THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CROSS-NATIONAL ADJUSTMENT AND
IDENTITY TRANSITIONS AMONG STUDENT SOJOURNERS

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by
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ABSTRACT

There has been a significant increase in study abroad participation among U.S. students over the last seven years. Previous research has indicated that communication in general has been shown to facilitate sojourner adjustment abroad. However, to date, researchers have neither identified specific forms of communication that help students adjust, nor have they explored the specific function communication plays as a tool for adjustment abroad. One focus of this investigation, therefore, is on the patterns of communication established by a group of student sojourners as they adjusted to life abroad. In addition, previous studies have not tracked and explored subjective identity transitions across the sojourn. Thus, a second goal for this investigation was to systematically explore students’ subjective identity transitions throughout the sojourn.

This dissertation is the result of an ethnographic investigation conducted over the course of 13 months, 4 months in Paris, France and 9 months in the U.S. pre- and post-sojourn. The primary methods of data collection were narrative interviews, participant-observation, and participant journaling. This study offers a detailed description of the interconnections between sojourner stress, communication, and identity as students experienced them. Specifically, students used 9 types of talk across the sojourn to help them manage adjustment stress: Advice, superficial/introductory talk, information sharing, comparison, humor, story telling, gossip, complaint, and supportive talk. Using aspects of Burgoon’s (1978) expectancy violations theory, I suggest that some student stress is the result of unmet expectations in four major areas: Academic/language expectations, social expectations, cultural/value expectations, and travel/cultural
experience expectations. External sources of expectations came largely from their study abroad program, other students, friends/family at home, their host family, and their home university. Further, using Kim’s (2001) integrative theory on communication and cross-cultural adaptation I suggest that the more adjustments students made through communication the more functionally fit they became across time. The result was positive identity transformations including a sense of being a “global citizen” and increased feelings of confidence and independence. Based on the reported findings, this study concludes with practical suggestions for future study abroad coordinators and directions for future research.
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CHAPTER ONE:
FRAMING STUDY ABROAD

What I found appealing in life abroad was the inevitable sense of helplessness it would inspire. Equally exciting would be the work involved in overcoming that helplessness. There would be a goal involved, and I like having goals. . . What scared me was the idea of French people I’d gotten from movies and situation comedies. When someone makes a spectacular ass of himself, it’s always in a French restaurant, never a Japanese or Italian one. The French are the people who slap one another with gloves and wear scarves to cover their engorged hickies. My understanding was that, no matter how hard we tried, the French would never like us, and that’s confusing to an American raised to believe that the citizens of Europe should be grateful for all the wonderful things we’ve done. Things like movies that stereotype the people of France as boors and petty snobs, and little remarks such as “We saved your ass in World War II.” Every day we’re told that we live in the greatest country on earth. And it’s always stated as an undeniable fact: Leos are born between July 23 and August 22, fitted queen-size sheets measure sixty by eight inches, and America is the greatest country on earth. Having grown up with this in our ears, it’s startling to realize that other countries have nationalistic slogans of their own, none of which are “We’re number two!” (Sedaris, 2000, pp. 155-157).

“International Exchange Programs: An Investment in National Security” headlines a June 11, 2003 full page advertisement in the New York Times paid for by the Institute of International Education (IIE) and the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange (AIECE). The claims that international exchange aids in the bridging of nations and increases (inter)national security, while emphatic, are not new. Building bridges of communication and understanding across borders has been the impetus for many social and governmental programs, including Rotary International, the Council on
International Education Exchange, the Alliances for Expanded Study in Overseas Programs, IIE, AIECE, and the Fulbright Act. Of these international programs, one stands out above all others for its role in international exchange – the 1945 Fulbright Act. More than thirty years after he introduced the Fulbright Act, J. William Fulbright spoke to the importance of international exchange,

> It was my thought that if large numbers of people know and understand the people from nations other than their own, they might develop a capacity for empathy, a distaste for killing other men, and an inclination to peace. If the competitive urge of men could be diverted from military to cultural pursuits, the world could be a different and better place to live (Fulbright, 1976, p. 2).

However, the current socio-political positioning within and outside of the U.S. indicates prevalent and vast misunderstandings across borders such as we see with the current Iraq/U.S. and continued Palestine/Israeli conflicts.

As an effort to increase positive international relations, especially on the U.S. American front, U.S. universities are sending more students abroad than ever before (Open Doors, 2004a). Such international exchange programs have many positive outcomes, including increased world mindedness (Drews, Meyer, & Peregrine, 1996). However, due to various social and psychological barriers, the full positive outcomes of study abroad are not always achieved (Sandhu, 1994), leaving some students with lowered self esteem (Juhasz & Walker, 1988) or unable to complete their sojourn. In worst case scenarios unprepared sojourners might further instigate international tensions and increase ethnocentrism for both parties. In order to reach increased levels of international understanding, it is important that the sojourner experience a successful term abroad. Social and
psychological adjustment abroad is a key element for a successful international sojourn (Ward and colleagues, 1990, 1992, 1991, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000). Moreover, communication on the interpersonal and international level is a significant player in the development of social and psychological well-being abroad (Fontaine, 1986, 1996; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kim, 2001). Thus, the purpose of this research is to undertake an ethnographic investigation of communication and identity processes among a small group of student sojourners as they adjust to living abroad for one semester in Paris, France.

Background and Importance of Study

While many would argue that the U.S. has changed much since importance was first given to international exchange after the Second World War (Edgerton, 1976; Furnham & Bochner, 1986), many of our current domestic and international crises have not. For example, severe constraints placed post-September 11, 2001 by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) under the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 (Ziglar, 2001), such as SEVIS (the student and exchange visitor information system), have created a threatening and hostile atmosphere for targeted groups of U.S. residents, immigrants, refugees, and international students, including faculty, visiting scholars, and students on the Penn State University campus (Nafziger, 2003; Pell, 2003; UOIP, 2003). Moreover, terrorist attacks in major global cities such as London, Madrid, and New York has made international travel, and living abroad especially, an extremely intimidating prospect.
Yet, in the aftermath of 9/11 two optimistic findings suggest many U.S. Americans are maintaining open doors and open minds. The most recent educational exchange statistics report an 8.5% increase from the previous year among U.S. American students studying abroad in the 2002/03 academic year, resulting in a 145% increase over the last ten years (Open Doors, 2004a). Moreover, Penn State ranks 13th among the top 20 doctoral institutions that sent students abroad (Open Doors, 2004b). Thus, regardless of the continued tumultuous state of global affairs, people are still participating in international exchange at increasingly high rates (see Figure 1).

This news is positive in nature, indicating continued widespread belief in the potential “global understanding” benefits of international exchange. In fact, a recent survey conducted by the IIE suggests a majority of international education professionals agreed that post 9/11, “international education exchange, including
study abroad, is regarded as more important or equally as important on their campuses” (Open Doors, 2002).

Study abroad programs are not only increasingly popular, but they are also placing high expectations on participants to succeed on an international level (Open Doors, 2004a). If indeed international exchange programs stand a chance to advance the aims of “perception and perspective, of empathy, and the humanizing of international relations” (Fulbright, 1976, p. 5), then serious study of those behaviors that contribute to sojourner success must be investigated.

Scholars in the field of communication have undertaken studies investigating those international and intercultural processes that have led to successful outcomes. Kim (2001), for example, has investigated the roles of communication in cultural adaptation and identity transformation among international sojourners. However, the majority of these studies report sweeping, cross-sectional statistics gathered before and after the sojourn, are not longitudinal in nature, and do not explore subjective sojourner experience, thereby potentially missing important process dimensions such as the everyday communication patterns used by sojourners to facilitate adjustment across the entire sojourn (Ryan, & Twibell, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998). In addition, although previous research has shown communication constructs such as social support, cultural and communication competence, information seeking, anxiety management, uncertainty reduction, and impression management to be important aspects of overseas adjustment and overall success (Baldwin & Hunt, 2002; Fontaine, 1996; Hullett & Witte, 2001; Gao & Gudykunst, 1990; Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001;
Kim, 2001; Montagliani & Giacalone, 1998), none of these studies focus on the specific patterns of communication across a sojourn. Because communication plays such an essential role in sojourner adjustment (Fontaine, 1996; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Martin, 1986a, 1986b, 1987), communication practices and processes are important areas to explore if we are to increase likelihood of building bridges of understanding through international exchange. Knowledge of the actual daily communication practices among student sojourners will help scholars and study abroad program coordinators to map out the specific patterns of communication that contribute to sojourner adjustment and could lead to enhanced training and program development with a communication focus.

Previous studies among student sojourners have offered insight into their reasons for studying abroad (Edgerton, 1976; Schroth & McCormack, 2000), their experiences in general (Sam, 2001; Wilkinson, 1998), the effects of study abroad (Drews et al., 1996; Flack, 1976; Juhasz & Walker, 1988; Nash, 1976;), and a global understanding of the sojourner adjustment process (Cross, 1995; Gong, 2003; Ward & Rana-Dueba, 2000). While these generalized findings are useful, they only skim the surface of the lived experience of the sojourner. What is missing is in-depth exploration into the actual daily living practices among student sojourners, specifically those communication practices that help student sojourners to adjust within their host country and the impact that has on sojourner identity. An earlier examination of the study abroad experience revealed, for example, that one group of student sojourners used communication to facilitate adjustment (Pitts, 2001). The specific uses and patterns of that communication,
however, were not explored. Further knowledge of the daily communication practices student sojourners use abroad will result in a better understanding of the specific role communication might play in the cross-national sojourn. Moreover, an investigation into sojourner identity throughout the study abroad experience and return will help to better understand the future implications of such a life experience. Such knowledge can help future sojourners prepare for their term abroad, can help study abroad coordinators create programs to facilitate adjustment, and further inform scholars interested in specific processes of communication, identity, and adjustment across the sojourn.
CHAPTER TWO:

GUIDING LITERATURE

At times the learning curve has seemed almost vertical. The social code I discovered in France wasn’t just different from the one I knew, it was diametrically opposed to it. For a long time, I couldn’t fathom the French and, to be fair, they couldn’t fathom me either. My clothes, my smile—even how much I drank—set me apart. During my first year, dinner parties turned into tearful trials. There I was, a confident twenty-eight-year-old with the confidence knocked out of me, spending cheese courses locked in somebody’s bathroom, mascara streaming down my cheeks. It hasn’t all been tears and trials, of course. The truth is, if France failed to live up to some of my expectations, in other ways the reality has been far richer, a thousand times better than my clichéd visions (Turnbull, 2002, p. i)

Defining Constructs

In reviewing the literature on sojourner adjustment, the first matters of concern are definitional. Literature within and beyond the field of communication consistently refers to the transition to a new country in loose terms including the synonymous uses of adjustment, assimilation, acculturation, adaptation, and adjustment regardless of the host country or traveler involved (for an exception see Sussman, 2000). While each of these terms refers to the process of becoming functional at some level in a host country, they have quite different meanings. The same ambiguity surrounds the term sojourner, which has been used to refer to immigrants, refugees, missionary personnel, diplomats, humanitarian aid personnel, migrants, military personnel, expatriates with overseas assignments, and foreign students.
Sojourner

For the purposes of this research, a sojourner refers to a person who has temporarily relocated to a new country or geo-cultural location for an extended period of time. As compared to others who relocate out of necessity, (i.e., migrants, refugees), sojourners typically volunteer to relocate for a specific amount of time at which point the sojourner returns home, or relocates yet again (Ady, 1995). Sojourners differ from persons merely traveling abroad in that their length of time abroad requires at least some immersion and adjustment (Martin & Harrell, 1996).

Student sojourners are a unique subset of international sojourners. For the purposes of this research, I have defined student sojourners as those who travel abroad for a determined amount of time (usually a semester or an academic year) under the guise of academic purposes and return to their primary university to complete their degrees and/or to graduate. International students, alternatively, are those who move overseas for a longer period of time (usually four years) in order to accomplish academic requirements and attain a degree abroad. Student sojourners and international students have many common experiences, but differ in length and purpose of stay.

Adjustment

Sojourner adjustment is distinct from assimilation, adaptation, and acculturation in that it implies a temporary solution to a change in environment, and unlike acculturation or assimilation, sojourner adjustment is not an end-state, but a dynamic state of becoming (Ady, 1995; Church, 1982). Adjustment focuses
primarily on the sojourner and the behavioral and/or mental modifications made by the sojourner to be able to function in a new country rather than on how the sojourner changes to assimilate or to fit into that country. Thus, for my research adjustment refers to the process (as opposed to a goal or end-state) of becoming functional in a new country by coping with and reducing stress inherent in the transition, while adaptation refers to the functional outcome. Although I have differentiated adjustment from acculturation, assimilation, and adaptation, much of the literature reported below uses these terms synonymously. When appropriate I have substituted adjustment or adaptation. I turn now to some of the more frequently studied aspects of the international sojourn.

International Adjustment

Psychological and Social Factors

Much of the current research in the area of sojourner adjustment has been conducted by Ward and colleagues (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999; Ward & Searle, 1991). Within this research, Ward has expressed the distinction between two types of sojourner adaptation/adjustment – psychological and sociocultural (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adaptation refers to emotional and psychological well-being and satisfaction, whereas sociocultural adaptation includes social skills and the ability to “fit in” with the host country (Searle & Ward, 1990). While psychological and sociocultural adaptations are positively related, that relationship fluctuates depending on the sojourner’s integration in the host country (Searle & Ward, 1990). The more engaged the
sojourner is in the host country, the stronger the relationship (Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward et al., 1998). Psychological adjustment appears to be primarily affected by sojourner variables including personality, life changes, and social support network availability. Alternatively, sociocultural adjustment is influenced by amount of time spent in host country, sojourner-host culture similarity, sojourner-host relations, language ability, cultural knowledge, cultural identity, and acculturation strategies (Ward & Kennedy, 1992, 1993). Similarly, Sandhu (1994) suggests adjustment can be placed in two categories along a personal—social continuum – intrapersonal (psychological) and interpersonal (sociocultural). Intrapersonal factors such as a profound sense of loss due to the sudden departure from a familiar culture, family, and friends; a sense of inferiority as a result of international status; and a sense of uncertainty in their new environment, are responsible for most of the adjustment difficulties among international students (Sandhu, 1994). Difficulties associated with interpersonal adjustment include communication problems, culture shock, loss of social support systems, academics, illness, loneliness, and depression (Sandhu, 1994).

Adjustment Theories

Perhaps the most popular and oft-cited theory of transitional adjustment is the U-curve hypothesis advanced by Lysgaard (1955). The U-curve is characterized by four stages of adjustment: A “honeymoon” stage prior to or at the beginning of the sojourn in which participants are fascinated by the host country and elated to be abroad, a second stage characterized by hostility toward the host country, a third stage wherein the sojourner begins to adjust and thinks of
herself as superior to host nationals, and a final stage of adaptation wherein the sojourner accepts and integrates host country customs (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960).

Oberg (1960) further described the U-curve in his seminal essay on culture shock. According to Oberg, culture shock occurs at the lowest point on the adjustment curve. Culture shock is the anxiety resulting from the loss of ability to interpret and create meaningful communication cues in the host country (Oberg, 1960). Culture shock often results in varying levels of severity of hypochondriacal and real illnesses (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Oberg, 1960). Symptoms of culture shock can include an insurmountable longing to return home, excessive concern over daily activities, fear of host contact, a feeling of helplessness, anger and hostility, and a great concern over minor ailments (Oberg, 1960). For student sojourners, culture shock also includes academic adjustment difficulties (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Sojourners experiencing culture shock often have two reactions – reject the host environment and retreat toward national identity groups (Kosmitzki, 1996; Oberg, 1960; Wilkinson, 1998).

What Oberg (1960) and Lysgaard’s (1955) description of the U-curve and culture shock neglect to take into account, however, is the return to the home country. In response to this, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) proposed the W-curve to encompass reacculturation upon reentry. The W-curve reflects the mirror image of the U-curve, with the second curve describing reentry difficulties.

Although the W-curve appears to hold more heuristic weight than the U-curve, neither perspective of sojourner adjustment hold much more than
sentimental value for current intercultural researchers. Two major problems with the U-curve hypothesis remain. First, there is little evidence to suggest sojourner adjustment and adaptation follow either the U or W-curve. Results from numerous studies that have undertaken systematic investigation of the U-curve (e.g., Nash, 1991; Ward et al., 1998) suggest support for the hypotheses is weak and findings are inconclusive (Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Hsiao-Ying, 1995; Nash, 1991; Ward et al., 1998). In addition, the hypotheses do not account for sojourners who fail to adapt and/or return home prematurely (Hsiao-Ying, 1995; Nash, 1991). A second problem is that the research and conceptualization of culture shock and adjustment have been inherently negative in nature. Such models present cultural adjustment as a crisis to be weathered before successful adaptation can occur rather than focusing on the positive aspects of such encounters (Adler, 1987). Although current research continues to test and use the U-curve hypothesis (e.g., Gaw, 2000; Ryan & Twibell, 2000), and trainers continue to prepare sojourners for transitional stress using the U-curve model (Martin & Harrell, 1996), such studies offer little new insight on the process of adjustment among sojourners.

Stress and Coping

Much of the international adjustment research is grounded in a stress and coping framework advanced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). It is generally accepted that a) stress results from a struggle to reestablish a homeostasis following a transition and b) humans are largely intolerant of change (Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan & Mullan, 1981). Life events, such as an international
transition, can create new strains and/or intensify existing strains resulting in stress (Pearlin et al., 1981). Coping and adjustment in the international context are psychological responses to challenges brought forth in and inextricably tied to the new host environment wherein sojourners struggle to meet the demands of an unfamiliar environment, people, tasks, and situations (Kim, 2001; Sykes & Eden, 1985). The sojourner’s ability to cope with and adjust to those strains will influence her overall adaptation and sojourn outcome (Adelman, 1988; Walton, 1990).

The stress and coping perspective on international adjustment has pushed forward one particularly insightful communication theory – Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Although this theory seeks to explain the domain of cross-cultural adaptation, it is a useful tool in understanding sojourner adjustment strategies en route to adaptation. Kim defines cross-cultural adaptation as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (p. 31). Her theory revolves around a spiral stress-adaptation-growth over time model (see Figure 2). Kim suggests that three intercultural transformations take place during the adaptation process. First, the sojourner achieves a level of functional fitness in which she is able to interact competently in the host society. Second, the sojourner becomes psychologically healthy and no longer experiences emotional, mental, and/or physical trauma associated with transitional stress. Third, the sojourner experiences a gradual
development of an intercultural identity. The intercultural identity is not bound to a specific culture or location. Instead it is flexible and always developing in the context of new environments and social situations.

![Diagram showing adaptation over time with stress as a factor]

**Figure 2: Kim’s (2001) Stress, Adaptation, Growth Model**

Understanding the stress present in an international sojourn is an important step in understanding the coping and adjustment strategies used by sojourners. Furnham and Bochner (1986) offer three related explanations for the stress that follows a sojourn. They suggest overt and covert value differences between home and host country invite stress, anxiety, and lack of well-being into the lives of the student sojourner. Essentially, the larger the difference in values (i.e., Hofstede’s value dimensions), the higher the anxiety (Redmond, 2000). Second, adjustment strain may result from the life-events turning point, which, as with many major life transitions, is likely to induce anxiety and promote illness (Ward, 1996). For example, sojourners undergoing cultural transition will inevitably experience a number of life changes that will incur a significant amount of stress (Ward &
Searle, 1991). Finally, Furnham and Bochner state that stress is also the result of the rapid loss of social network ties due to the international transition.

Whereas Furnham and Bochner (1986) offer general reasons for the stress inherent in the international transition, stress specifically targeting student sojourners has also been found. Previous research has not only found that high levels of stress in international student populations interfere with personal and academic performance, but that such high levels of stress puts these students at unnecessary risk of physical and mental illness (Randall, Naka, Yamamoto, Nakamoto, Arakaki, & Ogura, 1998). Stress relating to the international sojourn include: Perceived discrimination, social isolation, threat to cultural identity, threat to personal competence with the most mundane of tasks, inferiority, homesickness, fear, anger/disappointment, mistrust, communication/language difficulty, culture shock, perceived hatred, frustration in reaching academic goals, guilt, helplessness, depression, and suicide ideation (Fontaine, 1996; Randall et al., 1998; Yang & Clum, 1994). Moreover, emotional problems accompanying transitional stress, such as anxiety and depression, can limit vitality and social activity (Ryan & Twibell, 2000) thereby diminishing possibilities of developing necessary social networks.

**Social Support and Friendship**

In light of the stresses and strains present during an international transition, sojourners must be able to apply coping strategies and manage their stress in order to function abroad. Social support is one mechanism that has been found to aid in the process of physiological and psychological well-being,
especially when a person is exposed to a major life transition (Cassel, 1976; Turner, 1981). Transitioning to a new university can be an anxiety provoking transitional situation that calls for increased sources of social support all students (Pratt et al., 2000). University students with available formal and informal social support networks tend to fare better than those without such intervening support (Huff, 2001; Pratt et al., 2000). Student sojourners manage many of the stress-related variables for university students in general, such as academic stress and identity formation, becoming self-supporting, contributing positively to society, and establishing independence (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Wiseman, 1997). However, student sojourners must cope with these stressors in accompaniment with others specifically related to education abroad, such as communication problems, hostility, homesickness, and the added pressures of being perceived as an ambassador of their country (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Students abroad must also negotiate the cultural complexities of social support in their new host country.

