture. Proposed sites of observation include two on-campus sites such as classroom settings and dining halls, where communication patterns reflect social dynamics. The final site of observation will be an off-campus site, where the observations and initial hypotheses of communication patterns between college students can be tested in a different environmental setting and new observations can be made. The three main campuses where the research will be conducted are Korea University, located in Seoul, Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, and the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

In the examination of communication patterns, an observation of the following relationships will be used to better analyze social dynamics: 1. Interactions between indigenous students 2. Interactions between indigenous students and international students 3. Interactions between professors and students.

The research will begin with general observations, which can assist in later topics that may arise, and verify data collected from interviews (Crane & Angrosino, 2002). In conducting interviews, the researcher will use nondirective and directive methods (Crane & Angrosino, 2002). Nondirective interviews, which allow informants to talk freely about personal interests and opinions, will be conducted in the beginnings of the research in all three cultures so as to attempt to collect all possible information of interest. Directive interviews will be conducted as the researcher spends more time in the culture and has a more specific idea of questions that have been formed through previous observations.

Ethical considerations such as the presentation of honest statements about the conducted research and its uses, the personal limits of the researcher in interacting with members of the studied culture, and the protection of the anonymity of informants as well as an honest and complete presentation of the research will be used (Crane & Angrosino, 2002). Informed consent forms will be distributed to all informants prior to engaging in interview protocol as well as given copies of this form to keep for their personal records. Each participant will be given a pseudonym for use in data analysis and presentation. While all of the participants will be aware of the existence of other participants, there will be no contact between them engineered by the researcher. If they choose to contact one another and discuss each other's participation in the study, this will be possible. Alternatively, if they wish to not discuss their involvement in the study, they will also be able to decline to engage with other student participants. There is no perceivable threat to the trustworthiness of the research or to the student participants by other student participants knowing their identities throughout the duration of the study.



Student participants will not be financially compensated for their involvement in this study. The primary compensation will be the opportunity to engage in a one-on-one informative relationship with the researcher. The relationship should be beneficial to the student in a manner that a friendship with any student would be in a campus environment.

10. RISKS AND BENEFITS - Describe the risks to participants (risks listed here should be included in the consent document. What steps will be taken to minimize risks? Describe any direct benefits to participants (if any). Describe any potential future benefits to this class of participants. Under what circumstances would participation be terminated?

The risks for participants in this study include the exposure of their communication styles in their daily relationships to the observation of the researcher. Student informants who participate in this study will permit the researcher a greater insight into their personal principles and cultural values. They will not be required to provide personal information in the event that they feel uncomfortable about discussing their personal opinions on the nature of the communication patterns in their culture. The researcher will maintain confidentiality and anonymity of student participants at all times and data will always be kept private. In the event of interviews, they will be conducted one-on-one in a private setting or through textual exchange such as email so as to avoid any possibilities of causing potential social or relational problems. The researcher plans to act as a nearly invisible observer as far as possible throughout the duration of the study.

Direct benefits to participants include a heightened personal awareness of the importance of intercultural communication, as well as the ability to gain personal insight into their own motivations, desires, impulses, self-image and understandings. The student participant will gain the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural dialogue with the researcher, who is an international student from Singapore currently studying in the United States, and gain a deeper understanding of another culture.

Potential future benefits to participants include an easier transition to a foreign culture in the event of their future participation and engagement with foreign cultures through a heightened awareness of intercultural communication patterns. The researcher also plans to utilize the research to challenge cultural misconceptions within the school community through the presentation of the final research result to student audiences in symposiums held in the University of Dayton, which will potentially benefit this class of students in the event of future engagement such as study abroad experiences with the University of Dayton.

Participation will be terminated in the event that students fail to provide responsive communication with the researcher and who have little to contribute or display an increasing lack of enthusiasm in participating in the study, due to a lack of useful and accurate data that can be utilized in shaping the final research product.

11. CONFIDENTIALITY/DATA MANAGEMENT - How will participant data and responses be managed, stored and reported? How will participant identity and

confidentiality be protected? Will participants be audio taped, photographed or videotaped during this study?

Participant data and responses will be recorded privately in a journal by the researcher, and will not be made available to anyone else other than the researcher herself.

Participants will be assigned pseudonyms during data collection, analysis and presentation to maintain their confidentiality, and the final research result will only utilize these pseudonyms. The final research result will comprise of a thesis written on intercultural communication patterns and presentations at the Stander Symposium and the Honors Student Symposium in the University of Dayton – pseudonyms will be used in all cases.

No audio taping, photography or videotaping of participants will be used in the duration of the study.

12. CONSENT AND ASSENT - underline or highlight as appropriate. This can be sent by e-mail to [IRB@notes.udayton.edu](mailto:IRB@notes.udayton.edu).