Various types of support play a critical role in developing adaptive functioning and a sense of well-being among sojourners (Fontaine, 1996). Social support enables sojourners to manage major transitional and everyday stress by allowing them to vent frustrations, allowing them to express and/or receive messages of acceptance and reassurance, providing information that enhances communication skills, reducing uncertainty, providing points of social comparison, enhancing perceived mastery and control, and assisting in coping with mental and physical trauma/illness (Adelman, 1988; Albrecht & Adelman,
1984). Albrecht and Adelman (1984) suggest that sharing a context, such as a sojourn abroad, may allow for the most effective social support, “because such individuals are more familiar with the intensity of the situation, share a common meaning for environmental symbols with the receiver, and therefore may play a special role in the uncertainty reduction process” (p. 5). Moreover, Vaux’ (1990) ecological perspective on social support networks suggests, “environmental demands and stressors influence the support process. In the short term, stressors may serve to mobilize the network and elicit supportive behavior. In the long term, shared stressors might promote supportive relationships between those who have ‘been through a lot together’” (p. 512).

As the above perspectives on social support suggest, communal coping is one distinct way in which a social support network is activated to help a body of people (student sojourners) come together to cope with a pressing issue (host-country adjustment). Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan and Coyne (1998) describe communal coping as occurring when a stressful situation is perceived as a group rather than an individual problem, which in turn activates a sense of collaborative coping. In the face of a common stressor, people may band together to gain benefits not available to the individual (Lyons et al., 1998). Such an approach toward coping with transitional stress is often evoked for student sojourners who form co-sojourner social support networks for many reasons (Fontaine, 1996). Social support networks among co-sojourners can provide resources, information and guidance, opportunities, feedback about perceptions of and interactions with other cultures; they can provide ideological validation and a source of comfort or
rest from the stress and fatigue of dealing with a new environment; a different perspective, a similar perspective, a comparison group, someone with whom to share responsibility and effort; and a sense of familiarity, intimacy, and companionship (Fontaine, 1986, 1996).

The role of social support among sojourners is particularly interesting, in part because of the disruption in their previous support ties, and because of the pressure to develop new ones in the face of transitional stress (Copeland & Norell, 2002). The loss of social networks upon arrival in a host-country in itself is a significant predictor of stress (Albert, 1986; Fontaine, 1986, 1996). Thus, the stress inherent in the international sojourn, partially created by lack of a social network, calls for a new support network to help buffer the stress of adjustment (Fontaine, 1996). However, social support networks overseas are often hindered in providing adequate support because of the contextual restraints put on the network (Fontaine, 1986). Inadequate social support is linked to poor adjustment and can negatively impact the mental and physical health of sojourners (Jou & Fukada, 1994). Overall, the lack of social support among sojourners is a source of stress, but the availability of social support has a positive impact on adjustment (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

Social support is a particularly effective tool for combating sojourner loneliness and creating friendship networks (Wiseman, 1997). For the first days and weeks of a sojourn, students are prone to loneliness. It is during this initial stage of international adjustment that students have been found to seek out people, usually of the same nationality, with whom to form a network of friendships
(Wiseman, 1997). However, some research has found that although interpersonal relationships are important and developed relatively quickly, they remain a primary concern for study abroad students, as friendship formation can be difficult (Ryan & Twibell, 2000).

Friendship and social support networks among student sojourners tend to follow a predictable pattern: friendship formation among co-nationals first, followed by friendship formation with other international students, and finally among host nationals (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Sam, 2001). Bochner et al. (1977) express this tendency toward friendship formation occurs in three ways: Mono-cultural friendships (friendships only with co-nationals wherein home culture values can be expressed and rehearsed), bi-cultural friendships (friendships between host and co-nationals which serve as instrumental guides for academic and professional purposes), and multicultural friendships (friendships between host and international students which provide companionship for recreational, non-culture and non-task, purposes).

Student sojourners might at first rely solely on national enclaves for friendship and social support due to lack of communication competence, but once students have developed the necessary language and social skills for interacting with the host-nationals, they are able to develop supportive bonds with host-members. For example, Wilkinson (1998) has found “as participants begin to integrate into their new surroundings, boundaries between in- and out-groups become ‘softer’ and new cross-cultural identities develop, thereby diminishing the need for native-culture anchoring.” (p. 32). Thus, Bochner et al. (1977) suggest
co-national bonds “are of vital importance to foreign students, and should therefore not be administratively interfered with, regulated against, obstructed, or sneered at” (p. 292). Instead, co-national bonds should be encouraged to develop into multi-national bonds (Bochner et al., 1977), perhaps through the development of a co-national and host-national buddy system for students (Sandhu, 1994).

While building a co-national support network assists in psychological adjustment among sojourners by providing a sense of security, maintaining a solely co-national support system puts the sojourner at risk of limited long-term adjustment and often forces the sojourner to the periphery of the host society (Cross, 1995; Ying & Liese, 1994; Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Thus, it appears important that student sojourners develop strong host and co-national support (García, Ramírez & Jariego, 2002; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Host-national support is beneficial because it helps the student sojourner to learn social and cultural skills; co-national support is important because students are enabled to retain their cultural identity and help to establish a familiar group (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

The benefits of social support outweigh any drawbacks, but social support networks are not inherently positive, nor are they easy to create and maintain. Stressors may arise through the network especially when the entire unit is undergoing transitional stress and relational bonds are being tested (Vaux, 1990). Unfortunately, because of the high density nature of student sojourner networks and lack of available, easily accessed others, their social support cluster can be “fortressed” from the host-country thereby limiting the kinds of support available
to students (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984). In addition, because of the contagion
effect sometimes present in social support networks, a few negative support
providers can render the network ineffective (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984).
Moreover, although social support is shown to have a significant impact on
sojourner adjustment, sojourners are not trained in strategies for development,
maintenance, and management of such a network (Fontaine, 1996). This lack of
training and knowledge can result in ineffective support overseas. Finally,
differences in the amount of support needed for the individual sojourner, the
quality of support available and/or necessary, and the new cultural codes for
displaying and engaging in social support further complicates the overseas social
support network.

Sojourner Characteristics

Sojourner Identity

In addition to understanding sojourner communication and psycho-social
adjustment overseas, a review of sojourner identity processes is provided to
overview the impact a sojourn can have on personal and social identities in the
transition process. Social identity processes appear to be a major contributor to
overseas adjustment (Nesdale & Mak, 2003). Of primary importance are those
factors that relate to national and ethnic identity salience for the sojourner
(Nesdale & Mak, 2003; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). For example, overseas
students often experience an increase in national identity salience as a result of
being placed in a new environment and therefore seek out co-nationals who can
support and validate their identity (Kosmitzki, 1996; Sussman, 2000; Wilkinson,
In comparison with social identity processes, within group identity processes appears to play a significant role only after the sojourner has initiated the adjustment process and begins to differentiate herself from other in-group members, however this within group differentiation is an under explored concept.

The increase in identity salience among student sojourners is likely to cause some identity conflict, especially when the sojourner realizes that her identity is not in correspondence with the social environment around her (Leong & Ward, 2000). Identity conflict can arise in international sojourners because “lack of knowledge about the host culture and the loss of the reference group as a reinforcement of one’s identity may cause anxiety and insecurity” (Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, Obdrzálek, 2000, p. 3). Although identity conflict among sojourners can occur as a result of identity salience in the new culture, sojourner’s tolerance of ambiguity, attributional complexity, and/or strong national identity lowers levels of identity conflict (Leong & Ward, 2000). However, perceived discrimination and quantity versus quality of interaction with host nationals increases identity conflict among sojourners (Leong & Ward, 2000).

Research on cultural adjustment continues to find that sojourners group together on the basis of national identity, creating national enclaves reflecting home cultures (Cross, 1995; Hsiao-Ying, 1995; Kosmitzki, 1996; Nesdale & Mak, 2003; Ying-Liese, 1994). Wilkinson (1998) and Nash (1991), for example, found that U.S. students experience a major transition in national identity salience upon arrival in France and as a result spend a significant amount of time with “a clump” of other U.S. Americans. Church (1982) explains:
Such enclaves allow the sojourner to reestablish primary group relations and maintain familiar, traditional values and belief systems while minimizing psychological and behavioral adjustments. A protective function is served whereby psychological security, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging are provided, and social stresses are reduced. Such enclaves also serve as reference groups with whom the new environment can be discussed, compared, and interpreted (p. 551).

Because interactions with local people often put student sojourners in a situation in which they are reminded of their national identity, sojourners tend to communicate in ways that enhance that identity to satisfy both compatriot and host expectations (Bochner et al., 1977). Although many U.S. study abroad program coordinators discourage students from forming such enclaves, in the face of difficulties that emerge throughout a sojourn, students tend to turn toward each other as an attempt to reclaim their identity and self confidence and to process their experiences communally (Wilkinson, 1998).

Groups of students formed on the basis of national identity seem to serve as a survival mechanism by providing identity validation and enabling students to function in potentially threatening intergroup encounters and daily activities abroad (Wilkinson, 1998). These co-national enclaves tend to shed a strong positive light on national/cultural identity that not only encourages identification with one’s home culture, but also discourages identification with the host country (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). This finding persists even though strong co-national identity appears to impede development of the complex social skills necessary for negotiating the host-country (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). Still, identification with
co-nationals seems to provide sojourners significant ballast during cultural adjustment and reduces likelihood of identity problems (Leong & Ward, 2000).

Some evidence suggests the strength with which sojourners hold their national/ethnic identities influences adjustment strategies and capabilities – those who hold firmly to a particular identity experience more difficulty in adjustment than those who do not (van Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998). Ward and Searle (1991) also found that cultural dissimilarity/distance and strong national identity are negatively correlated with sojourner adjustment. The larger the “culture” gap between hosts and sojourners, the more likely are sojourners to create national/ethnic enclaves rather than exposing themselves to the wider host culture, which in turn serves to increase members’ sense of ethnic pride and self-esteem (Nesdale & Mak, 2003).

One model is particularly helpful in understanding identity processes across the sojourn. In her cultural identity and cultural transition model, Sussman (2000), proposes that cultural identity shifts and self-concept disturbance occurring throughout cross-cultural transitions are critical factors in predicting and explaining cultural adjustment and adaptation. She argues that identity salience, sociocultural adaptation, and self-concept/cultural identity changes work together in a cyclical fashion to predict consequences for the transition process. Her model suggests that upon entering the host-country sojourners experience a shift in national or ethnic identity salience. The identity salience at the start of the international transition leads to home country reaffirmation and development of co-national social networks. Once sojourners have negotiated adjustment
strategies in their new location, they recognize the discrepancy between their enacted identity and their environmental context. Depending on the sojourner’s cultural flexibility and identity centrality, she will engage in different stages of self-growth and environmental fit. Adaptation occurs when sojourners become comfortable with their person-environment fit. When the sojourn comes to an end, sojourners engage in a similar identity cycle upon reentry. Once again, the self-concept is disturbed and changes in cultural identity become salient. As a consequence of identity shifts and identity salience, Sussman proposes four distinct types of sojourner identities that surface upon reentry: additive (sojourners identify more strongly with their host- rather than home-country), subtractive (sojourners do not identify with their home country or compatriots), affirmative (sojourners maintain a strong home-culture identity and shed any acquired host-country identity), and intercultural identity (sojourners attempt to hold multiple identity and cultural scripts across contexts).

**Sojourner Traits**

In addition to the stress, coping, social support, and identity aspects influencing the study abroad experience, a variety of personal characteristics have been found influential in sojourner adjustment. Naturally, those students who choose to engage in a study abroad program might differ quite significantly from those who do not from the outset (Church, 1982; Drews et al., 1996). For example, Schroth and McCormack (2000) found that as compared to students who do not study abroad, student sojourners rank high on sensation seeking and need for academic achievement.
Broadly stated, strong interpersonal skills and social interests are associated with overseas success (Kealey, 1989). Although personality does not appear to affect sojourner adjustment in a straightforward manner (Armes & Ward, 1988), and is not as strong a predictor of preliminary adjustment as are some social support variables (Jou & Fukada 1994, 1996b), some trends in the literature do exist. In general, sojourners with positive expectations and previous experience abroad have greater adjustment ease, higher satisfaction, and less stress than those without (Kealey, 1989; Martin, 1987; Rohrlich & Martin, 1991).

Communication competence facilitates cultural adjustment, while cultural empathy encourages host-sojourner interaction and social adjustment (Montaglioni & Giacalone, 1998; Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002). In addition, personality factors such as internal locus of control, extroversion, self-efficacy, and goal orientation appear to be related to adjustment and psychological well-being (García et al., 2002; Gong, 2003; Jou & Fukada, 1996a, 1996b; Tsang, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1992). However, an external locus of control, loneliness, weak co-national identification, dissatisfaction with personal relationships, difficulties with sociocultural adjustment, dissatisfaction with the quality of host and co-national relationships, and a high incidence of host national contact have been shown to predict psychological distress and poor adjustment among student sojourners (Ward & Kennedy, 1992; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Moreover, the greater the disparities between pre-sojourn expectations and expectation fulfillment, the more psychological adjustment difficulties have been shown (Weissman & Furnham, 1987). Finally, nationality, ethnic status, and sojourner
self-construal (i.e., interdependent or independent) can also affect sojourner adjustment, especially when the value orientation of the host country does not match that of the home country, resulting in adjustment dissonance (Church, 1982; Cross, 1995; Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002).

Returning from the International Sojourn

Reentry

Although less studied, reentry adjustment provides as much, if not more, insight into desired sojourner outcomes such as increased international understanding and bridge building. Reentry into one’s home country after an extended sojourn is often as distressing as the sojourn (Martin & Harrell, 1996). Similar to entry into the host country, the reentry processes can bring about depression, alienation, isolation, loneliness, general anxiety, speech anxiety, friendship difficulties, shyness concerns, and feelings of inferiority (Gaw, 2000). One study found that even six months after their return, international students showed substantial emotional distress (Furukawa, 1997). The difficulties in reentry adjustment are largely communicative in that the sojourner is forced to redefine her identity and her relationships with family and friends who did not study abroad (Martin, 1986a, 1986b). Rohrlich and Martin (1991) further suggest the mismatch between frequency and depth of communication achieved during the sojourn (usually among co-sojourners) and the depth and amount of communication sojourners experience upon return proves dissatisfying. Others have speculated that expectations of the reentry are a primary source of anxiety and disappointment for sojourners (Gaw, 2000). Gaw (2000) attributes this to the
fact that many sojourners expect the home environment and relationships within
to remain relatively unchanged, while in reality both the sojourner and the home
country have no doubt undergone at least some changes. Equally stressful is the
disruption, yet again, in sojourner’s social networks (Fontaine, 1986).

In her review of reentry adjustment, Martin (1984) proposed that specific
elements pertaining to the sojourner and specific elements pertaining to the host
country carried the most influence in reentry adjustment. Elements related to the
sojourner included gender, age, academic level, previous cross-cultural
experience, and nationality (Martin, 1984; Tamura & Furnham, 1993). Elements
related to the host country that influence reentry include location of sojourn,
duration, degree of interaction, and readiness to return home (Martin, 1984).
Research tends to suggest that reentry shock is strongest for sojourners who were
most successful in adapting overseas (Fontaine, 1986). However, Furukawa
(1997) found that maladjustment overseas predicted poor reentry adjustment. This
suggests that perhaps adaptive, flexible people are able to adjust to many new
situations. Sussman (2001) also found that returning sojourners who were the
least prepared for the reentry and experienced the greatest shifts in identity had
the most difficulty upon reentry.

Although upon return to their home country many students report
satisfaction with their sojourn experience (Sam, 2001), satisfaction with life upon
reentry appears to be somewhat lower (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). This is often
compounded with the change in the physical and social home country
environment to which the sojourner returns (Martin, 1984). Upon return, students
might be inclined to place a halo around the experience abroad and desire to return to the host country (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). A difficult reentry might bring about severe academic and social problems for the returning sojourner which are rendered even more detrimental given findings that suggest those with serious reentry difficulties are not likely to reach out for professional or interpersonal support (Gaw, 2000). For those who do derive support upon return, they often identify with and find comfort among others who have shared a similar intercultural experience (Koester, 1984).

Implications of the Sojourner Experience

Despite the claim that “international education has contributed greatly to the major goal of international understanding by promoting an awareness of the shared nature of most human concerns…[and is] an unparalleled means of promoting understanding of other cultures” (Edgerton, 1976, p. 7), in the past thirty years there has been little empirical evidence to support this claim, or even point to what exactly the outcomes of international education are (Juhasz & Walker, 1988). However, the findings that do exist tend to suggest that along with the many difficulties associated with international exchange, there are positive outcomes. Whereas a “survive to tell about it” motto seemed to encompass study abroad programs in the 1970s and 1980s, more recent study abroad participants seem to have a deeper awareness of our increasingly global society and anticipate a positive social experience in their host country (Ryan & Twibell, 2000).

One of the most obvious outcomes of a term abroad is educational. Ryan and Twibell (2000) reported an increase in students’ perception of academic
knowledge as well as serendipitous learning about themselves and human nature outside of the classroom. Yet, educational outcomes may vary greatly depending on the level of training a student receives prior to their sojourn (Martin, 1989). A second obvious outcome of the study abroad experience is language learning (Freed, 1995; Meara, 1994; Rivers, 1998). However, language learning and communication competence abroad can be a hit or miss affair depending on amount of time socializing with host members, quality of host interaction, whether or not the student was involved in a home stay, and length of time abroad (Church, 1982; Meara, 1994; Rivers, 1998). Still, academic and language benefits do not speak strongly toward international awareness and global understanding obtained for international versus domestic students.

Students who study abroad also tend to become more world-minded, have cultural empathy, be able to critically view cultural value orientations, and develop a more sophisticated and concrete awareness of their own and other cultures resulting in a reduction of monolithic and ethnocentric cultural characterizations (Church, 1982; Drews et al., 1996; Flack, 1976; Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Moreover, students who have studied abroad exhibit an increased likelihood to engage in international activities (Church, 1982). In general, the academic sojourn is marked by a broadening of perspectives, increased autonomy, expansion and differentiation of the self, and increased maturity as compared to domestic students (Juhasz & Walker, 1988; Nash, 1976; Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). Unfortunately, this increase in self-awareness, can also result in lower
levels of self-confidence (Nash, 1976), self-esteem, and self-efficacy for student sojourners than their domestic counterparts (Juhasz & Walker, 1988).

Rationale for Study

Statement of the Problem

Much of the research on student sojourners has focused on academic and personal outcomes of the study abroad, but we still know very little about the processes and patterns of communication used by student sojourners as they adjust to life abroad and the identity outcomes of such a transitional life experience. Researchers have lamented the overwhelming emphasis on sojourner outcomes and sojourner difficulties and the lack of exploration into the actual process of the study abroad experience (Church, 1982; Kealey, 1989; Kim, 2001). It is likely that many everyday communication practices and processes used by students throughout the sojourn help them adjust to life abroad and contribute to overall sojourner experience (Pitts, 2001). In fact, an underlying assumption in much of the research is that sojourners who adjust well overseas are more likely to have a positive experience abroad and have an increased likelihood of developing international awareness than those who experience adjustment difficulties (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999, 2000). Unfortunately, longitudinal and process-oriented research that could inform students, educators, and programmers about communication practices across the sojourn is rare; most sojourner studies rely on retrospective surveys, pre- and post-sojourn questionnaires, or cross-sectional data neglecting the daily lived practices of students abroad (Bochner et al., 1977; Church, 1982; Tsang, 2001; Ying & Liese, 1994). Even more
distressing is the finding that sojourner studies lack research that illuminates the process of communication and adjustment across the sojourn (Adelman, 1988). Therefore, given the wealth of findings reported earlier in this document that suggest communication (i.e., social support, impression management, and anxiety reduction) is a key aspect of sojourner adjustment and experience, it is of sincere importance that scholars undertake the study of those specific, day to day, communication practices used by student sojourners as they adjust to life abroad. Moreover, to fully understand the long-term outcomes such as international awareness, global understanding, and cross-national bridge building, an investigation of student sojourner identity processes across the sojourn and reentry is warranted.

Statement of Purpose

The lack of knowledge surrounding communication processes and patterns among students who study abroad, and most especially as they occur across time during the study abroad experience, has been noted (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Research indicates that overall psychological and sociological adjustment is related to sojourner success (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Research further indicates that communication plays an important role in fostering psychological and sociological adjustment (Fontaine, 1996). Previous research does not illustrate, however, what are those communication practices in which sojourners participate that might contribute to such sojourner outcomes. The purpose of this research is to describe the communication practices that sojourners use as they adjust to their term abroad and how those practices are perceived to relate to
sojourner identity processes across the sojourn and reentry. With further knowledge of specific communication practices associated with the adjustment processes for sojourners, we can equip students, parents, and study abroad coordinators with tools to help student sojourners manage the transitional stress present in an international sojourn and help them to navigate the inevitable waters of identity transitions abroad. Moreover, we can help lay a foundation for sojourners to begin building bridges of understanding across nations by helping students to understand the processes and practices of communication and identity across the sojourn, rather than having them spend the majority of their sojourn “merely surviving” by always re-establishing and re-inventing communication and coping strategies. To achieve that end, it is necessary to systematically study the processual nature of the international sojourn from pre-departure throughout the return from a communication-centered approach.

This research is the result of a semester long ethnography tracing the transition from home to host country and return revealing a detailed mapping of the communication and identity practices and processes among a group of student sojourners studying in Paris. In addition to writing about the community of sojourners in general, the specific focus of inquiry for this ethnography was on the communication processes and practices used among student sojourners as they adjusted to living abroad for one semester and the ways in which those practices influenced their identities.
CHAPTER THREE:
PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH

In Paris they simply stared when I spoke to them in French; I never did succeed in making those idiots understand their language. - Mark Twain

Because international adjustment is a process that begins before the actual departure and continues throughout the sojourn and eventual return, an investigation of sojourner communication practices and identity transitions must be longitudinal in design and process-oriented. Such research must also be sensitive enough to capture the various experiential and communicative nuances present throughout the sojourn in participants’ daily routines and larger events.

Thus, in order to gain a holistic understanding of the communication adjustment processes and practices and identity transitions embedded in the study abroad context, I conducted a longitudinal (March, 2004 – May, 2005) ethnographic investigation into a small group of sojourning students in Paris, France. These 15 months were broken into three phases, the pre-departure phase (six months) in the U.S., the semester abroad (four months) in Paris, and the reentry (five months) in the U.S.

Ethnography is simply the writing of culture. It is used to document a process among an interdependent group of people (LeComte & Schensul, 1999), often referred to as a culture (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1988) or a community of shared identity (Carbaugh, 1996). Ethnography stresses the engaged nature of the researcher within the social scene and holistic description of the group under study, in this case, study abroad students. Because of the often intimate nature of
ethnography, it is important to build a rapport with the community under study, to live and interact with participants. Ethnography is interpretive in nature, the purpose for which is to come to understand and interpret community meanings through detailed analysis, recording, and thick-description of that group (Denzin, 1997). Finally, “the in-depth specificity of interpretive data brings our understanding of certain social phenomenon into clear focus” (Miller-Day, 2004).

Field Site

I joined the Penn State International Education of Students (IES) Paris program during the Fall 2004 semester. There were several reasons why I chose Paris as my investigation site, but perhaps the most compelling was the personal and research experience I have with France. During the 1996-1997 academic year, as a junior in college, I attended a study abroad program in Montpellier, France. That experience, as I have said many times since then, can only be summed up in a most clairvoyant remark by my father as I was leaving the country for the first time, “the word experience is not necessarily prefaced by the word good.” And it wasn’t. But it was an experience that had a profound effect on my self-perception and worldview. It was my experience as a student sojourner that led me to further explore whether others had similar experiences. But, my own sojourn experiences were not the only ones that led me to the decision to study abroad in Paris. The Paris program is a well-attended semester-long program (as opposed to 3 weeks or an academic year), which enabled me to explore the entire transition from pre-departure throughout the return in a timely manner, yet that also allowed me to thoroughly explore all phases. In fact, the short term abroad might be a better
indicator of study abroad experiences than a full year, as the majority of students who study abroad do so for only short terms and not an entire year (Open Doors, 2004a; Jacobs, 2005). Moreover, in the year 2004, France was the fourth most popular destination for U.S. American students to study abroad (Open Doors, 2004b). Finally, the ongoing tensions between France and the United States make it a unique place to investigate not only communication patterns, but national identity as well. The tensions between the U.S. and France during my time abroad were further exacerbated by President Chirac’s “refusal” to send military troops to fight in Iraq. This tension can be summed up in an oft-quoted, and highly offensive to the French, 2003 statement made by what was then the future U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, “We must punish France, ignore Germany, and forgive Russia” (Leicester, 2004). My familiarity with the location, language, and academic program in Paris, in combination with my previous research on student sojourners in France (Pitts, 2001) helped to ground me as a researcher and enable me to focus on co-student communication and identity patterns across the sojourn rather than focusing on my own communication and adjustment skills.

Participants

The pliable nature of ethnography offered the opportunity for many people to participate in this study at various levels. The primary participants, or what I would eventually call “my precious few,” were eight Penn State students attending the IES Paris Fall 2004 program – two males and six females. The unequal female to male ratio among participants was due to the fact that female students are more likely to spend a semester in Paris than male. It was with these
participants that I developed the closest rapport (with the addition of one female student who became, to us, an “honorary Penn Stater” rendering nine total participants). I got to know the nine “precious few” participants over the course of the sojourn. Through their narratives of home, friends, lovers, family, school, work, and numerous life experiences I was able to piece together a “character profile” for each student. Stories that students shared with me and with each other across the sojourn added depth to their individual identities. This profile helped me to better understand their experiences abroad, especially as they related to identity shifts. Because of the confidentiality I promised all participants, I am unable to paint the portrait of individual participants here. What I can offer, however, is a generalized view of who these participants were.

The first interviews I conducted with the core group of participants revealed a great amount of difference between them. They majored subjects that varied from French to business and from art history to politics. Some students were raised speaking French with family members, while others took French only at University, and some for only two semesters. Most students were raised within the United States spanning the West Coast, the Midwest, and the East Coast. Three students were primarily raised outside of the United States either by nature of their nationality or their family’s involvement in international affairs. All of the students had traveled outside of the U.S. at least once in their lifetime; some of them felt very comfortable and had a lot of experience living in different countries. Without asking them directly it would be difficult to tell that they varied also in age, perhaps because they displayed a great deal of maturity as
students – at least most of the time. The youngest of the core participants was 19 years old when we went abroad, while the oldest (excluding myself) was 26 years of age. Everyone else fell around 21 years of age, which was the general trend for most of the students who studied abroad during that semester. They were only children, children of divorced parents, and big sisters/brothers. They were championship athletes, high-end fashion and shopping gurus, political debaters, and art enthusiasts. Some of them were “academics,” always succeeding and participating in scholarly pursuits; others were merely trying to “get by” and start living in the “real world.” I would describe individual personalities as dramatic, practical, low-key, high-strung, or humorous.

Participation “requirements” for the “precious few” were more stringent than for others who became second tier participants. These first tier participants humored me with lengthy interviews, attended dinner discussion parties once a month in my apartment, allowed me to tag along on their social outings (recorder in hand), and maintained personal sojourner journals (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>7 Females</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 Males</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group Discussions</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Journals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: First Tier Participants

Although they met these “requirements” with varied success, they were compensated more than other participants by means of refreshment or dinner at my apartment. Second tier participants typically agreed to one or two in-depth
interviews while abroad, and allowed me to film and observe them during social outings (Table 2).

<table>
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<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>19 Females</td>
<td>One Interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7 Males</td>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
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Table 2: Second Tier Participants
As the social networks of these students expanded overseas, so too did my participant pool. In addition to the “precious few,” a total of twenty-eight other IES students and two IES staff members participated as second tier respondents, engaging in interviews and focused observations. A third tier (Table 3) of students agreed to be observed, filmed, and photographed but with whom I never had a formal interview – this made up the majority of the 125 IES students and three students from other international programs who we met just by virtue of all being foreigners in a foreign land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Sex of Participants</th>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
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<td>81 Females</td>
<td>Observations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11 Males</td>
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</table>

Table 3: Third Tier Participants
As incentives for participating in this study, key participants received (a) one pre-paid international phone card, (b) a “college sized” hardbound notebook, (c) a small “pocket sized” notebook, (d) pens, (e) refreshments throughout the sojourn, and (f) a final copy of the research report.

Participation and Rapport

Gaining rapport with the study abroad participants was my priority from the beginning. Rapport, the development of a trusting researcher-participant relationship, made it possible for me to become an accepted member of their
group. It was necessary to gain rapport in order to establish a sense of confidence so that members felt free to behave naturally and express their feelings to me throughout the sojourn. Because trust and rapport are not quickly established (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), I had to structure specific events and maintain connection with participants through the entire sojourn. I not only became involved in their organized orientation, academic, and social activities, I also interacted with the students outside of the university setting per their invitation during excursions, going to cafés, and exploring Paris.

In order to develop and maintain a trusting relationship with the student sojourners and others who participated in this research, I engaged in several practices throughout the research that helped to ensure that trust. First, I established connection with students several months prior to departure. In March 2004 I attended the final orientation session for students in the IES-Paris 2004 program. This meeting was designed to offer some basic travel information and cultural advice to the students. At the end of the session, I introduced myself saying,

Hi, I am Maggie Pitts. I am a grad student in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences and I am going to study abroad in Paris with you this semester. I am also creating a documentary of the experience and I would like to invite you all to participate. I am going to hold an informational meeting at the crêpe shop down town – crêpes on me!

I then asked students to provide their names and contact information. Within two weeks I personally contacted each participant with specific details of the research. Although students’ schedules only allowed me to have crêpes with
two of the nine Penn State participants, I was able to open a line of communication with all of them. The second phase of rapport building occurred during the pre-departure interviews. During these interviews, I was able to establish a more personal relationship by asking students to describe themselves and talk about their thoughts on the upcoming semester abroad. Although the disclosure was not balanced between the participants and myself, I also talked about my previous experiences and gave them *some* insight as to why I was interested in studying student sojourners. Prior to arriving in Paris, I had a few e-mail exchanges with some participants, but it wasn’t until we were all abroad that we began developing stronger rapport. During the third phase of rapport development, in addition to being a full-time student at IES-Paris with all the related responsibilities, I also made a conscientious effort to be “seen” by all of the IES students and staff and introduce myself to as many of them as was possible.

I was forthright about my dual identity as a co-student interested, as they were, in language and cultural patterns (though for me this was less about *The French* and more about *Americans out of water*) and a researcher. I hesitated little in telling my instructors that my primary goal was to observe and collect data and not to excel in class, whilst they showed no hesitation in telling me I would be held to the same standards as the other students. The director of the program offered me *carte blanche* to attend and record all IES events. This was less the result of my ability to demonstrate the importance of my research and more on the fact that she had more important things to worry about than an overzealous
graduate student. By mid-semester all my rights were extended equally to my videographer who had befriended many of the IES staff assistants and was given access to site visits and social clubs I was unable to attend. I divulged my research purposes to about 50 of the students, the rest heard about it through the reliable, though hardly accurate IES gossip chain.

Upon arriving in Paris I immediately invited students to cafés, made small talk in the lounge, and asked questions about homework in our classes. I shared my own struggles and comical moments with students and they in turn opened up to me. I maintained rapport with students by remembering personal details about each person’s experience, showing them I was interested in how they were doing by asking specific questions, and making sure I engaged in social activities with various groups of students so that I did not exclude anyone. I continued to build trust with participants throughout the sojourn by maintaining their confidences and refraining from disclosing any of their information to someone else. Most importantly, I maintained open and honest communication with co-students about my own experiences abroad as it was appropriate. The goal was for participants to see me as a co-student, and not primarily as a researcher. By the end of my semester I established some true friendships, some fun acquaintanceships, and even became somewhat of a “big sister” to others. To my dismay, it has been much more difficult to maintain rapport with my participants now several months since our return. However, we have made efforts to keep in touch through e-mail, Instant Messaging, and even the periodic postcard. One final way I intend to maintain rapport with students is by making my research available to them.
Data Collection

I collected data for this research primarily through participant-observation, narrative interviews with groups and individuals, and participant journaling. The data collection process took place throughout all stages of the sojourn from pre-departure to return. By obtaining multiple forms of data across the sojourn, I was able to more fully capture the complexity of communication and identity, but also to provide co-students the opportunity to add their perspective in a mode that was most appealing to them (e.g., discussion vs. writing). In addition, by triangulating these three forms of data, maintaining meticulous records across the sojourn, and providing detailed description of daily life among the sojourners, I met the established trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These criteria include credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. The specific modes through which I met these criteria are outlined in Table 4. Finally, I hoped to convey my commitment to accurate reflections, local meanings, and interpretations of the sojourning process by including the voice and perspective of the students involved in the research. As part of this effort, I checked with participants frequently to ascertain whether my interpretations were consistent with their perceptions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trustworthiness Criteria</th>
<th>Description of Criteria</th>
<th>Criteria Met Through</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credibility</strong></td>
<td>Truth value in interpretations are established</td>
<td>Triangulation of observations, interviews, and journals, Extended engagement in the field (entire sojourn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transferability</strong></td>
<td>Interpretations are able to be transferred to other similar cases</td>
<td>Thick description, Purposive sample, Linking findings with previous theory and research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confirmability</strong></td>
<td>Findings observable to others within and outside of locale</td>
<td>Meticulous data management and recording, Member checks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependability</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrable consistency between researcher/researched</td>
<td>Strong co-student rapport, Audit trail, Co-students confidentiality protected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Trustworthiness Criteria in Qualitative Research

**Participant Observation**

The first stage in this research program was to participate in the pre-departure and orientation meetings provided by Penn State. Having established prior approval from the Office of Education Abroad and the IRB, I began taking observational notes during the pre-departure orientation meeting. My notes largely focused on students’ voiced concerns, social interaction, and the very little personal information they disclosed at that meeting.

Once we arrived in Paris, I began to interact with co-students during their daily routines recording descriptive field notes as circumstances allowed. I directed my attention toward their social and discursive practices. I established insider status almost immediately as the semester began making it difficult to observe without being invited to engage in any given interaction. More often than not I found myself in a circle of U.S. American students talking and walking
around the city. Regardless of the limited possibility to take extensive notes while interacting with these students, I made a concerted effort to compose in-depth field memos recording the day’s activities upon my return home each evening. These field memos were highly descriptive (including thick description of the social setting), reflective (including personal thoughts and insights), analytical (making sense of the data from my current stance) and theoretical (including potential links to established theory and praxis) in nature. However, students’ night-owlish personalities and desire not to waste a minute abroad made it difficult to write notes after every evening event. I eventually resorted to writing one or two important thoughts, a few trigger words, and/or snips of dialogue and using the weekend mornings to fill in the rest. I also made use of audio, video, and photographic recordings to aid in the possibility of capturing important nuances of their experiences across the sojourn. The audio recordings proved extremely useful in writing up detailed field notes a day or two after an event. One interesting outcome of the ever-present recording devices was that when I made a motion to begin recording, students often transitioned into explaining their experiences to me without prompting. I also made audio and video recordings of participants during the interviews and informal social gatherings.

To my dismay, my observations became much less frequent after returning from Paris. First, not all of the students returned to Penn State at the end of the semester. Second, resuming university life in the U.S. proved to be stressful and busy as compared to our time abroad and we had a difficult time arranging schedules. I did, however participate in the reentry meeting held by Penn State,
and invited participants to luncheons and dinners. I focused my post-sojourn observations on social networks and communication behaviors with a special emphasis on their subjective remarks about the entire sojourn experience.

**Interviews**

In addition to daily observations, I held individual and group interviews with co-students throughout their sojourn. I conducted semi-structured, narrative interviews in order to allow for deeper understanding of sojourner experiences and probe in depth about communication processes abroad (see Appendix A). This type of interviewing allowed me to focus on participants’ understandings of how the study abroad experience unfolded across the sojourn and the ways in which they created meanings about that experience (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I prompted narratives by asking participants to recount a specific experience. I often asked them to tell me the “story” of their relationship with their host family or other sojourner or to walk me through their days. Interviews were largely developed from observations and casual conversations I had with participants before a formal interview.

Prior to our departure, I conducted the first round of individual interviews. The primary focus of those interviews was to ascertain sojourner’s expectations, previous experience, and goals. I conducted a total of five face-to-face pre-departure interviews, one “electronic interview” conducted over e-mail, and one telephone interview. Once we were in Paris, I conducted narrative interviews with co-students on a monthly basis. I also held informal monthly group interviews at my apartment wherein the purpose was to draw upon the group perspectives and
social and communicative nature of the study abroad experience. The group interviews were very social in nature, appearing more like discussions and gripe-sessions than an interview. Unfortunately, due to scheduling, not all participants were able to attend all of the gatherings. In order to maintain a positive relationship with co-students, and encourage their future participation, I also provided refreshments or purchased meals and/or café snacks at each interview. Like most college students, these participants relished their interviews because it came with a free meal or coffee. By the end of the semester, I had conducted a total of 48 individual interviews that lasted in duration anywhere from 30 minutes to three hours, and hosted four group discussions/interviews, which lasted between four and six hours.

Upon returning to the U.S., I conducted final interviews with the participants who returned to Penn State about their overall experiences, including the reentry. I conducted a total of four face-to-face interviews and one “electronic interview.” The return interviews took place approximately between two weeks and three months after the sojourners returned. With the exception of the interview I conducted over e-mail, which spanned several weeks because of the series of follow-up questions, the reentry interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours.

Journaling

In addition to participant observation and narrative interviews, I asked each participant to maintain a personal journal. I provided each participant one large and one small hardbound notebook and pens as incentives to maintain their
journal prior to departure. I asked students to use it as their personal journal and to write about whatever they wished. I told them that for my purposes I was interested in their “experiences and reflections” about the sojourn. I informed them that like the interviews, what they disclosed in the journal was confidential, but also told them that if they did not wish me to have access to parts of the journal, they could put post-its over it, cut it out, or photocopy it themselves. I collected the journals during their individual interviews abroad, photocopied them, and returned them the next day. In lieu of maintaining a written journal, some students opted to type them into a word processor and forward them to me as an attachment; other students offered me access to their electronic journals and blogs on-line such as in Facebook or livejournal.com.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The goal of data analysis is to reduce data “to a more manageable form that permits [researchers] to tell a story about the people or group that is the focus of their research” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 2). Ethnographic writing and analysis are ongoing, recursive processes that take place throughout the duration of the project (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Moreover, qualitative data analysis is systematic and organized, but not rigid, demanding flexibility, creativity, and reflexivity from the analyst (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Because of the length of this project, the fact that it covered two countries, and involved the collection of multiple types of data from several different sources, my ability to systematically and meticulously organize the data was crucial for the analysis. My primary means of data organization was made possible by using a qualitative data analysis
software program. Specifically, I used NVIVO 2.0 to organize meaningful bits of textual data and aid in the process of data analysis by allowing me to code, categorize, link, and model the data. I engaged in data analysis throughout all stages of this research. And, because I collected various forms of data, I also employed multiple approaches toward analyzing these data across the sojourn. My preliminary data analysis began after my first orientation meeting with the co-students and continued throughout the return. Each phase of data analysis informed the next phase of data collection and data analysis in an iterative fashion. For example, responses obtained from the first interviews and preliminary observations shaped subsequent interviews and observations reflecting the flexible and personal nature of ethnographic work. The methods I used to analyze specific forms of data are listed below, although the initial procedures are specialized for each one, the actual process of coding and grouping the data is similar and is thus reported at the end of the following section.

Observational Data

For the observational data, the first stage in the data analytic procedure was to write theoretical memos after each encounter and/or write summary notes at the end of each week abroad. A theoretical memo is a note that ties a specific detail, encounter, or sequence to previous theory or practice. The theoretical memos helped me to tie new observations with previous ones and sometimes pull in existing theory. In addition to the theoretical memos, I analyzed daily field notes throughout the sojourn looking for patterns within and across co-students social interaction and discourse. Throughout the study abroad I made small
analytic notations within the field notes to highlight potential patterns and to connect patterns across the sojourn. An analytic memo is one in which an observation is accounted for or interpreted rather than just described. Then, upon returning to the U.S., I typed all of the field notes into a computer document and imported those and the theoretical memos into N-VIVO. During that stage in the analysis, I read and re-read each of the field notes and memos from across the sojourn looking for patterns of communication and evidence of identity salience and transformation across and within the students. Finally, I compared them with the interview and journal data looking for overlapping patterns, but also allowing freedom for the uncovering of new ideas and patterns.

**Interviews**

Shortly after completing each interview, I wrote a memo recording my observations as well as theoretical and analytical insights gained from the interview. During the semester these notes served a useful purpose in allowing me to mark changes and consistencies found within and across student sojourners and the differing data types. The notes were particularly helpful during the phases of analysis overseas, because I was unable to keep up with the transcription overseas. Upon return I transcribed all but six interviews for which I hired a transcriptionist to complete. Once transcribed, I read each interview transcript over several times to increase my familiarity with each transcript as well as check the accuracy of the transcripts.
Journals

I analyzed journal entries concurrent with when I collected them. In the case of the electronic journals, I imported them directly into N-VIVO. I highlighted useful bits of data in the handwritten journals and typed them into a computer document that was then also imported into N-VIVO. As part of the ongoing process abroad, I read over each journal entry several times, then wrote short phrases in the margins (or into the text itself) highlighting patterns of communication, adjustment, and identity within their writing.

Coding

For all of the data collected throughout the sojourn, I engaged in a similar process of coding and linking thematic patterns uncovered in co-students’ discourse and behaviors. I used established coding procedures set forth by Strauss and Corbin (1998) to guide me through this stage of analysis. I conceptualized thematic patterns as *recurrent concepts found throughout the data that hold significance in answering the driving research questions*. After thoroughly reading through the data, I assigned *concrete* labels to each meaningful unit of analysis found in the data. I defined the unit of analysis for this research as a complete thought or behavior. Completion of thought or behavior was determined by its ability to stand alone in the context of the surrounding communication and behaviors and/or in which a beginning, middle, and end could be identified. “Concrete” labels are those that are specific, detailed, and reflect the most common denominator within the selected passage such that other passages could not be “categorized” under that label. Coding is the act of selecting a unit of
analysis (a meaningful passage from the text that offers insight into my research purpose) and assigning it a unique, concrete label. This stage of coding is termed “open” or “free” coding, because the researcher makes no attempts to place codes in groups. Instead, at this stage, I made an effort to code at the most basic level by assigning a label to meaningful bits of data that satisfied the following requirements, (a) the label had to be unique and concrete such that it was very rare that more than one bit of data could be coded with the same label, (b) the label had to reflect the words of the participant, using *in-vivo* codes (direct participant quotes) when possible, and (c) the label had to make a statement about the research such that in reading the label I would easily identify the analytical contribution of any specific code. When I completed the open coding for all of the data, I was left with a list of several hundred abbreviated phrases that were linked to the actual data, but served to summarize my data into the smallest, most concentrated units of meaning. Thus, rather than several hundred pages of text, I had a list that summarized the meaningful data. The next step was to organize those “free” units of data into meaningful patterns.

Once the data were open-coded, I engaged in the “axial” or “tree” coding phase of analysis. During this phase of analysis, the researcher is free to “play” with the data by grouping, re-grouping, editing, deleting, and merging codes. Throughout this process I made decisions about which codes to keep, which codes to re-label, which codes to delete, and which codes to merge. I re-labeled imprecise codes. I deleted any duplicate codes and any codes that were better identified by a second open code label I had previously assigned it. And merged
together codes that held the same conceptual meaning yet were coded separately. Throughout my coding process, but especially during this phase, I kept a detailed process log of my decisions, goals, and accomplishments.