Consent forms will be used and are attached for review (Use UD consent form template).

Additionally, child assent forms will be used and are attached. (check if applicable and attach form)

If you will be accessing or gathering personal health information include HIPAA authorization form or use UD's HIPAA template.

Consent forms will not be used (Must justify request for waiver).

13. OTHER APPROVALS - Check underline or highlight that apply and submit copies with application

Has this protocol been submitted to any other IRBs? If so, please list along with protocol title, number, and expiration date.

If you will be collecting data OFF-CAMPUS, you will need to provide documentation of approval by an administrator at that site (e.g., school principal). This can be sent by e-mail to [IRB@notes.udayton.edu](mailto:IRB@notes.udayton.edu).

If you are a STUDENT, you will need to provide documentation that your faculty advisor (1) has read your IRB application, and (2) approves of the research as proposed. This can be sent by e-mail by the faculty advisor to [IRB@notes.udayton.edu](mailto:IRB@notes.udayton.edu).

14. IS THIS PROJECT EXTERNALLY FUNDED? (If so, please indicate the funding source)

University of Dayton International Scholarship  
Daniel J. Curran and Claire Renzetti Scholarship (UD-funded)

## Appendix D

## Informed Consent Form

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH****• TITLE of STUDY: Intercultural Communication Among College Students: A Case Study in South Korea, Morocco and the United States**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Chin Yi Chen, BA from The University of Dayton. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

**• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to provide a comparative analysis into the divergences in intercultural communication patterns of college students across the three different cultures of South Korea, Morocco and the United States. It aims to research on cultural implications on communication styles and ultimately challenge cultural misconceptions.

The primary question guiding this research is: How are the communication patterns of college students influenced by their aspects of their native culture? In other words:

- Is there a high degree of non-verbal language present during interpersonal communication?
- What are the communication styles of college students regarding discussion and conflict?
- What are the cultural values and assumptions within the studied culture?
- How does the native language act as a representation of physical and social reality?

**• PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Honestly respond to questions asked by the researcher – both in person and in email. There will be a minimum of two face-to-face interviews. The first will be at the onset of the study and the second interview will be at the conclusion of the study.
- Email interviews will take place in the form of a question/answer or pen pal format. The researcher will question you about your communication styles in daily college life and with other students or professors. Your role will be to answer the researcher's inquiries. Timely response is appreciated.
- Estimated time commitment per week is approximately 3 hours. This includes the

time to read the emails/inbox messages from the researcher and the time it takes to respond to these emails/messages.

### **• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The risks for you in this study include the exposure of your personal opinions and communication patterns as well as behavior to the researcher. You will be asked to provide details regarding your responses to daily interactions with other students and professors.

You will not be required to be in contact with other student participants. You will only be required to maintain a one-on-one informative relationship with the researcher. You will be given a pseudonym of your choosing throughout the duration of your study, including the processes of data analysis and presentation. The researcher will maintain your confidentiality and store collected data in a private journal that will not be disclosed to anyone other than herself throughout the data collection and analysis process. The researcher plans to act as a nearly invisible observer. This is intended to preclude the possibility of the researcher causing actions or engagements with your friends that could cause potential social or relational problems.

### **• ANTICIPATED BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS**

You are invited to participate in a reflective face-to-face and pen pal method of textual exchange. The researcher will ask you personalized questions with regard to your interpersonal relationships with other students and with professors. You will be invited to reflect and respond to the researcher's questions and observations. This process is intended to offer you the opportunity to engage with the researcher in a meaningful and respectful manner, and to reflect on your own behaviors, practices, inclinations, understandings, perceptions, and relationships. It is believed that this process may be an enlightening one for you and may enable you to gain some personal insight into your own motivations, desires, impulses, self-image, and understandings. This research provides an opportunity for you to engage with a student from another culture in a one-on-one, intimate manner that is not often reproduced in a classroom environment. Reflection is a key component in learning and this project offers you the opportunity to benefit from self-reflection. This is an intrinsic and internal benefit.

### **• PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will not be financially compensated for your participation in this study.

### **• IN CASE OF RESEARCH RELATED ADVERSE EFFECTS**

If you are experiencing any kind of discomfort as a result of your participation in this study, you may contact the University of Dayton Counseling Center at (937) 229-3141. The Counseling Center is available free of charge to undergraduate students. If you find yourself experiencing distress after the Counseling Center is closed for the day, you may



**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT (or legal guardian)**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature of Participant* \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE OF WITNESS**

My signature as witness certifies that the Participant signed this consent form in my presence.

Name of Witness (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature of Witness* \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*(must be same as participant signature date)*