I spent some time yesterday and today collapsing open codes. I will need to do one more round of open code collapsing tomorrow and then begin to fully investigate what I actually have in my tree codes. I am certain there are codes within the trees that can be merged. My goal is to start investigating each tree code tomorrow (process log).

Once I completed the process of refining my open codes, I began to group them together. The goal of axial coding is to further reduce the data by creating hierarchical groupings. The purpose for which is to classify and categorize data into groups of similar codes, and provide meaningful links between the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The end result for axial coding should be a recontextualization of the data made from recognizable patterns found within the data in order to glean a fresh view of the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). For this stage, I was able to use the labels described above to order and assign hierarchical meaning to my data. Rather than using large blocks of text to axial code the data, I created meaningful groupings of the data just by using the open code labels. In the instances that the open code did not provide enough information for me to axial code it, or if I had any question about the contents of that code, N-VIVO allowed me to simply click on the label and it would bring up all the contents coded with that label. I determined and created axial codes with the following requirements: (a) an axial code had to contain two or more open codes, (b) the open codes that made up an axial code had to have conceptual similarity, (c) axial codes needed to reflect similarity in hierarchical ordering such that each top-order code carried the
same conceptual weight as the other top-order codes and so on for second, third, and fourth tier codes. After an axial code was created, I assigned it a new label, refined one of the previous labels, or used an existing open code label that reflected the contents of that axial code. I then engaged in a process of comparing, contrasting, expanding, and collapsing axial codes until I had reduced all of my open codes into a manageable amount of axial categories that represented my data in an exhaustive, yet parsimonious manner. From the axial categories I began the process of interpreting and making sense of the data.

The final stage of data analysis involves interpretation and generating new meanings that reach beyond the surface layer of the data at hand. This process is what Coffey and Atkinson (1996) call “transforming” the data and is accomplished by “interrogating” the data to generate new meaning. The question I asked myself was, “now that I have these categories, what do I do with them?” Among the categories I generated through the axial coding process were categories for patterns of talk, categories for the reentry experiences, categories for identity shifts, categories for expectations, and several more. My next stage in the analysis was to try and make sense out of those categories, how did they interact with each other? This stage involved the reading and re-reading of text associated with codes and categories. I looked for similarities, differences, and contradictions in the data. During this stage I frequently wrote analytical memos posing questions to the data and trying out answers, these notes became part of my audit trail (see Appendix B). Sometimes these analytical thoughts panned out, as in the example below:
I was just looking at some preliminary codes and upon reading the node “Why do students make IES their space” which seems “weird” to the French to hang out at school, the answer is because that is the only place that they *know* they belong. It is *their* space. Everywhere else students are always reminded that they are the outsiders, but at IES, they are the norm. Students were encouraged from day one (and in the pre-departure orientation for some) to find a place to make “their own,” and that’s it.

Other times, my analytical hunches led me in one direction only to decide on another by the time I had finished writing about it:

The difficulty the students experienced really boils down to balancing dialectical tensions and managing expectation violations. On the one hand, students want to be fully immersed into French society (language fluency, blending in, having French friends) yet at the same time they enjoy/need the companionship of other U.S. Americans or international students. Ok, so the overall desire is a sense of connection of fitting in, of belonging. Although all students disclosed a desire to achieve this sense of connection (at least to some level) by integrating in the French system, they were not all able to do so. However, the need for connection still existed and had to be met in an alternate way. Thus, the U.S. American/international student base fulfilled this need. The less the students were integrated in the French system, the more they held on to their co-national and international network despite the fact that this was associated with feelings of guilt and being unsuccessful. Um, well ok, maybe not dialectics. Maybe just expectation violations? Not sure. I have to think further. But there has to be something here.

During this phase I went back and forth between my findings and previous theory and literature surrounding cross-cultural adaptation. At the end of this process two previous theories emerged as helpful in interpreting and adding depth to these data – Burgoon’s (1978) expectancy violations theory (EVT) and Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (ITCCA). Because the analysis of these data was integral with the discussion and
interpretation of the results, the process of going beyond patterns and linking the
data to theory and vice-versa is fully reported in Chapter Six. For the moment is
important only to note that EVT and ITCCA shed light on some patterns of
communication and identity, but did not direct the analysis. For, it was only after I
explored critical linkages within the data that I began to employ previous theory
to situate it in the larger body of communication scholarship.
CHAPTER FOUR:

DESCRIBING THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

It was wonderful to walk down the long flights of stairs knowing that I’d had good luck working. I always worked until I had something done and I always stopped when I knew what was going to happen next. That way I could be sure of going on the next day. But sometimes when I was starting a new story and I could not get it going, I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little oranges into the edge of the flame and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, “Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.” So finally I would write one true sentence and go on from there...Going down the stairs when I had worked well, and that needed luck as well as discipline, was a wonderful feeling and I was free then to walk anywhere in Paris (Hemingway, 1964, p. 12-13).

My apartment in Paris (which was really a converted chambre de bonne, or maid’s chamber) was on the seventh floor of a noble Haussmann building in the 18th Arrondissement. My small, but functional, windows opened over a maze of cobble stone streets and shimmering haute couture fashion windows. And, when I leaned out the window and craned my neck to the right all of my vision was immediately encumbered by the gallant presence of the Arc de Triumph. The apartment was clean and bright and much bigger than I had imagined, though much smaller than anything I was accustomed to in the U.S. From the moment I became acquainted with the apartment, I felt comfortable as soon as I closed the door behind me. For just over four months this apartment provided a sanctuary for me – a place to escape from Paris and a place to embrace my work. Naturally, the reverse was also true. The door also served as a way to escape my work and
embrace Paris as it slowly shut behind me while I walked down the long stairway to the garden courtyard below. This is the description of events that surrounded my experiences researching students who study abroad. It starts with the months that lead up to my first trip up the unforgiving circular stair case, full of questions and anxieties, to my last trip down, arms full of documents that I hoped would have answers, and back home with only memories and snapshots of “truths” captured across the sojourn and the return to a familiar, yet changed United States.

Pre-Departure Jitters and Desires

Pre-Departure Orientation Session: Disappointed with Preparation

Six months before I “entered the field” to glean an understanding of the process of communication and identity among students who study abroad I could not have known that I would be able to convert this little Parisian apartment into a home space not only for me, but for several of the young women who became my participants and friends across the course of the sojourn. This is because six months before, along with the 125 other students who would be participating in the International Education of Students (IES) study abroad program in Paris, I was just starting to receive orientation information and actually think about the upcoming semester abroad for the first time.

It was March when I met the first of my participants, though it wasn’t until the summer that I got to know any of them on a personal level. Unlike many other universities, as I later found out, Penn State offers a series of brief pre-departure orientation sessions to which all study abroad students are required to attend.
Students’ interest and engagement in these meetings varied, but in the end, almost everyone agreed that it was at least remotely helpful to have some sort of training prior to departure. I attended the final orientation session, which is created just for those students going to France. There were ten Paris participants in attendance that night, including myself, two of whom were international students – one from Brazil, and one from Poland.

The meeting lasted just over two hours and covered a variety of topics relating to adjusting to living in France. The director entertained as well as informed all of us by playing popular French music, passing around train schedules and photocopies of various Euro denominations. He warned us about everything ranging from safety issues (terrorism, harassment, pick pocketing) to cultural differences regarding resources (energy and water conservation, lack of computers, lack of space) to recurring student issues (alcohol and drug use, friend and romantic relationships, cellular phone and Internet communication). Students, on the other hand were concerned with more immediately practical issues: How should I pack? How much money do I need to bring? Will my computer work overseas?

I gazed around the small, stuffy room wondering who would participate in my research and if I would form friendships with any of them. Judging from the tense energy in that room, it didn’t seem possible. Students were aloof throughout the entire orientation. None of the Paris participants appeared to know each other. Everyone sat with at least one empty chair between them and the next person. They occupied themselves by flipping through the rainbow of colored information
sheets we received and made eye contact only with the director, and only if he was addressing a point that was pertinent to that student (such as answering her question). Even my attempts to create some kind of a group identity by asking who was going to Paris and trying to gather personal information failed. I did manage, however, in the final minutes to send around a sheet of paper and ask the Paris participants for their contact information. I told them that I was interested in doing a documentary of their experience abroad. Although their response to this prospect landed somewhere between nonchalant and the slightest perking of the ears, they all humored me and offered their name and contact information. At the end of the meeting, everyone dispersed and walked in separate directions. I walked alone to my car, doubtful, disappointed, and distressed. That was the last time eight of the ten Paris participants would interact with anyone on the program except for me until we met again in France.

In the interviews and informal discussions that took place long after that initial meeting, I was able to pinpoint why it was that I left feeling dissatisfied with the orientation session. My field notes are spattered with phrases about students being “put off” at having to be there, “disinterested,” “lacking eye contact” and “leaning on their elbow on the desk with their head down.” To be honest, even I found it hard to schedule two hours out of my life to attend the meeting. When I walked out without feeling either more informed about the sojourn or more connected with other participants I was unhappy about the whole experience. I was not alone in feeling a distinct lack of interest and lack of cohesion among those in attendance. Leia confided in me that though she “sort
of” knew some of the other participants, “everyone was kind of like ‘into their own world,’ and not really into chatting.” She was not only disappointed with the lack of sociability at the meeting, she was also dealing with feelings of uncertainty and the sense of being overwhelmed that emerged in the meeting. I asked her how she felt about the sessions, and in a frustrated manner she replied, “they were alright, I thought they were gonna be a little more useful. They kind of scared me, like, not scared me, but what you have to do to get your bank ready and all the money that you have to have, and applying for that visa was a frickin' pain in my ass!” Although the purpose of the orientation sessions was to reduce uncertainty for students in several cases it only served to increase feelings of anxiety.

Talking with the others before we left for Paris tapped only into a superficial feeling of dissatisfaction with the orientation sessions. However, in the first weeks abroad, students were better able to articulate why they were so dissatisfied with their pre-departure experiences. Students were disappointed with the preparation they received from Penn State on two fronts. First, students felt as though the orientation sessions could have been more useful, especially in the area of helping students to orient to each other prior to departure, and by describing the emotional and physical distress that comes with study abroad, as well as ways to cope with it. Second, several students felt as though their years at Penn State did not prepare them for studying abroad, that they “had no idea what study abroad was all about,” or “I had no idea what was coming, at all!” Only six
days into the program Gina expressed this sentiment to me as we were sitting in the garden of the IES center:

After six days, I’m gonna say that it feels like a year, it feels like we’ve been here for so long, you know, just because it’s such an overwhelming thing, all at once, there’s so much to take in, but, it’s good, I mean, there was a couple of times that I was just like you know, God, I never thought I’d be the one to say that I don’t think I can do this, but this is hard, you know this is harder than I ever imagined, I mean Penn State didn’t prepare me for this like they said they did, you know, so, but it’s good, it’s definitely good.

Despite the fact that she majored in French, had an excellent academic record, and had completed her upper-division French courses, Michelle was extremely disappointed in her language instruction at Penn State. She felt the classes were too easy and didn’t teach her anything she needed to know about daily living and conversing in a Francophone country. Gina’s journal illuminated a similar frustration in her first week overseas, “In the future, PSU should offer suggestions of some kind of ‘brush up’ with the language before students with little experience come to Paris, like me. It has been 3 months (the whole summer) since I even thought in French and it’s been a rusty start.”

*Extracting Previous Experience and Expectations*

Two months after our initial meeting. I wrote to all of the participants asking them to participate in this study. After three months of trying to contact all of them, all but one agreed to participate and I was able to conduct personal interviews with six of them, one telephone interview and conduct one interview over e-mail. The interviews were conducted in a variety of settings across three states during the three months that preceded our sojourn. These preliminary
interviews served as the beginning of my relationship with each participant. My goal was to find out as much about each participant as I could before we left for Paris thinking that the more I knew about them, the better I would be able to interpret their experiences and behaviors abroad.

As I sat face to face with participants under a hot sun in Central Park, New York, in the stoic library of one participant’s home in rural Pennsylvania, in accompaniment with a large housecat in a friendly living room in Washington, D.C., in a local coffee shop, or even in my sterile campus office on the phone or computer with participants, a picture of their expectations and concerns emerged. Participants shared with me an array of previous experiences and expectations that they had. Elana, Richard, Anita, and Sheila had already lived overseas for a significant amount of time. While the others, Nick, Leia, Michelle, and Gina had only some previous international travel experience. The concerns and expectations that students expressed to me depended greatly on their previous travel experiences. Despite these differences, two common threads bound us together. We were all overwhelmed by the amount of preparation involved in a study abroad, and we were all anxious about what would happen when we got there.

Students expressed that part of the stress involved in preparing for the sojourn was that everything seemed to happen last minute. The “reality of it all just sinks in late.” Students sought to balance their desire to be prepared with an “it’ll be fine, you can only prepare so much” attitude. But, when posed the question “what have you been doing to prepare for your study abroad” most
participants laughed and responded, “nothing;” “Uhm, I haven’t done anything, no, I don’t think,” or “you know, I’m not gonna lie, I really haven't done a whole heck of a lot of anything.” With few exceptions, students prepared in largely superficial manners, looking up where they would be living on the Internet, packing, or trying to earn extra spending money to travel while abroad. More active attempts to gear up for the sojourn included taking a summer course in French or attempting to immerse oneself in French media. Unfortunately these were mostly failed or only partial attempts. After thinking about his preparation, for example, Nick replied, “I took a course this summer, but I really didn’t study too much during the course at all, cuz I was waiting tables at the time.”

The only thing that muted anxieties about the sojourn was previous experience – whether participants’ own previous experience or those told to them by other sojourners. Students sought advice from previous study abroad participants about packing, money, travel, and most importantly which teachers are the easiest and if it is ok to skip classes. They inquired about what the biggest shock was and what it is like to live with a host family. Previous experience helped students like Anita to make preparations for the study abroad, “you have to readjust fast, you know, it's necessary, otherwise, you get behind, and you have to learn how to be on schedule, pack properly, don't miss you flight, get your I-20 signed, you know all that stuff, and like I've got used to it.” Previous experience also helped students to formulate expectations for the upcoming sojourn. Those who had already traveled to Paris were looking forward to returning to a city that they “love.” They expected to feel “more at home” or equally comfortable in
Europe. They expected to adjust easily because of their previous international experience, “if you’re asking about adjusting, I think [previous experience as an international student] is an advantage, because I don’t have any problems with that. I think I traveled before, a considerable travel, so, if you ask me if I have troubles adjusting, I’m not going to answer, I don’t see that as an issue” (Robert). Finally, previous experience gave them the confidence needed to try something new. Not all previous experiences, however, led to positive adjustment expectations. Anita’s previous experience led her to the conclusion that you can never fully integrate abroad:

I never expected to integrate fully, because, if I’ve learned something in the States and in my other study abroad experiences is that you can never integrate fully into a culture being a foreigner. I think. I mean I’m very pessimistic and all, but I don’t think it’s possible. Not one hundred percent. I don’t even feel integrated within my own country, let alone in a foreign one, you know, so I didn’t come with all these expectations of “yeah, let’s meet French people and be friends with them and talk in French all the time and eat baguettes and shit,” you know?

Similarly, one participant entrusted me with information that she occasionally sought professional advice because she often had troubles adjusting to new situations. She was relieved to discover that IES had a therapist on staff, because she expected a very difficult time adjusting.

Perhaps the only thing overriding participants’ pre-departure anxieties was their excitement for the adventure to begin. Travel, food, wine, shopping, touring, museums and historical sites topped the lists of what we were most excited about. Most of them couldn’t wait to meet their host family even though this was also source of anxiety everybody. Although I had anxieties of my own, mostly
regarding the success of my research, I shared with the participants the excitement of temporarily relocating to a new country.

Goals and Assumptions: Why Study Abroad?

Regardless of previous experience and despite a driving, anxious desire to study abroad, adjusting overseas is a mentally and physically taxing life event. So why do it?

I guess I would say that I always assumed that I would, just cuz all the like teeny little travel experiences I’ve had have always been really cool, and because I was in M- like going to school 20 minutes from home, I knew that I was just like not gonna sit around there for my for 4 years. So, I always knew (Kara).

There was never a doubt in my mind that I would study abroad, but I don’t - I’m sure I would be having experiences that would change me at Penn State, but I don’t feel like I’m missing out on them. I feel that this is an addition to my college experience (Leia).

Like you hear study abroad, and I’ve thought about study abroad, and my dad’s always mentioned like “when you do your junior year abroad,” you know; it was just always something I would do (Elana).

As each interview unfolded, I asked participants how they came to the decision to study abroad. I thought back to the first time I studied abroad in France and my answer would have been merely “because.” For these students, studying abroad was an anticipated and expected part of their college experience. The first reasons that they offered are reminiscent of the responses given by first year college students – they are doing it simply because it’s what’s next. Not only did these participants “always know” that they would study abroad, they “always wanted to” study abroad, and “always knew it was important.” Study abroad was
a natural extension of their college experience like getting an internship or taking a trip over Spring Break.

Students also saw spending a semester or year abroad as an opportunity to become a “well-rounded individual,” a “global citizen,” as a “learned person,” and someone able to understand multiple perspectives. Talking with Michelle the week she prepared to leave for France revealed her passion about the importance and potential benefits of study abroad,

I don't know, it seems as though the way the events in the world are playing out, like that's really something that people need to have, like be encouraged to go abroad and so I think a lot of people maybe are kinda holding back from doing stuff like that nowadays? And, I don't know it seems like now's the best time because we're having all this, you know, kind of culture, like miscommunication, and if people would just like step out of their comfort zone kind of and just try, you know, like going abroad and like talking to people and living in a new place, that could really help a lot of problems.

Even after arriving in France, students continued to articulate the importance of such a venture. During our first week in France, seven U.S. Americans invaded a small café at the end of the pedestrian-only cobble stone road where our school sat. I only knew two of them, so as we sipped seven different coffee drinks and laughed about our shared cultural faux pas in the first week, I asked why the others had decided to study abroad:

Alan: I had to write an essay to my school to approve the whole study abroad thing, and regarding why study abroad is necessary, like we’re here, so like our view is totally different than somebody who heard that the French were snobbish, or whatever, and it’s like to be really an authority, not somebody’s opinion of somebody’s opinion
of blah, blah, blah. You know, it’s just absolutely necessary that people do that.

Annie: Yeah, we need to know from another source.
Alan: It’s just absolutely necessary that people do that, you know, like people have to get out, like OK?
Maggie: It’s cool to pick up different perspectives.
Alan: You can’t call yourself learn-ed per se, unless you know something about something else.
Maggie: Good point (laughs)

Students not only articulated global goals for their study abroad, such as “expanding my views on the world” and getting “different people’s perspectives on things,” but they also set forth some very specific goals for their sojourn. One goal all of the participants had in common was that of language acquisition, or at the very least to improve their French skills. Study abroad was a “chance to become fluent in the language.” For Elana and Michelle, becoming fluent in French was a top priority because they majored in French. Elana insisted, “I wanna be able to speak French intellectually, at that high level, broaden my vocabulary a lot, and that's something I'm going to have to work on, cuz there are a lot of words that I don't know, and I speak on more the basic like hanging out level, so I'm going to try to up that, because I am majoring in French and I hope to work with it in the future.” Students expected that they would “speak only French” and that the language would “just click one day” while they were abroad. While some admitted that “the whole French thing is gonna be kinda difficult,” and that “it's hard to get over that anxiety and kind of like timidness and not really wanting to say too much for fear of messing it up or sounding silly” several participants also professed a deep love of the French language and even some
confidence in their abilities. In a humble manner Leia said, “I just have a very good ear for languages, I absorb the accent very well, it's just something that comes really naturally, cuz I know foreign languages for a lot of people are just very difficult, so I'm just very fortunate in that regard.”

In addition to wanting to achieve a higher level of French proficiency, students articulated a secondary goal, to achieve complete cultural immersion. Which, in most cases was expressed as a personal mandate, “I must make French friends!” Students both expected and desired to be fully integrated in the French social scene. For Michelle, this goal was equally as important as learning the language, “I kind of would like to have French friends, just because, you know, I'm so interested in their culture and I just feel like you can't really one-hundred percent understand a culture unless you've kind of been accepted by the people whose culture it is.” A usually unstated pre-departure goal that accompanied the desire to make French friends was an equally strong desire not to make U.S. American friends. Participants worried about whether they would be able to break out of a “comfort zone” of U.S. Americans and break into the French social scenes. Participants devised two ways they hoped to achieve this. First, they anticipated making French friends through other friends, or what they called the “Circle Theory.” In her own words, Elana describes how this theory works, “I just have to get lucky and like maybe meet one person who has a big circle of fun friends and just keep meeting more through them.” This would be done through host siblings or classmates. Second, they intended on engaging in social contexts
that would open up to French interaction such as through internships, joining social or sports clubs, and volunteering abroad.

With solid plans for forging meaningful French friendships, mastering the language, and either becoming Sabrina, for the women, or meeting their own *femme fatale* for the men, the students set out to arrive in Paris on September 8, 2004.

The Longest Roller Coaster: The Ups and Downs of Study Abroad

If this were a movie, the opening scene would focus on the hourglass shaped Perrier glass with a blonde bombshell sitting in the curve of the “P.” The glass refracts sunlight highlighting fizzy bubbles and the bright yellow lemon slice swirling as it is tugged around the glass by a long silver spoon. All you hear is the kind of buzzing French hummed by a group of older men smoking cigarettes and sipping a café noir. The camera would zoom out in circular motion and eventually settle on a 28 year old female researcher and her cameraman. They sit outside Café des Amis at a little table situated at the corner of the building. With dark sunglasses on they watch for hours as young adults clad in blue jeans, ball caps, ponytails, and tennis shoes wander aimlessly down the long cobblestone road. Like a mystery, the onlookers watch as single, confused, solitary people bumble around this busy street in Paris. Each one cradles a deep blue folder in their arms. Then, as if those folders were magnetically charged, the strangers begin to cling to one another. By the end of the morning, the “blue jean, blue folder clans” begin to form and take to the streets in various directions
talking loudly with gaping mouths and big eyes. With the kind of smile that says “a ha, I knew you would do that,” the researcher jots on her paper placemat:

On the first day, students are walking down Rue Daguerre with a dazed look on their faces. From experience, I know that it is hard to find the IES center and we weren’t given directions. It is easy to spot IES students because they are all carrying their blue IES folders with them. If you spot an IES student or an American student near IES, it is normal to say hi and ask if they are IES. If you see an IES student that is kind of lost and wandering, you help to direct them to the center.

The combination of jetlag and first time realization that you are alone in a foreign country is overwhelming. Once you step off the plane everything changes. Even the smallest things become difficult challenges. Stepping into the chaos of Charles de Gaulle airport students are immediately confronted with language difficulties, learning new cultural rules, feelings of “terror and isolation,” and the incredible realization that “Paris” was not the experience they were expecting.

Arrival: What is going on?

Our arrival at IES on the first day of orientation was met with a sense of relief and increased uncertainty. For some, it was the first time we felt we could breathe in France. We were surrounded by others who not only understood our language and our cultural patterns for interaction, but who were also equally terrified. We were surrounded by people who would “get us,” because, after all, we were “all in the same boat.” Everyone “just sort of converged” at IES, it was “nice having people that can relate and just like go through the same things that you are.” At the same time, the week-long orientation session at IES brought forth new anxieties. We were split alphabetically into Group A and Group B and took
turns attending seminars on “culture shock,” “preparing for your academic semester,” “engaging in French social clubs,” “taking an internship,” and volunteering to do “benevolent services.” (Not surprisingly, emerging friendship groups all shared in common last names that started with “A” through “L” or “M” through “Z”). Those of us with some experience in French were bombarded with lists of rules, warnings, and orders:

“Do not eat in class”
“Never bring your cell phone to class”
“You must attend all classes”
“Listen to French radio, watch French T.V., read French papers”
“Don’t leave your hair in your host family’s tub”
“Feet are taboo in France”
“Never re-fold your dinner napkin”
“French people never get drunk”
“Women don’t drink beer in France”
“You must not make friends in bars, on the Metro, or in streets.”
“Never speak in English”
“Do not drink alcohol at school or at IES sponsored events”
“Don’t buy drugs or you’ll support the mafia, slavery, and prostitution rings”
“The French don’t jog in public”
“The French don’t drink milk”
“Women mustn’t make eye contact with a man”
“If you leave Paris, you must give us all the details”

As I was diligently writing down each of these rules and warnings (the list continued) I watched as those with less French experience struggled just to grasp a few words. The girl next to me kept whispering “what about host families?” “Oh God, what is she saying about French men?” “What does that mean?” Some of us struggled with the thought of having to uphold many of these new rules, while others struggled just to figure out what the rules were. Day one inspired the “oh God, what have I done” feeling for many.
Leaving your home country is a stressful experience, but this is compounded when your arrival committee is bombarding you with messages that you are inadequate because you are not engaging in French culture.

There is a common discourse among the IES faculty and staff about benefiting from all you can while you are in Paris. They remind us to join cultural events, not to stay on the computers too long, not to hang out with only Americans, not to speak in English, etc. This discourse stresses students out, because they feel sometimes that they are inadequate and that they are being chastised for behaving in a normal and natural way (field notes).

I wanna do something now, you know, I don’t wanna wait and they (IES) kinda push that idea, too, but. Like they told the full year students, they were like “you have to find clubs now, because this is when the French kids are going back to school, so this is like the best time, and like if you don’t go now, like it’s gonna be hard,” and we’re like “oh, ok” (Michelle).

These messages easily penetrate students’ self perception, as their sense of self-confidence and competence is already weakened. By the end of the first week, I was used to walking into IES and being pulled aside by any number of young girls who whispered, sobbed, laughed, or sometimes hollered their most recent frustrations to me. The first weeks abroad were the most difficult for students. The first time I walked in on a girl convulsing with tears being consoled with a great hug by another student I was uncomfortable. I felt as though I was intruding. By the third week, these “breakdowns” and emotional outbursts were so common I expected to see one every week inside the classroom and several more in regular social contexts.

I saw Maria after class and she was having a visible panic attack. She was hyperventilating and all red and flustered, she wasn’t making any sense and talking really fast. She
told me she was in a panic, she showed me she was shaking because she didn’t know what to do. I asked her if she had anyone to talk to, she said no. She said IES was no help and neither was her advisor at school. She didn’t have anyone she “trusts” to talk to.

My heart sank the day Kara turned to me in class with big glassy eyes and whispered, “I feel like I’m failing study abroad,” just before flopping her head into her arms that were folded across her little desk.

*The Pressure Mounts: You Must Succeed*

This pressure to succeed was pounded into our souls with the mantra “*il faut profiter!*” The IES staff said it. Our teachers said it. The baguette lady said it. The postman said it. My landlady said it. And, by the end, I was saying it. It doesn’t matter if you never understood what it meant, or couldn’t quite get that subjunctive tense, you knew by its frequent use that it was important. But to clarify, *il faut profiter* is a very strong suggestion that “one must profit from, benefit from, or take advantage of” something. Often it went something like, “you must benefit from your study abroad,” or “you must profit from French cuisine,” or “you must take advantage of the good weather!” But, ungrammatical as it was, “you must profit” could also stand alone in any situation. For example, you would be as likely to hear “*il faut profiter*” followed by a scooping hand gesture if there was a computer open in the lab, as you would be to hear your professor yell it at you as you walked out the door before a holiday weekend.

IES wasn’t the only place students were pressured to “profiter” from the experience. Their families at home expected them not only to excel in school, but to also travel around Europe, make French friends, and become fluent in French.
For many students their parents were financially supporting their whole sojourn and they wanted their sons and daughters to experience as much of the European continent as they could in that short amount of time. Even their host families pressured students to “go out all the time,” or chastised them for having only American friends. Students’ “true friends” were no consolation either. They received e-mail from their friends at home almost daily asking them exactly how much do they love Paris? As Kara expressed so clearly, this was a source of stress in itself, “I’m still really anxious, and one thing that’s been hard for me is like talking to people from home, and having everyone be like ‘how is it!?!’ And they want you to be like ‘IT’S INCREDIBLE!’ like ‘the time of my life, I’m so happy!’ And I’m not.” Or, there was Michelle who shared the following with me over comforting mugs of hot chocolate on a rainy day in Café Daguerre:

I remember I had a friend in Japan for a year, and every once in a while I’d see him on line and I’d talk to him, and I’d be like “oh don’t you love it, isn’t it cool?” and he’d be like “yeah, it’s cool,” and he never seemed as excited as I thought he should be and, I’m like, why is this? And I’m, just the other day I was talking to this girl I know from Penn State who was in a French class of mine, she was like “oh my God, Paris, don’t you love it?” And I’m like “yeah” (lack of enthusiasm), and she was like “oh, I’m thinking about going there, tell me everything, how cool is it?” And I’m like “it’s cool,” you know? But I knew I wasn’t being as excited as she wanted me to be, she was like “well, what’s wrong?” you know, and I’m like “nothing’s wrong, it’s just, you know, it’s, it’s a hard life,” and she was like “well, what do you mean,” and I’m like “I can’t explain it, you know.” It’s not quite complete immersion, you know, so you kind of feel lost sometimes between worlds, and I don’t know if that’d be better if everyone around here was French and spoke to you in French all the time, or, and you know, it’s Paris, and it’s, you know, the Metro and transportation, that wears you out, and basically just living in the city wears people out. And so she’s like, “oh, I don’t
really understand,” and I’m like, “I can’t explain it.” She just wanted me to be like, “oh, it’s so awesome, and blah, blah, blah,” but you know, I don’t know. I didn’t know if she caught me at a bad time? I remember thinking: wow, a year ago I was talking to my friend around this time, and I was like, why isn’t he, he’s in Japan, I wanna be in Japan, why isn’t he so excited. This is weird! What’s wrong, what’s he doing wrong?

Students were pressured to succeed in various ways from a multitude of sources. But, perhaps the most painful pressure was that which students put upon themselves. Students were motivated not only to meet the expectations of others, but they also had their own expectations of their study abroad experience to manage. The success or failure of their entire study abroad (in whichever way they defined it) rested solely on their own shoulders. Of course students experienced this pressure at different levels, from Robert as he coolly said, “How much I will benefit depends solely on myself,” to Kara who said she would be “totally devastated” if it didn’t “pan out.” Sitting with friends one day at lunch Kara turned to me and confessed, “I’ve been very stressed out, thinking to myself that like this entire experience is like all my responsibility to create, and if I fuck up and make the wrong choices, then, I’m going to ruin it for me and the onus is totally on me!” This was a heavy burden to carry across a sojourn. Only weeks into the sojourn students began to feel guilty for not achieving their goals. Students had it in their mind that by the third week “I should be already at a certain level with my French, and should already have a certain number of friends, and have been to like x amount of monuments, (laughs) and churches, and have been to like every bar in Paris by now, cuz that’s how I feel. I feel really like a huge sense of pressure and urgency.”
I Just Want to Belong

The more IES structured our experience and pressured students to “profiter” from their semester abroad, the more students retreated into their own groups. On the one hand, we were pushed away from IES and encouraged to “go out and meet French people, do it!” But, the other hand held disappointment, as students were unable to “break into” French culture. This tension left little space for students to form necessary meaningful relationships. Almost immediately students became overwhelmed with a desire to belong. Understandably, the beginning of the sojourn was marked by deep feelings of isolation and alienation. “The first week was horrible I felt like I was a foreigner and that I didn’t belong here.” Gina recounted how she felt calling her parents the first week abroad, “Just talking to my parents, I was like, oh my gosh, I just want some familiarity, just somebody who can look at me and be like ‘you know, you belong here.’” Sheila explained it like this, “[you are] desperately searching for people to hang out with, people to talk to, because you’re having all these new experiences, and you wanna tell someone about them.”

Therefore, upon arriving at IES, everybody’s first priority was to establish some sort of “connection” – connection with someone in Paris and connection home. After a very brief introduction of names and home university students launched into chatter about cellular phones and getting computer access to contact home. Fortunately, I had already purchased my Paris cell phone. As if I held some sort of magic key, students approached me in groups saying:
Student: Hey, I heard you got a cell phone already.
Maggie: Yeah I bought it when I got here. It took us all day to figure the whole thing out.
Student: Really?
Maggie: Yeah.
Student: How did you do it? Where did you get it?
Maggie: Oh, just turn left on General LeClerc and Happy Phone will be on your right with a bright blue awning.
Student: Was it expensive?
Maggie: I got the cheapest one, it was like 100 Euro or something.
Student: I don’t even care if it’s like 500 Euro, I gotta get one. I can’t stand not being able to talk to anyone.
Maggie: Yeah. Here’s my number, you can call me when you get it.
Student: Oh, thanks!

We all then spent the first two weeks abroad indiscriminately handing out our phone numbers to everyone and asking everyone for theirs. The goal was to make as many contacts as you could with IES people. And though we did this in a somewhat superficial manner, at the moment it satisfied our needs for inclusion.

Gina offered Kara a sorry laugh and described it in this way,

Remember that time when you first got your phone you were getting the numbers out of my phone, you were like “you have so many,” I was like, I don’t talk to any of those people, they gave them to me, you know what I mean? Or some people say, when I was like “hey give me your number we should hang out,” I genuinely mean it. I would like to be your friend. You know? But some people, I think it’s just kind of like a thing. It’s just what you do. You just say it because you want to be friends, maybe, if you have time, unless you find someone cooler, you know what I mean?

Connection during the initial weeks, however superficial, became the most important goal for many students. Students searched desperately for “someone to relate to.” One approach was “just trying to meet everybody you can, and make
friends with anybody who’s willing to be your friend, and then, maybe later, you can like whittle away, you know what I mean, like if you get anything kind of not preferential going on” (Gina). The following excerpt from my field notes expresses a similar thought:

A lot of the talk during the orientation period is centered on finding out where everyone is located in Paris. How can I get a hold of you, where do you live? People are trying to set up their contact list, everyone shares their cell phone numbers with everyone else, regardless of whether or not you like or are even interested in that person. This indicates some of the initial desperation of making friends when you arrive.

Essentially, students felt that making any friends was better than no friends at all. For some, this prevailing attitude resulted in a change in friendship tactics. For example, some became accepting of any kind of friend, became more assertive in finding friends, became more tolerant of differences, and even reduced the basis for friendship formation to just having a good time together once. Anita was struck by her change in friendship patterns in the sense that she became “willing to accept or settle for less” with her friendships:

Because with me, before, I was sort of like all or nothing, like either we’re really, really, really friends...we’re really friends, we’re really close and we live each day together. Or, we’re nothing. You know? And here’s it’s just like in the middle, and it’s good, you know, there’s no commitment, but at the same time it’s still fun, it’s a good thing and I never enjoyed that before, so it’s like a new like side of friendship that I never saw I guess, and it’s a good thing, it’s very good.

This left little mystery to friendship formation, because “nobody was really being choosy, like you met someone and you’re like ‘oh my god, you speak English,’ so
we’ll walk together.” Students held the philosophy, “put up with people you don’t like just so you’re not alone.”

Part of the desperation for connection was found in students’ need to interpret their experiences. Sharing experiences with others and co-creating stories helped us all to understand our experiences and cope with the anxieties present. Developing friendships ensured that we had someone who not only understood what we were feeling, but who shared those emotions with us. In a sense, we needed friends to help us learn to enjoy Paris. Anita exposed this thought in her journal, “I’m really happy that I made a network of friends this fast. Thank God. Paris is really beautiful, but if there is one thing I’ve learned in the past is that it’s not the place, it’s the people. So no matter how cool Paris is, if there was no one to enjoy it with, it would suck.” It’s just easier to fall in love with Paris in the company of friends or family. Elana, who had been to Paris a number of times with her family and just loved it had a difficult time enjoying Paris on her own, “If I were here with my family, I would be loving it. And I am, I’m liking it. Just once you get to know people, as long as you have people to spend time with, so you don’t feel completely alone.” The general consensus was that once you started making friends you were fine. This idea was openly shared among the groups of people I interacted with most often. During especially rough times it was common to say or to hear, “thank God you were there, I couldn’t do this without you.” For instance, after a particularly trying night for Kara when she spent an entire evening with only French people that ended up in frustration and bug gulping tears, being surrounded by a group of her U.S. friends turned her tears into
laughter and eventual happiness. My after-midnight jottings one evening produced the following note:

We went to some vernissages (gallery openings) Thursday evening with Gina, Julie, Barb, Kara and her best friend’s other best friend from the States, Trina, who is studying for a year at the Sorbonne. We had a nice time going to the vernissages, then we went to Odeon to get some drinks. We ran into some other IESers there, and it was as if we were expected to all go together. We tried, but we couldn’t find a place where all of us could go. It is funny how the whole American gang didn’t want to break up; instead, we grouped up with another group. Finally, we went to “Le Pint” and had some Kriek there. Alan joined us. As we were sitting and talking Trina smiled big and said she had an announcement to make, “I am so happy, this is the first time since I got to Paris a week ago that I have felt so comfortable! You guys are so cool, I’m so glad we all met.” We all toasted to her, to happiness in Paris, and to how “cool” we all were – meaning that we were all nice people and easy to get along with. It was a great moment.

Eventually the superficial mode of interaction wore some people down. As students became more comfortable, their shallow interactions became less comfortable. They realized they weren’t forging true friendships during this initial “grace period.” Sheila always lamented that she never got past the superficial stages of friendship. She frequently compared her France friends with her “real” friends in the States, “I’ve told you this a hundred times, but [my friends and home and I] always make farting jokes, and you just cannot make farting jokes when you’re trying to make friends (laughing).” This wasn’t the case for everyone. Some friendships did form around that sense of freedom to communicate intimate details as Kara reported:

And like first impressions are always like not really telling. Well, like actually you can, sometimes you can tell right off the bat when you like don’t like someone. When I first met
Buffy I was like, oh, my impression was just like, “she’s fun, ok,” like the first day I met her. I was like “wow!” I kinda cracked up, her voice is really high and she’s really bizarre, I could tell how high strung she was right away, and it was, it seemed kind of happy. I don’t know, what should I do? Next morning at IES she walked up to me and the first thing she said at like 9am in the morning was “Kara, I haven’t gone to the bathroom, since I’ve been here!” (very high pitched/squealing voice). And I was like “YES!” And from that moment on I was like, I’m totally going to be friends with this girl.

The desperate need for friendships wasn’t just their own experience, they saw it in other people as well: “you can see in people’s eyes that they’re trying to look for someone to hang out with.” This too was a heavy burden. As students coped with their own sense of “belongingness” they were also confronted with others’ desperation. Gina describes an event that happened to she and Kara, “I guess like that girl the whole day was just venting to Kara, just, ‘oh, you know, this is not going well, blah, blah, blah,’ the girl was just grasping for a friend anybody to just listen to her.”

Groups Solidify: All For One and One For All

By the end of the orientation sessions abroad everyone settled into a friendship group. Perhaps inspired by Three Musketeers author Alexandre Dumas, the groups of IES students shared an “all for one, and one for all” attitude. Groups solidified quickly and the “group” took priority over any individual needs or desires. Two early excerpts from my field notes describe how this phenomenon would play out throughout the months abroad:

It appeared that the person who had the most information (Nancy, at this time) was the one who made many of the decisions. Together one or two people negotiated what they wanted to do and then asked if others wanted to go with.
Those without other plans just agreed. Decision-making was never too slow, and pretty much everyone just went along.

No one was really dedicated to any specific art space, except for Jake and I, so it was more or less our show. However, since everyone appeared to have invited at least one additional person who was not there, we spent the whole night meeting up with people. By the end of the night we were a big group all looking for somewhere to go. People were aware that they were making others wait while they waited for their friends. Everyone was relatively apologetic, and pretty much everyone said at some point or another

These groups served an important purpose for students. Within two weeks primary group bonds were formed and by the third week groups appeared relatively stable. Most students perceived their groups as open and friendly despite the fact that there was little crossover between groups. Groups initially formed on the basis of an activity, whether that was to combine resources to try and get from point A to point B using public transportation or just to get together with someone for a drink. Students relied on their group not just to “figure things out together,” like the cafeteria, but also because frankly, “its more fun to do things together!” Groups served a functional purpose such as accomplishing daily tasks together, but also a social purpose such as engaging in social activities and offering social support. Initially, the balance between functional and social purposes of groups was fairly level. Students “explored and adjusted as a group” by combining the task of developing functional fitness in Paris with the enjoyment of exploring Paris together. Groups played such a significant role in student adjustment that many students were unable to talk about adjusting without
mentioning their group as shown in the following excerpt from a discussion with Anita.

Maggie: If I asked you if you felt adjusted to this culture, what would you say?

Anita: I’d say yes. And I’d say no. The thing is that it’s very easy for us because we’re here with a group of people who are sharing the same experience as we are, so we’re discovering it together, that makes it so much easier than if you came here all by yourself, it’d be completely different. So, like, you know, you go out, “yeah, I don’t know this place, let’s go try it out,” you know, or “yeah, let’s meet French people together,” you know, you already have a pre-established group of people who you can connect with 100%, or at least 90%, but see if you’re alone, then you have to meet actual local people, and you’re alone, alone. It’s so much more sort of intimidating, I think?

In later stages of the study abroad, the functional/social purposes shifted slightly toward a more social purpose.

On the last night of the orientation week IES threw a small party on a boat docked in the Seine. It was a clear and cool night. A group of us walked along the Seine toward the Latin Quarter wanting to “profiter” by staying out all night in our fancy clothes. I think all of us were walking methodically, entranced by the beauty of the Seine below that was reflecting “The City of Lights” in her waters. Suddenly, yet softly, Greta sparked a short-lived dialogue:

Greta: (to Kara) Do you feel like you are part of a group, here? Like you belong?
Kara: No, not really. (pause)
Greta: I know, I feel like I hang out with a lot of groups, but I don’t have my own group to belong to.
Kara: Yeahhh (lingering on the aspirated h). Maggie, do you feel like us? Like, are you trying to hurry and find friends to hang out with and make a group, like us? Or are you like above that since you’re older?

Maggie: (laughs) No, it’s kinda like that for me too. Like today, I was the last to leave the class and there weren’t any people in the courtyard, so I had to go to lunch by myself, and I was like “oh, I don’t have any friends that wait for me.” It was sort of sad, really.

Kara: Ahh. Yeah.

What Happens When “Your” Paris Doesn’t Match the Real One

Coping with language barriers was difficult. Trying to break into the French social scene was nearly impossible. Being far away from friends, family, and anything familiar was painful. But the hardest part about the study abroad was that it didn’t match up with students’ expectations of what living in Paris was “supposed” to be. In fact, it wasn’t what students thought it was going to be like at all. Students hoped and hinted throughout their sojourn that the experience would eventually become the one that they had expected. In the beginning stages of the study abroad students were anxiously wondering when they would “be one hundred percent happy here,” or when the fireworks were going to go off. It wasn’t until midway through the semester when they realized it might not happen. Their emotions turned from anxiety to disappointment when they realized that the experience they were having was it.

Students expected an ideal experience, the Paris that we see in the movies, that we know from the great love stories, that we have always imagined in our heads.

I expected fireworks the second I got off the plane and that was probably wrong of me to think that I was going to get
here and be like sublimely happy the minute I got here. But I just pictured this glamorous idea that every night I would be going out and just being Parisian and feeling like everything was just gonna fall into my hands. It hasn’t been like that at all… I had no idea like what was coming at all (laughs). I was just gonna get off the plane, have friends, know the city, be fluent in French and like have the time of my life within like 10 minutes (Kara).

Gina freely admitted that she went into the experience with a “romantic lens.” Instead of the Paris they knew from *Sabrina* or final episodes of *Sex and the City*, students described it as “not amazing, but it’s okay, though,” or “fun, but not a total paradise.” Michelle expressed disappointment when she realized “I kinda have this idealized notion in my head that ok, well, now that I’m surrounded by all these French people, and they only speak French, so obviously my French is going to be perfect NOW, it’s a magical solution, you know? And it’s not like that at all.” She added to this sentiment later in the semester writing, “’immersion’ is not magic! If I would like to learn French, I must work, a lot, a lot, a lot.”

Students expected every second to be amazing, to become magically immersed in all aspects of French culture, and to have the best experience ever.

To be fair, students didn’t dream up these expectations alone. They were partly built on a standing discourse about how amazing their experience should be: “because everybody says going abroad is this huuuuge, it’s blown up really, really big. And everybody always says, ‘it’s the best thing I’ve ever done in my whole life,’ and that’s what I’m expecting. And if it doesn’t happen, I feel like I’m just gonna be hugely disappointed.” Reflecting on her study abroad experience, Phoebe told me that she thought it’s “probably impossible – to really make it like what everyone says it should be is like kind of impossible, in a way.” Students
had a hard time coming to terms with their own study abroad experience in comparison to what they had imagined and what they were told. For Leia, coping with this discord meant having a heart to heart talk with a close friend from home about it:

My study abroad experience? I thought it had to be like what everyone else’s was like, so I was comparing mine and I was saying like, well, this is what they did; you know, why isn’t mine like that? But then Linda said, “Well, yours is different, everyone has a different study abroad experience; you can’t compare yours to everyone else’s, you know, you’re living in Paris.” So it was just really hard for me to accept that mine was going to be my own experience.

One of the most significant discourses on “what your Paris experience should be like” came from an unlikely, but as it turned out extremely persuasive source – a pamphlet among a myriad of pamphlets distributed by IES. Perhaps because of its narrative appeal, or perhaps because students were desperate for some sort of “key” to unlocking the Paris experience, every single student appeared to have an intimate knowledge of “Moveable Feast: One IES student’s guide to making yourself at home in Paris,” written by Bernard Swain, a former IES student from the 1968-1969 academic year. Putting aside commentary about the differences between study abroad in the late sixties (which also happened to coincide with an incredible student movement in France), Swain’s “how to” guide and accompanying “Readiness for the ‘Moveable Feast’” quiz is a cute, if slightly self indulgent, personal note on how to make France your home (see Appendix C). It is complete with “Seven Basic Steps to Making Yourself at Home in Paris,” which include the following:
1. Find a third place, and make yourself a regular there
2. Accept the trade-offs: Spending more time on Paris means less time for other things
3. Break out of the IES/peer group cocoon
4. Let yourself feel lonely sometimes
5. Promise yourself you’ll “do Europe” later – you’ll never have another chance to LIVE here!
6. Work WITH the language barrier, not against it; Immerse yourself
7. Aim to meet anybody, not just students

Each point is later followed with a brief passage for how to achieve each of these steps. By the end of the semester, “Moveable Feast” achieved status as the religious text of study abroad. It instilled fear, offered prophecies, inspired hope, and created guilt among the IES students.

Kara: I’m just really worried that I’m never gonna - did you read the Moveable Feast?
Maggie: Yeah, that little thing?
Kara: That thing scared the crap out of me! Cuz it was just like, if you don’t sink your teeth in and take it upon yourself to make the friends and like embrace the culture you’re just gonna have a very shallow experience.

Students would often say to me, “you know, I want it to be like Moveable Feast.”

I could have funded my entire research trip if I had a Euro for every flippant reference students made to Moveable Feast. They compared their experiences to Swain’s and took the 10-item readiness assessment at face value. Her second week abroad Michelle wrote enthusiastically about almost meeting someone in a cafeteria, “It almost worked! I feel weird about talking to random people in bars… I don’t think I can pull that off unless I get really desperate. I’m not there yet. I need to be like Moveable Feast guy.” In the end, however, most students did not “achieve the moveable feast.” Swain himself writes, “Would it surprise
you to learn that most IES students DON’T get seduced by Paris? They pack their memories and souvenirs in their bags and go home and leave nothing behind. They don’t leave their heart in Paris, or their youth and (sic) even any close friends. For them, Paris is not a moveable feast” (p. 3). To which Leia replied:

You know when we had to read that thing about “Are you ready for the movable feast?” and all that shit, and I was like, “Yah, I’m ready for the movable feast! I don’t want to speak English!” Now, I’m like the exact opposite of all of that. I’m like, “Screw it!” I don’t deal - like I really don’t care. I’m like “movable feast,” my ass! I don’t care. I just want to enjoy Paris. And like it’s great just getting around. I love it!

By the end of the semester, some students had come to terms with the idea of making Paris their own experience and not regretting the experience that they made.

I mean it’s weird now looking back because I’m at the end of this thing that I know is going to be like, it’s one of those things that you say you studied in Paris for a semester, and everyone’s like “wow, that must have been the best thing of your life,” and it is awesome, but at the same time, it’s weird now being like “well, my life is not over, so I still have more things to do and like” (laughing) I don’t know (Phoebe).

Once students began to “accept” that Paris wouldn’t “fulfill all my hopes and dreams,” and that yes, Paris was going to be “exciting, but not a fairytale,” or “awesome, but not the best thing in my life,” or even, “a good experience, but not perfect” then they were able to better enjoy their own experience. Once they started accepting their experience for the way it was, they were able to find pleasure in some of the unexpected events. While most of the students experienced a shattering of expectations, many were eventually able to find an
immense amount of pleasure and satisfaction out of the things they had no expectations of, such as volunteering with elder adults, or learning to appreciate a second language. Things that students “didn’t foresee became really good experiences.”

The tangible goals that students articulated most frequently were to achieve “total French immersion,” and to “become fluent in French.” The “Moveable Feast Guy,” among others, set up a perception that immersing oneself in the French culture was very possible. This possibility mixed with students’ own goals for integrating with the French was a recipe for distress when reality sunk in that that was incredibly difficult. Students were, “expecting a more of an integrated situation as soon as we got here.” Instead they found that “it’s disappointing,” “a lot harder than people say it is,” and “more difficult than I had expected.” But, making French friends and speaking French weren’t the only challenges that students had to face while overseas.

Identity Challenges and Changes Inherent in Study Abroad

Study abroad was also a personally challenging experience on many fronts. It was a physically challenging experience as students were fatigued from jet lag, language translation, cultural shifts, and acclimating to life in a big city. Even the brusque program director urged students to take care of their bodies and minds while they are in Paris,

Get your spirit ready to support French all the day. You must be able to make it through a day of all-French in a huge city. Get plenty of rest, rest for 9 days if you have to! Baguettes are not enough, eat at a cafeteria, it’s not good, but it has plenty of nutrition. Your spirit can’t handle all the
French, it’s hard, so you have to get your body healthy. Pay attention to your body - eat!

Sheila expressed that one of the most difficult thing to adjust to was the constant shift between U.S. American culture (at IES) to French culture:

I wonder if the fact that we were so much with Americans and not with French if that actually made it harder on us, because it was kind of like there was two completely different cultures and you’re dealing with both of them on a daily basis. Does that make sense? Kinda like when you go to class, and you are in an American world, you are with your American friends, and you leave and suddenly you have to be French.

Although some students suggested that they studied abroad to escape from the U.S., or specifically Penn State for some, they came to realize that “study abroad is not a vacation, you’re living there, it’s hard work!” Or as Michelle said, “it’s a fight just to get into the culture a little bit, and then it’s not that you’ve made it, you’ve gotta keep fighting.” Everyday tasks are challenging when you are a foreigner. Opening doors, flushing toilets without getting soaked, and buying bread become accomplishments and bragging points that foster a true sense of pride. Not only are you stripped of your identity while abroad, but your very sense of intelligence and competence is challenged.

You’re semi-stripped of your identity, I mean, you still know who you are and you make friends that will know who you are, anyway, but in terms of day to day interactions with people and trying to build bigger interactions, you know, big, like, stronger relationships and stuff, you’re stripped of your, when you don’t speak the language, you can’t communicate your own identity that well, so you’re just kind of like, how are you going to prove to these people that you’re cool, and funny, and respectable, and intelligent? When your language skills are not? (Kara)
University students with a decent enough GPA to study abroad for a semester are struck down to a “half competent personality.” Sometimes students who were engaged in a French social scene would find themselves “wishing that someone from the United States would call me so that I could speak to them in English and prove that I am competent.” It’s hard, because “you’re switching from this like competent English personality to this not-so-competent lesser personality of you.” Instead of getting better across the sojourn, Sheila told me that she felt the longer she was in France the stupider she was getting regardless of what language she was speaking! Students were faced with the inevitability that they were unable to express their true self in French. You can’t crack jokes in French; you can’t even get past a superficial layer of discussion. Many of the potential French friendships were quickly dissipated because it’s neither possible nor satisfying to maintain a relationship with a person that you can only talk to about the weather or The DaVinci Code. Despite the pervasive believe that they were able to understand 90% of what was going on around them,

I can understand a good, I don’t know, ninety-percent of what people say to me, which of course is probably tuned down a little bit, because they’re like, “oh a foreigner,” so it’s like ninety-percent, but I still can’t quite respond at that level (Michelle).

I’m not really speaking French so much outside of class, it’s just the hardest part for me is that I understand everything and I read everything, I can’t speak it. Which never was my problem, but to formulate what I want to say is just very difficult, and it takes a long time for the thoughts to come together, and then when it comes out it doesn’t sound right or something, it’s weird, I don’t know (Leia).
students were unable to express themselves. For Kara, this was a humbling experience,

> But maybe I’m a little more humble than I used to be? Possibly? Just because of that same feeling of like I don’t have any, I don’t have the grounds here to completely put myself out there and defend my opinions, or whatever it may be, so, maybe that’s changing slightly?

For everyone else it was just a source of frustration.

Identity, or one’s self-concept as a student, was challenged particularly in the classroom setting. Students’ entire sojourn abroad was under the pretense of a scholarly endeavor. Although students all had additional goals that either competed against or collaborated with a scholarly one, education was the principle driving force behind their sojourn. Moreover, students who desired to study abroad through IES had to have a minimum 3.0 grade point average, at least a 5th semester standing, and have successfully taken no less than two years of college level French. Students also had to demonstrate significant educational motivation and cultural interest in a short application essay and supply the IES office with a formal language assessment and letter of recommendation from a professor. Thus, the students accepted into the IES-Paris program were both highly motivated to study abroad and demonstrated high academic standing. As such, students who had a difficult time in their courses abroad were often shocked and sometimes offended. In Paris, students were required to take 15 credit hours in French, which included one of four grammar courses – débutant (beginner), amateur (novice), intermédiaire (intermediate), or avancé (advanced). Naturally,
placement at one of these levels felt more like a marker of human value and overall intellect than a mere indicator of French proficiency.

The first challenge to students’ scholarly identities occurred three days after arriving at IES. Still recuperating from jet lag and a sense of culture shock, all the students congregated into several small rooms at L’Institut Catholique to take placement exams at 8:30am. The Institut Catholique was a private college with enough classroom space to accommodate all 125 students in various groups as they took their written and oral placement exams. It was also the site of the week-long “Propédeutique” – a word created by the director of the program to conjure up the idea of “to prepare you, to teach you, and to orient you.” After waiting a long weekend for the results of the placement exams, students arrived early Monday morning and rushed to the large paint chipped wall where our full names and placement in one of four hierarchical groups was publicly displayed. Students scoured the wall searching for their names, as they were not in any kind of order. Hopefully, students started with the “avancé” list, those who found their names at the beginning of the public wall quickly paired off with other high scorers or followed their less fortunate friends who walked parallel to the wall until they located their names with shoulders slumping the further they went. Once we all found our respective places we searched for others who would be placed in our “Propédeutique” and subsequently our semester-long grammar class unless in actuality we proved to be more or less capable than our initial placement test predicted.
The placement exams did more than just locate students in a grammatical (and as a result social) hierarchy. It also served to dictate who your peer group would be and what classes you would be encouraged to or discouraged from taking. By the end of the second week we were ranked, sorted, and placed. You could get a quick assessment of your skills by simply looking at – or more often listening to – the person seated next to you in grammar class. Entire identity and friendship groups were created on the basis of everyone’s newly assigned intellectual value. Public praise and public humiliation were particularly useful communication devices in the establishment of new identities and social networks. We all knew our places within the first two weeks of class – all you had to say was “I’m a one” or “I’m a four” and everyone knew what that meant. So, then we would sit among a group of students with more or less the same capabilities as our own and take notes. The class format was essentially the same regardless of what class it was: chat in English until the professor arrived, grow stone silent once she opened the door until she left again three hours later, attempt to take notes on whatever information you could glean about French business culture, impressionist art, the subjunctive tense, or la laïcité (the French system for the separation of church and State), ask classmates for clarification of information, get a cup of instant café au lait or chocolate chaude for thirty-five Euro cents from the IES coffee dispenser, go to your next class and do it again. Invariably someone would be called upon and put on the spot to respond to some statement or question posed by the professor. Lacking a decent response, the student stammered in French until either the teacher redirected the question or
another student came to the rescue (see Appendix D for samples of course syllabi). As the semester progressed many students became withdrawn in class and reluctant to provide oral responses. In this way, students with a stronger grasp of the French language were more likely to respond in class and continue to develop their oral skills, while those without a strong foundation became reluctant to speak. Despite the fact that students with the same level of French proficiency occupied many of the classes, by mid semester it was evident in each class who the best speakers were. Not only were the courses hierarchically structured, by mid semester there were hierarchical factions within the individual classes. As a result of this, students often found themselves trying to make sense of their course material while at the same time negotiating their new classroom identities as mediocre students, ambivalent students, anxious students, or even brown-nosers.

While being stripped of one identity abroad (viz., intellectual identity), we were also confronted with new identities. A few of these identities were ones that we wanted to “try on” while we were abroad, but most of them were just imposed upon us (or at least we thought they were). I would like to write that Leia’s positive identity experiences of “becoming the person that I want to be,” “I am more confident, more adventurous, less afraid here,” and “helping me grow, and making me independent and almost fearless of a lot of things” were the case for everyone, but it was much more complex. Students experienced many types of identity shifts—some better than others. These changed identities encompassed everything from being more “focused on my self” to “thinking more about other people in the world” and everything in between. Students expressed the notion
that “I know myself better” and “I’m more accepting, I’m more tolerant,” or “it’s weird how my perception on social standing has changed.”

As U.S. Americans or foreigners abroad, we were also confronted with some very specific negative identity messages. The majority of these messages were directed toward national identity. Confronted for the first time with negative images of U.S. Americans, many students sought to distance themselves from their national identity. Students who were not from the U.S. were certain to establish this fact when engaged in any French-American discussion or interaction. U.S. American students with dual citizenship opted for the “other” nation. Those of us who couldn’t escape our national identities were not only encouraged to, but found comfort in, lying about our national identity. The program director was not laughing when she told us to say that we were Canadian or Swiss if confronted by a French person. Many students found it useful to be able to switch identities. Elana describes a typical French-American interaction,

They will be like “ah!” And then they’ll go into some discussion about how Americans think they're the best or, political conversation, or conversation in general about like how they don't like Americans. That's not that often, but it does happen, so sometimes I would just always tell them that I was Canadian. In Russia I would say that I was French, cuz they didn't really know anything, if they spoke any French, I could speak back. Here I might just stay with Canadian, I don't know, to avoid like, there are so many stereotypes that go along with being American, and like if I really, really felt that I was, fit, every stereotype, then alright then I'd say that I was American, but I don't and I don't want them to judge me as being that from what I, just because I label myself as American, Canadian just is kinda like neutral, like Swiss, so that gives me a clean slate to work with, you know, I don't wanna start out on a bad foot.
The natural outcome of having to cope with strong negative images was students’ equally strong desire to “just blend in, not be American.” Students hoped that people wouldn’t just “assume I’m American,” and they made an effort not to be perceived as the “stereotypical loud, stupid, rude Americans!” On the one hand, students were faced with an increase in national identity and a feeling that “I represent the U.S.” On the other hand, students met this identity salience with a rejection of national identity – at least most of the time. There were times, however when students embraced or enhanced their American identities.

U.S. identities were primed during national events, “Definitely during the World Series, when we went to the bar at two a.m. until six a.m.,” and national holidays, “they seem more American when it is Halloween or Thanksgiving, or you know, the Fourth of July, or something like that, it’s always the days when you realize that they are Americans, you know? That they want the turkey made the American way.” Students also “became more American” in group settings, especially when they perceived that they were being compared to the French or when they felt targeted as foreigners. A group of us would go to an English pub on Sunday nights that held a competitive “quiz night.” Not only did we feel we had to perform better on the quiz than the French, but also the English. The worse we did, the more American we became! I asked Gina if there was a time when she embraced her U.S. identity, laughing she said:

> When we are at quiz night like we are, we were (sad voice) past tense, we are all together, I shouldn’t even just say, cuz it’s not just when we’re speaking English together, like now, like now I don’t feel like you and I are like hyper-American because we’re speaking English, yeay, but it’s just like when you do stuff that I feel is so cheesy, you
know Cracker Jack and popcorn at a baseball at a game, you know that kind of stuff. That kind of stuff makes me feel more American.

Other times a U.S. identity was evoked was when we were in a social setting, often standing in a line, if we felt we were getting poor service, or being outright ignored. In these cases, we decided to engage in the “System A.” System A was our version of the French “Système D” or “Système Débrouillard,” which was a throw back to the years surrounding World War II in which the people of France were forced to *se débrouiller* or “make do” and “be resourceful,” by whatever means necessary to survive. Système D sometimes meant doing things illegally or counter normative. The IES director described the Système D as this, “The laws are always for your neighbor and not for you. The red light is for the person behind you, not you. Even if something says it is “interdit,” [not allowed] the French will do it. They drive crazy. If there is a line, the French will walk to the front and pretend they didn’t notice the line.” There were times when it was necessary to use the System A (system American) to fight against the Système D, “I feel like we were fighting back on behalf of all other American students, you know, that are getting Système D’ed!” Usually that just meant standing together in a line and not letting anyone get past us, or standing up for ourselves if we were being ignored. Gina offered a scenario in which she engaged the “System A,” “It upsets me so much when they use the ‘Système D,’ though, because I was so much raised not to do that, and when we went to the, the day that we went to the cafeteria, an old man with a cane cut me off, I was like I can’t yell cuz you’re *old* and your *crippled*. You know? So use the System A.”
The final and most significant event that created a united American front was the U.S. presidential elections. This event made even the non-American IES students rally behind the United States. Students who had no interest in voting before leaving the U.S. became passionately interested in the elections during the sojourn. Those who had a healthy interest in U.S. politics and the presidential elections prior to their study abroad surpassed passionate and became obsessed. The flames of “election passion” were inspired and fanned by French media. All of France was buzzing – cafés, bars, Laundromats – about the U.S. presidential elections. The entire country was hanging on to every U.S. poll result, news clip, and rumor they could glean. Being identified as an American was an open door to ask not if you voted, not who you voted for, but when you cast your ballot for John Kerry. Inside the American enclave at IES and throughout the entire city of Paris, the discourse surrounding the elections centered on how important it was on an international level that Kerry became president. When we woke up the day following the elections, early results indicated that Bush would win. Some news sources already claimed “Bush Re-elected!” Americans and French gathered in cafés to watch the news for any updates. IES students gathered in the lounge and computer lab waiting for any official report. Students held hands and hugged each other. Some students cried as they talked on their cellular phones with parents in the States. Professors and students ran into classes periodically to give an update on the Ohio count. When the results were finally in, and Bush was re-elected, students cried in disbelief and fear. Despite the great American rally at the IES center during election week, the weeks that followed were filled with humiliation
and disappointment about being an American. In France, the 125 of us students were held personally responsible for letting Bush continue his presidency. We not only let France down, but the rest of the world. From that point on, students became much more reluctant to “admit” to being an American. The following excerpt from my field notes the day after the elections describes the “energy” surrounding this event:

As I was walking into the IES building, I spied Darla down the street. I hollered a cheerful “bonjour!” Normally a happy person, I was shocked when she didn’t respond in anyway. I waited at the door for her. Her face was tear stained and she was shaking. She stuttered in broken French that she wasn’t going to speak English any more. Ever. She did not want anyone to know she was American. I asked “why, did anything happen?” She said “yes, Bush won.” Well, he hadn’t yet, but that wasn’t the point. France had been announcing that he did win, and she was fearful that someone would harass her because she was American. There were others who were also fearful now that the results were in. It is interesting, I am not exactly sure what the fear was, but the air in France is rich with a distaste, in fact a disgust, with the entire Bush administration. So, it is apparent that the American students here can also feel that tension. I think it is mostly in their minds, though, because no one has really said anything has happened to them because they were American, at least not in the political sense. There are some, who once they “admit to being American” are bombarded with questions and perhaps accusatory statements about “how could you, how could the American people vote that fool in,” but it is all done with that good sense of French argumentative antagonism.

As the sojourn progressed, students were more easily able to accept the discord they felt between old – new identities and expectations – experiences. They did this partly by creating their own “theories” about study abroad. Darla shared two of these theories with me on our last night as IES students, or “Deep Thoughts by Darla,” as she called them:
Circle Theory: Everything has gone full circle, and things that she experienced in the beginning are coming back - like getting the heel of a shoe caught in a grate in the road or hearing a song that she heard during the orientation sessions. She knew it was time to go home because she has gone full circle. She doesn’t want to be in “Ground Hog’s Day” where you wake up and it’s day one all over again. She doesn’t want to relive the first moments in Paris, because they were so hard, she cried a lot during the first days.

Déjà Vu Theory: She was sad when she first got here, but was experiencing a lot of déjà vu. She thought it was really bizarre and kept inquiring what it meant when someone told her that déjà vu happens when you are in the right space in the right time. This helped her get through her first days.

Darla wasn’t the only one to believe in a déjà vu type theory. Anita frequently wrote about “creepy coincidences” in her journal:

So besides all of these goodies [internship with Louis Vuitton and Cuisine trip to Dijon], this week was a week of weird coincidences. Yesterday after meeting at Maggie’s place, I was in Charles de Gaulle Etoile metro station listening to my iPOD tracks when I see an affiche [poster] for a techno concert with a DJ called Nicola Conte…and the name sounded familiar so I browsed my sound library and I found a song mixed by him and called “Charles de Gaulle à Belleville” and of course I was in between Charles de Gaulle and Belleville (literally) since I live there… very strange. Like god was trying to send me a message or something.

What I think is funny is the way things are coming together for me now. I never expected this to happen but it’s like suddenly all the pieces of the puzzle are coming together. Especially this whole internship thing the coincidence is just too creepy. I’ve always said to my friends imagine if I get an internship at Louis Vuitton in Paris how cool would that be? And it happened all of a sudden… so strange! I don’t wanna jinx it but really, it’s just weird. And my life is taking some sort of direction (at least professionally speaking).
Students created other theories to help them adjust as well. Food is so central to French culture that it was not shocking that some people had a “when you get an appetite for French cuisine you start adjusting” theory. And the short-term abroad combined with how quickly the days passed made a perfect backdrop for the “it takes three days to adjust to anything” theory. And, finally, there was the “study abroad destiny” theory that held that eventually everybody just finds each other and everything works out all right.

Though they were helpful, these theories were not the only method students had for coping with the challenges of study abroad. By the end of the semester, students had developed their own routines. Routines eventually lead to rituals. And, rituals “normalized” the study abroad experience. Communication was at the heart of these rituals and, in the end, was at the heart of the entire experience. Ritualized forms of communication are fully explored in the following chapter. But, before we can get there, and because communication also played a significant role in student’s reentry, I must first take you through the end of the study abroad and to the reentry.

The Shocking Experience of Reentry: No One Understands Me Here

My anxieties about returning to the U.S. after spending more than four months in Paris were quelled only by the sense of purpose that I had. Unlike the students I studied abroad with, I knew exactly what I was supposed to do when I got home. While others were struggling with finding a sense of purpose back in the States or having a hard time interpreting their experiences abroad – and an even harder time sharing those experiences – my sole purpose upon return was to
do just that. My job was to completely immerse myself in the interpretation of our experiences abroad. While others were attempting to ground themselves back in the U.S. by trying to maintain contact with other study abroad participants, through my analysis and writing, I was able to keep our lives and our relationships in Paris alive.

Going Home: Honeymoon or Heartbreak?

It was only when faced with their return that students began to mentally process the reentry. This was a much-welcomed phase for some students who were “excited to get back home.” At first, the return to the U.S. was “like a honeymoon in America.” Students were elated that they could “be themselves again” and not have to be in a constant state of panic. They also felt “more organized” in the U.S., and happy to return to some kind of structure. I asked Sheila to tell me about her reentry:

Ok, well, first of all, it was excellent (laughs) I sound like such an uncultured slime, but no, it was good to be back. And, I don’t know why, it’s just so much more comfortable, like I don’t have to panic about like who’s gonna push me on the Metro (laughs) who’s gonna- you know what I mean? Like you’re no longer on this like defense mode, and it’s just like, I can relax. I don’t have to worry about who’s walking behind me (laughs) or like who’s out to steal my wallet, or, you know what I mean? And yeah, it’s nice.

For others, the entire study abroad experience all of a sudden seemed easy compared to the eventual return:

Anyways, I think that it’s easy to leave to study abroad. People often dramatize it and say that it takes a lot of guts to leave and live something new bla bla bla. I think it’s relatively easy. You travel, live the ecstasy of discovering new things and people and of criticizing another country.
What is hard, though, is to come back unchanged. It’s hard to go back and feel the same at home, be interested by the same things, etc. (Anita’s journal).

The students who had the most positive experiences abroad also had the most difficult time with reentry. Anita, who had “a really hard time in the beginning, really hard,” and experienced a lot of “emotional breakdowns” upon her return, shared the following about writing in a journal for her class:

> In the beginning, all I would write about would be about Paris. Everything you know? It’s like the first 5 or 6 or maybe 7 journal entries, it was all about Paris, it was like “I miss Paris so much, I wanna kill myself, I wanna slit my wrist, I wanna get out of here” you know? And then it started getting better (laughs).

Upon returning to the U.S., students were hit with a double-edged stress sword. First, students had acculturated somewhat to the French laissez-faire attitude. As part of their new identities abroad, some students described a change in the way they approached life. Instead of planning and obsessing about the future they were “taking life one day at a time,” and “focusing more on the short term.” Other students starting setting life priorities such as putting less emphasis on work and more emphasis on enjoying life and incorporating French mannerisms, such as eating habits and fashion. The dominant cultural values in the U.S. do not support their new identities. Students found it stressful to return to the chaos of life in the U.S. where they felt pressure to succeed in school and make strong efforts to get that “great job” or internship.

> I don’t know what it is, but I feel that while I’m here (U.S.), I think it’s maybe the culture, as well, you know, especially because I’m in the business school, and everything there is so career oriented, like there’s so much pressure for you to read the newspaper and be informed
about *everything*, and like you know become successful and rich and donate and I don’t know what! So I feel that I’m behind while I’m here, you know? Even though I’m not. And I just feel so frustrated to just do stuff. Like I feel like I’m wasting time if I’m just sitting around, which is actually true, but it’s different, you know, in Paris, people just take their time, they just sit in a café, whatever, it doesn’t matter, but here, like if I sit at Starbucks for 15 minutes, I feel like jittery, it’s like you know, I look around and people aren’t doing what I’m doing, they’re either messing with their laptop or reading a book or something you know, where I’m just there, smoking a cigarette, and I’m looking around, I’m the only one relaxing. I feel guilty (Anita)

Second, students experienced an incredible amount of return stress because of the (often surprising) immense discord they felt between who they *became* and who they *were* – “the hardest thing is just people knew me as what I was before.” It is “impossible” to return from a semester abroad unchanged, though many students felt that *nothing* had changed back home. “I do feel like I changed and coming back to something that was familiar was hard. I definitely think the change coming back is harder than it was going there, you know? The culture reverse shock.” This was particularly difficult for Leia who, for the first time in her life, was able to explore her own independence while in Paris. This independence was short-lived, however. Upon returning to the U.S. she naturally fell back into a more family-dependent lifestyle. Elana projected a similar loss of independence from her previous reentry experiences, “it's almost like you become a child again, you can't go anywhere, you can't go to a little bar and sit in there with your friends and just like talk.”

Students were coping with some of their own study abroad disappointments, such as not becoming fluent and not making any French friends,
as well as some disappointments they felt from others. Friends and family expected their newly returned sojourners to share all the intimate details about their travels. Not only did students find it nearly impossible to “sum up the entire experience,” they also felt that when they did talk about it, it was on such a shallow level that they ended up only “belittling the entire experience.” They were continually letting down their listeners and themselves when they tried to talk about the experience. “I don’t know,” Gina said, “it’s like people ask and you wanna have this fantastic response, and I feel like I let them down (laughs) sometimes.”

Is There Anyone Out There Who Understands Me?

Once again students were faced with a driving desire for connection – someone who understood their experiences. Anita described the return as an egocentric and highly personal experience that even if you wanted to share it, and give a fully detailed description of it, nobody would ever understand. With disappointment in her voice Gina explained:

People will ask, “oh my god, so what did you think of it?” And I can’t really say in a short enough response to keep their interest like how amazing it really was, so all I kinda say is “ehhhh, it was really great? I loved it? I can’t wait to go back?” (disappointed voice). And then they’re just like, “ok.” And that’s it. They don’t really get the grand scope of what it really was, you know?

Because students were unable to fully share their study abroad experiences with others, most of the time they did not even make the effort. Study abroad stories involved too much background information to be interesting to tell, and in the end students felt that nobody really understood anyway. The only people they could
completely share their experiences with were other study abroad students. When asked about her return experiences, Leia described how much stronger the study abroad friendship (in comparison to her friends who did not study abroad) became since their return:

I just feel like she knows me better than a lot of people do. I’ve been really lucky, I think just in life, like to meet people that I connect with like really closely and we just have a connection. But Stace and I, I didn’t think it would be like that in the beginning, but we just like, she understands me, and like we’re both very mature, and like, um, she like sees good things in me, and like I see good things in her, but like I accept her faults and like, when I get down, she like, you know, brings me up, just like, I don’t know, we just, we talk a lot now.

Gina told me “it just feels good to know that you didn’t make all entirely like arbitrary friendships that are just fizzling out.” She went on to explain, “because then it’s like you know that that’s going to be someone you can talk to and not have to for the millionth time reiterate how was Paris or whatever.” Being able to relive Paris memories, or share in the reentry transition, offered some comfort to students. The week before she left for the U.S., Annie disclosed, “I think it’s gonna suck to go back to the States and to be back into people’s lives that didn’t have the same experience that I did.” Indeed, students felt that unless someone had a similar international experience they would never be able to fully understand what it was like.

Re-adjusting to the stress of the U.S. culture and not being able to connect with friends and family members students had been close to before created a confusing and somewhat depressing reentry. Once again students were wandering around dazed trying to make sense if their “new” culture. “When I first came back
I was like, ‘what am I doing here!’ It’s really confusing, basically I’m just going along with the return, I guess.” These feelings prompted the often repeated phrase, “you’re never in the right place at the right time!” Students felt lonely and disconnected in their own homes. While they were glad to see their friends, they missed their lives, and their friends, in Paris. It was hard for some to realize their friends and family moved on with out them.
CHAPTER FIVE:

RITUALISTIC PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION

Problem is that 75% of the world is made up of people that are obnoxious or annoying (or both). But in the end, all people do is talk about other people...why is that? Especially with girls...get them some chocolate and wine and they’ll start acting like poisonous snakes just gossiping and talking shit about others...it’s scary. Not that I don’t do it, of course I do, but it’s scary how naturally this evil behavior comes...with men it’s so much simpler. Women are dangerous back-stabbers...at least most of them, I think (Anita on Gossip – a common type of talk among study abroad students).

One of the main goals of this project was to describe the patterns of communication used by this particular group of sojourners across time. It was not possible to do so without first providing a description of the sojourn as it was experienced by the students who participated in this research (Chapter Four). I would now like to narrow in on some specific patterns of communication in which students participated and describe those patterns across the sojourn. Chapter Six will then offer an integrated discussion and interpretation of the findings.

Some of the communication patterns discussed here were touched upon in the previous chapter, however, different forms of communication played such a significant role in the sojourner experience that they warrant their own, in-depth description. Rather than providing a chronological description of communication patterns, this chapter takes each pattern individually and describes the role it played during and/or across phases of the sojourn. This topical structure is important to maintain the integrity of each communication pattern, as a chronological pattern would become too convoluted. Students engaged in
ritualized patterns of communication across the sojourn. I address these patterns in two clusters: Types of talk and reasons for talk. I address these clusters in order, as the analysis of talk types informed reasons why students engaged in them. First I offer a description of why “talk” was so important for these students.

The Importance of Talk

In the hours between completing our final exams at IES and going to the farewell dinner, Gina came over to the apartment for a glass of wine and final informal interview. By the end of the semester I had a pretty good idea of the importance of communication across the sojourn, but the air of seriousness in the following exchange from an otherwise lighthearted final interview solidified my belief:

Maggie: Gina, what role does talk, just talk, play in your study abroad experience?
Gina: I think it really defines your day, because, just because study abroad is in another language, I mean I think that the amount you speak and the amount of which language you chose to speak and then the amount of language people, like what language people are willing to speak with you, sometimes can really change how the day goes.

Talk was a significant factor in the shaping of students experiences abroad. Whether it was in English, French, or Francilais, with Americans, other international students, or French people, at the end of the day it was foundational to the experience. Anita told me, “[Talk is] number one, I think. It’s completely important. It’s totally important!” She went on further to explain what about talk was so important to her:
Personally I think that it’s (pause) it’s *just* talking, I think. Like for me, at least, I’m the type of person who has to express, you know, themselves, (laughs) I talk a lot, a lot. So, if I don’t talk, then whatever I’m thinking is going to stay in my head and it’s just going to rot there and I’m going to become very, very sad, you know? It’s just like I have to get, I have to cleanse myself from my things, that’s what I was saying like, it was so good for me to write, because it’s another way of doing that, you know, otherwise, it’s just like all this bad stuff is just going to stay within me I feel like, it’s very like a zen philosophy, I guess (laughs), but I have to talk to someone, I have to always talk to someone.

Of all the communicative interactions across the sojourn, being able to communicate in their own language was important for students. Students explained that communicating in English was more than just understanding the words, because several students were also extremely proficient in French, it was understanding the person, the culture. Students described feeling frustrated because they were never able to fully express themselves when they spoke French with French people. And, though it was often very staccato and grammatically incoherent, students felt speaking French with a group of U.S. or international students was easier and achieved a higher and more accurate level of meaning than when they spoke it with native French speakers. Though students wanted to speak in French as often as possible and felt some guilt when speaking English, Gina explained why this was not always possible,

I would really like to (speak French), but at the same time it’s more of a deeper conversation if it’s in English, you know what I mean? I think that I kinda sit on the fence on that one, cuz sometimes I just wanna sit and just talk about stupid boy stuff and blah, blah, blah, and I could try and find (words), it wouldn’t have the same impact, it wouldn’t have the same fun experience.
It was too difficult to develop friendships, even within IES in French, because as Elana explained, “Most of the people that I hang out with really don’t speak French to the point of being able to express themselves comfortably over more than a couple of minutes” and “you couldn’t really communicate fully if we were just talking in French.” She further described the draw toward speaking English together as:

Overall, I think it’s hard to speak in French with people that you know have your maternal language, that you share a maternal language with, because it’s, language is a comm-the purpose is to communicate, if you know you can get that purpose done in an easier way, then it’s just, I think it’s silly. I mean I don’t think it’s silly. I think it’s a good thing, but it’s hard to do, if you can communicate in your maternal language.

The beginning of the sojourn was marked with more attempts at speaking French with each other, but as Annie explained, as friendships started to form, people reverted to speaking more English, “I think it’s maybe because we know each other better and so English is easier to communicate with to each other.” Speaking with each other in English functioned as a sort of safety net for students, “it was good, because it was comfort, because if you needed to, and for the most part we did, you know, speak English, to have just, to really be able to carry yourself across to someone, to really express yourself, that was good.” Finally and importantly, it was just cooler to speak to each other in English, as Nick noted, “it’s so much cooler, you know, to speak in, I mean, well think about it, will we stumble through French or will we just speak English rapidly?”

When asked what they talked about, all the students responded in remarkably similar ways. First, they were perplexed – “what do you mean what
do I talk about?” They would roll their eyes, or make some other facial expression that indicated their annoyance at the question. Then responses ranged from, “Anything. BS.,” to “nothing, we laugh about nothing,” or “we just talk about stuff, not much, I don’t know, it’s just normal stuff.” Talking about “nothing” or “everything” was followed with disclaimers like, “you know, host families,” or “doing day to day funny things, and talk about what happened in our class, whatever,” or “Oh my gosh, everything! Like what’s going on in classes, who we hate, who we like (laugh), gossip, you know.” Students did talk about everything with each other because they felt that they could talk about anything. Topics ranged from the disclosure of personal, intimate details about health, sex, relationships, and fears. They talked about what they were “going through,” and “talk about our experiences here, and how everybody’s doing at home with their [host] families.” After a group discussion at my apartment one evening, Leia wrote, “So Maggie’s was a lot of fun. I ate a ton. We all shared stories about interning and our expectations. It was fun.”

Types of Talk

Fortunately, I did not have to rely on students’ perceptions about their types of talk. Spending every weekday with students and the majority of the weekends offered insight into the everyday communication patterns they used. Aside from feeling as though they could and did talk about everything, across time it became apparent that their talk tended to cluster around nine types of talk of varied frequency: Advice, superficial/introductory talk, information sharing, comparison, humor, story telling, gossip, complaint, and supportive talk. An
operational definition, as well as a detailed description of each type of talk is offered below.

*Advice*

Advice is the soliciting or offering of information such as helpful hints and suggestions for a future action or for a way to understand a past/on-going issue or action. Advice is drawn from a personal opinion often contextualized in an “I think you should…” form. Advice has a personal component that separates it from information sharing in that it moves beyond the mere exchange of knowledge by adding an expectation that the advice will (or at least should) be followed. Students sought advice for concrete issues and decision-making when an action had to be taken.

Giving and seeking Advice was one of the first talk types to be established among the study abroad students. For the most part, advice centered upon school issues, though not entirely. Prior to departure, students sought advice from previous study abroad students, language instructors, and/or friends and family that they knew had studied abroad before. Previous study abroad participants offered advice on making friends, preparing for culture shock, what teachers to take classes from and which ones to avoid, taking an internship abroad, and how to pack. Once abroad, participants continued to solicit academic advice from each other. In the lounge, library, garden, and computer lab at the IES center, it was almost always possible to find a group of students sitting together offering advice about how long someone should stay in the program, for example. The first weeks were filled with students seeking advice about whether or not to terminate their sojourn abroad early. At any time I could expect to walk in on, or brought into, a teary discussion about whether or not someone should go home. Such a discussion might sound like this one I recreated from my field notes:
After a difficult start in Paris, a handful of students gathered advice from friends, family, and staff and decided to switch their program from a full year to a semester long program. Midway through the semester, there was a second outbreak of advice about terminating IES. This time, however, pockets of students were so disappointed in the IES program that they considered dropping out of IES to “just live and work in Paris” for the following semester.

Kara is trying to decide if she wants to stay here at IES for the next semester or not. She was feeling helpless and like she didn’t know what to do, when her host mom asked her if she knew any American girls who would like to be an au pair and live with their friend’s family and get paid to speak/teach English to the children. She was very excited to talk to the director after class, and she now knows that she has to make a decision about whether or not to stay before December 1st. She asked me for advice in class, I told her she first had to find out if it was even possible, then she had to meet the family and see if that was something she really
would want to do. We are going to talk about it at lunch with Gina (field notes)

Both Nick and Kara sought advice about whether or not to stay with IES for another semester; they both did.

Superficial Introductory Talk

*Superficial introductory talk is a “getting to know you” form of communication comparable to Altman and Taylor’s (1974) outermost layer of their Social Penetration Theory. Its large breadth in communication topics, but very shallow depth identifies this type of talk. The purpose for this type of talk among sojourners was to establish similarities with each other and start creating at minimum a superficial friendship bond upon arriving in France. While talk was personal in nature, it was not too intimate, focusing on questions about majors, universities, likes and dislikes.*

Whereas Advice as a type of talk surfaced during major transition points (preparing for the sojourn, mid-semester, and return) the next talk type only surfaced upon arrival in France. Superficial Introductory Talk was described by students as “just like freshman year in college.” Sheila offered this description of talk during her first week abroad, “I would go up to almost everyone I met and just be like ‘Hi, I’m Sheila, from [West Coast] and Penn State, you know, what are your stats?’ (laughs) And, by the end, you don’t do that, you know what I mean, you might be like, ‘oh, hi, I don’t know you, where do you go, oh that’s cool. Ok, Bye.’” Gina described it as a bunch of disinterested, gum-chewing people going around asking, “So, where ya from? What’s yer major? Oh, really, that’s great.” Our second week abroad Richard expressed his dissatisfaction with the talk among the IES students, he felt that:

Richard: The first contacts with other students from IES were just very superficial.
Maggie: Uh hm?
Richard: Yes, the exchange of information, where you are from or what school do you go to? It would stop on that level.

My field notes are littered with “again, today everyone just talked about where they came from.” By the end of the second week I was exhausted with the conversations about “where do you live,” or “where are you from,” even though I was an active participant in many of these conversations as documented in my field notes:

Topics centered on “what school are you from, do you know so and so? What is it like there?” People invariably ask you what state you are from, then we all make generalizations about that state and cities – West vs. East, North vs. South, Rural vs. Urban, it means something to us. Like we know something about you once we know where you are from. We are searching for common ground, some common understanding.

An excerpt from a discussion at a café demonstrates how this topic naturally emerged:

(Michelle is talking about seeing a Penn Stater that we all know for the first time today)

Anita: Are you a Penn State person?
Michelle: Yeah.
Anita: Are you serious.
Michelle: Yeah.
Anita: Oh! I didn’t know that! Oh!
Michelle: Are you?
Anita: Yeah.
Michelle: Yeah.
Anita: This is so weird.
Michelle: That’s weird.
Anita: I had no idea. I didn’t see you in the orientation meeting.
Michelle: No, I didn’t see you either. Maybe we went to different meetings.
Anita: Very strange. Cuz, everyone keeps saying, yeah, Penn State is really,
you know well-represented, blah, blah, blah. And I was like I know 3 people, that’s it.

Michelle: I know.
Maggie: It’s probably because we’re loud talkers, I think there’s 9 of us.
Michelle: (to Annie) What university are you from?
Annie: Illinois Wesleyan, a little like farm community, like.
Michelle: Oh.

By the end of the second week, there was very little of this introductory type of talk – you only asked these surface-type of questions if you didn’t know someone. It was always evident by the types of questions students asked each other whether or not they knew someone. Then, it was a short step from posing safe introductory questions to asking more personal ones. The following is an excerpt from my field notes about having lunch at a table with a group of girls I had not met before:

I was the first person that they really quizzed about my background. Where I went to school, what I study, what is it like. I told them about my research and they are so very excited about participating. They want to be filmed and to get a copy of it in the end. They especially want a voice over. They later asked Barb where she was from and talked to her a bit, too. Barb is not as outgoing as I am, or maybe not as interested in conversation and sharing thoughts as I am. She joined in the discussion some time, but was not a large contributor. Once they got to know who I was a little bit, they felt more comfortable asking me intimate questions about my personal life (grad school, my thoughts on marriage, religious beliefs).

Information Sharing

Unlike advice, information sharing is a value-free form of knowledge transmission. There are no strings attached to this information that would suggest that now that I have
told you something, you should comply. Instead, information sharing concerns itself with facts, findings, and/or experiential anecdotes that might be useful in a given situation. Information was typically sought when one had to make a selection among options, such as purchases, when someone was engaging in a new experience, such as traveling, or when someone was unable to perform a simple or difficult daily task, such as flushing a toilet.

Equally pervasive in the beginning of the sojourn was an Information Sharing talk type. I describe an example of this in my field notes:

If you know someone has done something before, you ask them. I knew that Barb had picked up her parents from Charles de Gaulle on the RER, for example, so I asked her how she did it so that I would know when I picked up my brother. She explained everything from getting the RER to getting on the shuttle bus at CDG, she warned me to watch the signs to know where I was supposed to go and get off. Then, yesterday on the bus back from Chartres, Kara asked me about taking the RER to CDG because she and Gina and Tess were all going to fly to Amsterdam for the weekend. I told her the same information, it takes about 40 minutes, try to get an express train, figure out which terminal you have to go to (CDG1 or CDG2), and that there is a shuttle bus and to watch for an express train. Short, blonde Linda overheard and she told me that she had to pick up someone at CDG, and asked me to tell her how to do it on the metro. I then went through each step with her to tell her how to do it.

This pattern for information sharing was especially important in the beginning when few of us really understood how to accomplish normal daily tasks in Paris. The norm was that if you had experience with a certain task, it was your duty to share that information with the rest of the group. These normal tasks ranged from using the host family’s bathroom facilities (how do you take a shower or flush the toilet, what kind of toilet paper does your host family have and how do you use it?) to calling home (can you call from your hosts or how do
you use the cellular phone?). During the first two weeks, conversations centered on the how and where to’s: how to get a cell phone, how to get a power converter for your computer or hair dryer, where to get an international phone card, where are the cheap places to eat, where is a good place to go out, and how do you get to some place? Perhaps out of embarrassment, students preferred to ask each other these questions rather than a staff member or their host family. The following exchange between an IES student and IES staff during a large orientation session provides insight as to why it was preferable to ask a small group of friends:

Student: My French family uses squares of toilette paper, what should I do? (This question gets a bunch of laughter from the students and staff, the student is explaining that she can’t figure it out)

Staff: You should just ask for your host mother to buy a roll of paper.

Staff: When in Rome do as the Romans do, figure it out.

In addition to seeking information about “how to” accomplish daily tasks in France, students relied on each other to verify classroom information. Because students’ levels of French varied greatly, it was common to hear students test their understanding by asking a friend to explain homework and verify meeting times and locations. Frequently students sought information and compared information to make sure that they were getting the best quality or not being scammed. Students were always wary that they were in the process of getting scammed because they are not French and are incredibly skeptical about any kindness shown to them.
Only one type of information sharing remained consistent across the sojourn – sharing information about traveling. One of students’ latent goals was to travel throughout France and Europe in general. And, although most students went to the Internet for information about travel first, most of the practical information they received came from other students who had already traveled.

While sitting in classes, it is also common to hear people sharing information about how they accomplished what, this is often about traveling. For example, Gretchen was sharing her information (and her stories) about going to Amsterdam to engage in marijuana use and go see the Sex Museum. In the computer labs, people ask for information regarding a website, or how you get airline or train tickets (field notes).

A great majority of travel talk took place in the computer lab. This was likely for two reasons. First, despite the “work is priority” rule, the computer lab was a place for socializing. Second, since students were busy booking cheap “Ryan Air” flights and reserving rooms with “Hotels.Com” in the lab already this became the perfect place to solicit information on other people’s travel experience. (After offering basic travel information, talk frequently turned to travel stories a talk type discussed later.)

Comparison

Comparison is talk for which the main purpose is to establish normative boundaries by evaluating similar experiences. Essentially, it answered two questions: “am I normal” and “is what I am feeling normal?” Comparison was sometimes used as a “one-up” to highlight how good or how bad a particular experience was and was often used in conjunction with other forms of communication. Unlike gossip, comparative communication involves the first-person telling of an experience.
In addition to soliciting and sharing information to help accomplish daily tasks and study abroad goals, students also engaged in Comparative Communication. Students compared themselves to others throughout the entire sojourn. At first this type of communication centered around the questions, “how are you” or “how are you doing?” Unlike typical responses we would expect in the U.S. of “fine” or “good, you?” these questions received detailed responses about how someone was adjusting. Most of the time these were negative in nature, “I’m tired,” “it’s sooo hard here,” or “I cried all night.” While students appeared to genuinely care about how someone was doing, as evidenced by their hugs, and comforting eyes coupled with a sympathetic “ahhh,” they also used this information to compare their own process. Sometimes I was the target for this type of communication, as often during interviews a participant would ask, “Has anyone said anything different, really? How is everyone else doing?” or “Well, who do they hang out with then?” When describing her own adjustment, Elana confided in me, “you’re really sad. I guess you’re tired, you need a lot of sleep, and you’re away from food, you’re usually isolated, by yourself in a little room. Cuz, I talked to other people, and it makes me feel better to know that I’m not the only one who has an isolated situation.” By soliciting this type of information, students would then use it to compare their experiences to others’. Hearing about other students’ difficulties, for example, allowed Elana to compare her own experiences against others:

It helped me when I first started hearing [other students’ difficulties], cuz I was like, I just pictured everyone else, cuz you see them at IES and everyone’s like happy, and I was like “oh, they must have great homestays.” You know,
great families, and then when you hear that it’s not perfect, that it’s not this amazing homestay, with this amazing family that’s just completely taking care of them, not that I wouldn’t want to hear that, but you just, you see that you’re all in the same boat and that you can relate to them, and I guess that’s why we tend to stay out of our apartment so much, and just hang out in the city.

Students compared their experiences, because “It feels good to know that others are also struggling,” or as Kara said, “it’s good to know that I’m following along a logical, progression, hopefully.” In the beginning, students asked questions about adjustment and homesickness and then compared their own experiences. Once we were placed in one of four language groups, students could be found comparing their levels of French to someone else’s, “I speak better than her, why is she in that class?” Students compared themselves on various fronts: On levels of French, how often you “partied” in a week, how much money did you spend, how many French friends do you have? For example, after asking me how much the other participants “partied,” Leia, who had little interest in drinking and partying abroad, described one of these encounters,

She lives with another girl, Sam, I think, and this was the first day, I’m like, “oh, did you go out?” And she was like, “yeah, we go out on Thursdays here, because that’s what we do at college, you know, everyone goes out on Thursdays,” “yeah, but you’re in fricking Paris,” it was like the first week or something here, they went like to Montmartre to go party or something like that. It’s really stupid.

Gina provided further insight into how she used information to compare herself to other students:

Before I first got here I was super super, I wouldn’t say scared, but I can’t think of the right word, I was definitely very (pause) unsure of like how it was going to go. So, I was constantly comparing myself to the other students at
IES, I was constantly being like “everybody talks so well,” then finally I just realized, like I was talking to Lee or Leia or whatever, and we figured out how much classes she’s taken, she was like “oh well which class did you end with at Penn State,” and I told her, and she was like “that’s all,” and I was like “yeah,” and she was like “you must be scared,” and I was like “no,” and then later on, I was thinking about it, like you know what? It’s ok that you’re not as good as everyone else, you’ve only taken four classes, some people have been taking French since they were two, you know, they should be better than you, if they’re not, then they suck, you know, so it’s like, I finally am starting to feel a little more comfortable with my level of French, I’d still like to improve it, but at the same time, I’m more understanding about why I am not as good as some other people, and that that’s ok, that that should be expected, you know what I mean?

Most of the comparative talk surrounded host families and language groups, but it also took the more general form of just “recapping our days – good things and bad things” to see how daily experiences compare.

Humor

*Teasing, joking, playful bantering, word and language play, as well as forms of nonverbal communication such as playful fighting, expressive vocalics, and eye behavior comprised this form of communication. The purpose of humor was to test social and linguistic boundaries, to achieve and demonstrate closeness, and most especially to offset any difficult situation – to make light of a situation and/or to poke fun at the self.*

During our first orientation session, the director advised, “To be able to go up the adjustment curve, be capable of laughing at yourself. Laugh with the host country. Laugh at yourself. But,” she warned, “don’t try to tell jokes in French, they’re never funny!” Humor played an interesting role across the sojourn, mostly because there were times when only two actions were appropriate responses to an encounter – to laugh or to cry. After a solid week of hearing “horror adjustment
stories,” students were no longer shocked by them, and instead made light of them. Elana explains laughing, “especially if you want to talk about like the adjustment factor, there are so many different stories, so many funny sto- funny, yet at the same time, if you were in the situation it would be hard, but when you tell the story looking back, it’s funny.” Students often used humor to diffuse gross, scary, embarrassing, or intimidating situations. For example, Jilly stopped Leia and Stace in a hallway, she was crying and shaking trying to get through a story about some “old gross drugged-out man” who grabbed and followed her on the Metro. Stace gave her a hug, but Leia laughed and said “too bad he wasn’t a cute guy!” They all burst out laughing and walked out to get a chocolate croissant together. Sarcasm was an especially common form of humor in the beginning of the sojourn,

Michelle: So we really have to be at that place at 8:30 tomorrow morning, or?
Maggie: Yeah, did you guys get that?
Michelle: Oh (laughing) I’m not going to be able to find them, I’m gonna get lost and die on the way (sarcastic tone)
Anita: (laughing) oh, you’re really positive. You’re not only gonna get lost, you’re gonna DIE while teasing played a more important role toward the middle of the sojourn as students were solidifying their friendship groups,

Dallas: I speak French, but I don’t know.
Anita: (joking) but you speak baaaad, okay.
Dallas: I know.
Annie: (laughing)
Students also used humor to poke fun at our Americanness, such as in the following exchange where we joke that because you are American something might go wrong,

Anita:  Is this sugar?
Annie:   I think it’s sugar.
Michelle: They wouldn’t just give you a thing of salt and be like-
Anita:   You don’t think so?
Annie:   Well, we are American.

(everyone laughs).
Annie:   It’s sugar.
Miki:   Are you sure?

We also “laugh over this shared experience of us not being able to speak well under pressure.”

In other situations when someone’s feelings were hurt because of a bad French-American interaction, we would all take turns thinking of funny things we could have said instead of what we did say or just walking away. For example, if someone in class received a particularly harsh criticism from the professor, we would all join in the fun of making equally harsh criticisms of that professor – usually on a personal level – at a café after class. This type of humor wasn’t directed solely at professors, students also made fun of other students who were, “really disrespectful to our teacher, some of them are like obnoxious!” Students also admitted that they derived a lot of pleasure just from, “getting into mischief,” “just being silly and whatever,” “being stupid, I guess,” and “just goofing off.”
Story Telling

Stories are extended turns at talk where usually one person holds the floor to recount something that has happened, but can also be told by two or more people as a group effort to recount a (usually) shared event. Stories create in-group out-group distinctions but also serve as a mode to bridge experiences to people who did not experience them. Generally told with a dramatic edge regardless if the story was just to entertain, to inform, or to warn others, it always had a point. Though stories did not always follow Labov’s (1972) extended story structure, stories could be identified by the presence of an orientation to the story, a complicating action, an evaluation, and a resolution. Students usually cast themselves as characters in their stories with protagonists usually being their friendship group or U.S. Americans in general, and antagonists were often the French or any out-group member. Stories could be told as personal experiences or could be told about someone else, as in the form of gossip.

Extended humorous accounts turned into stories; Story Telling was among the most frequently used types of talk for sojourners. And, unlike most of the other types of talk, story telling was common practice during all phases of the sojourn, including the pre-departure and most especially the return. Prior to leaving for the study abroad, students were not only the recipient of numerous “when I studied abroad” stories, they also shared their previous travel stories with me as an explanation as to why they decided to go to Paris, for example. Their own and others’ sojourner stories helped to shape their expectations for the upcoming semester. Stories were often competitive in nature, with one story calling forth a similar story from someone else. Story telling was often either the impetus for other talk types (prompting advice, comparison, or complaint for example) or the context in which other types of talk were situated, such as
information sharing or gossip. Midway through the semester, it was apparent that story telling played an extremely important role abroad,

Story telling is by far the most common form of communication around IES and among friends. If you didn’t spend the weekend with a group of friends, it is expected that you will ask, or they will initiate the telling, about what happened over the weekend, on your trip, or last night. Stories always prompt more stories, as people then offer their own accounts (field notes).

Shelia expressed the importance of story telling for her study abroad experience, “I’m a social person, you know what I mean, it’s important for me to be able to tell stories, and create stories or whatever.” When asked about how she spent her time with her friends in Paris, Anita said, “we’ve gone clubbing a couple of times, bars, we just sit, talk, drink a little, share stories.” In a similar vein, Kara giggled while she was explaining why her friends were so important to her in Paris, “I love the company of other people, so I mean it’s nice having people that can relate and just like go through the same things that you are. And it’s funny (laughs), you know, everybody always has like ridiculous, funny stories!” But, story telling wasn’t always fun or funny. Most of the stories had a darker undercurrent – danger warnings. The driving purpose for many of the stories told during the sojourn was to warn students of some lurking danger. These stories often addressed “the dangers of the big city,” the “crime infested streets of Paris,” the “uncontrollable French men,” “the teenage gangs from the suburbs,” or “what happens when you drink too much.” Stories tended to follow the gossip line, such that if something happened to one student everybody would know about it by the end of the school day. Students took pleasure out of retelling
stories such as, “These people tried to rob me on the train,” or a story about “two attempted assaults in Dijon,” especially because in both cases the female U.S. student defeated the French man in his own territory. Story telling proved to be a fairly successful mode of communicating safety issues and warnings. Stories about how difficult it was to locate some IES-Madrid students after the Madrid subway bombings the previous year inspired everyone to fill out a travel form every time they left Paris. However, this story and staff warnings such as, “Terrorism relies on the fear of the unknown. Students should take security warnings seriously especially about abandoned luggage and packages. When shopping, don’t leave empty bags in public areas!” instilled a sense of fear in some students. But one story stood out above all others, which by the end of our semester abroad was just called “the strangle story,” as in “did you hear the strangle story?” An excerpt from my field notes describes the short version of this story:

Stories also travel through the gossip line, for example, there is a “story” that Tracy (in 2 of my classes, and I can confirm that she missed a couple of classes, was obviously distraught and I overheard her explaining her absences to an IES staff member who was also visibly and vocally distraught) was followed into her apartment building in mid-day, and was attacked by a man who began to strangle her. She blacked out, fell to the floor, woke up and started struggling and the man fled. In the end, she is physically ok, but obviously traumatized. I heard this story twice in one day which was at least a week after I saw that something had happened to her. Then Anita was telling me this story during her interview and how that upset her and she is worried about people’s safety.

As much as story telling played an important role as a social event and as method for conveying warnings to students across the sojourn, it played an
equally important role in students return. This was partly because students were expected to return to their friends and family with stories about their overseas adventures. Prior to returning to the States, Sheila expressed this thought, “I wanna be able to go back and have people be like, ‘oh tell me some stories from Paris,’ and if I’m like ‘oh well, I went out one night, that’s all, I went to a museum,’ it’s not a very exciting story.”

Gossip

Gossip is defined as talk about other people and/or other people’s experiences outside of their presence, usually for the purpose of comparison and refinement of norms overseas. Gossip was used as an indirect way to check perceptions. It often occurred in the short form of “can you believe that...” or “do you like what so and so is wearing?” In the longer form gossip could be the telling of someone else’s story. Gossip was most often derogatory or shocking, but could also be positive, such as in the case of a friend who had an unexpected success. In and out groups often formed as a result of gossip.

Of course, if you are telling somebody else’s story and not your own, the type of talk shifts to Gossip. Gossip was a type of talk that emerged at the end of the orientation sessions, during the first weeks of “real” class. For many groups, gossip became a ritualized form of communication, though it was often hidden within other talk types such as information sharing, comparative communication, or story telling. In the beginning, weaving gossip into these other talk types made it an acceptable and appropriate form a talk. As we entered the final weeks of study abroad, gossip became its own, ritualized entity. Gossip as a form of talk served three purposes for students abroad, it opened the way for third party information sharing, third party story telling, and most importantly it allowed for
social comparison. As Sheila explained, gossip could be a sanctioned form of communication, because “there’s two types of gossiping, there’s sharing stories and then there’s malicious gossiping. And I have no problem with sharing stories. But I do have problems with malicious gossiping. Not to say that I don’t do it (laughs), like for example, Gretchen, but-” Gossip provided students a means by which they could make comparisons with other students by talking about who is dropping out of IES, who is doing well/poorly in class, where everyone is interning at. After describing her “theory on gossip,” I asked Shelia why she did it:

Sheila: I think it helps us like define what’s kind of normal. You know what I mean?
Maggie: Yeah?
Sheila: Like, just for example, this is like out there a little bit, but like Gretchen and her tights that people like to talk about, you know what I mean? (laughs)
Maggie: Thank goodness Gretchen wears those tights, because if she didn’t what would people be talking about?
Heather: Seriously. It is a good thing, we’ve all bonded because of her. (laughs) But um, we have all these things to bond against. But she, I mean for example, I’ll be like “oh god, look at those tights, they look hideous,” I’ll be like “does everyone think that?” and I’ll be like, “Elana, Elana, do you like her tights?” Do you know what I mean and Elana will be like “no, they look like crap,” and then you know what I mean, all of a sudden you are gossiping, and then “oh my gosh, she’s also wearing that hat,” and you’re gossiping and it’s not very nice, but you’ve also kind of established, like, ok, those tights are not normal, like I’m normal because I think that. And I think especially here, we’re in another culture where like
we’re not normal, because we’re American, it’s kind of, it’s nice to see that you are still normal, somehow.

Gina and Kara also had a theory on gossip – that gossip is inherently competitive. They felt that people gossiped to enhance their self-esteem by talking bad about others.

Kara: Like, for example, when somebody hurts you, you just want to tell somebody else and then it just feels good to gossip.

Gina: Yeah. Because unless you really like the person that somebody is gossiping about, then you jump in and you’re like, “no, I really like her, she’s a really good person” or something, but if don’t, if you don’t say anything than automatically it’s like a validation of their beliefs.

Kara: Right. Yeah. If somebody is gossiping and saying something about someone and no one jumps in and intervenes, then it’s like you kind of all validate that person is weird or that person is wrong or whatever and you just validate those beliefs.

Students gossiped about fashion norms, language abilities, intelligence, and social norms such as drinking and partying. They gossiped about who they liked, who they hated, who was weird, who was annoying. Gossiping with a group of friends helped to set boundaries of acceptability and friendship norms. In this excerpt from Elana’s final interview she was discussing her housing options for the following semester and offers insight into how gossip can create a standing perception even if you never met the person:

Elana: Yeah. I know, everyone that I know is staying with their homestay or just changing completely hoststays.
Maggie: Yeah, that Rob guy and some other girl-

Elana: Are they getting a place?

Maggie: They’re getting a place together I think.

Elana: Oh really? But no one likes him.

Maggie: Right.

Elana: And I’ve never talked to him, but I guess I wouldn’t like him. (laughs)

For some, gossip was just a natural progression of what happens when you move beyond surface levels of talk. Anita explained how this happened:

Like for instance, we’re talking ok about salt and pepper and then suddenly the conversations just shifts to I don’t know, homosexuals, homosexuality, and then we’ll be like yeah, Rusty, yeah, he’s a screaming gay guy, you know and then we’ll just start talking about him. Like it’s natural, we’re people, we’re gonna wanna talk about other people, you know? I can’t sit with a person for an hour and talk about salt and pepper, it’s impossible for me, I have to talk about someone else, so I mean, you know, we talk good stuff about people, too, it’s just that we talk bad as well, obviously.

Whether purposive or just a natural progression of talk, gossip, like story telling, was one of the most pervasive types of talk used by students abroad.

Complaint

Complaint is defined as the negative assessment of a situation and/or the expression of displeasure with a past, future, or on-going event. Complaint was often found in the group context when there was an issue that everyone could contribute to, such as talking derogatively about a teacher who assigned too much work. Complaint often surrounded issues such as rules, social etiquette, responsibilities, and/or when students felt pressured/restrained in some way.
Often hand in hand with gossip was Complaint as a talk type. Complaint also became a ritualistic form of communication for these students. Like gossip, complaint was a talk type that was most often used during the sojourn, and much less likely to be used before or after the term. Exceptions were found in pre-departure complaints about the lack of information we were given about IES and how to go about completing our paper work, or complaints upon return about how long it took to transfer grades. Otherwise, complaint took place either in dyads or groups and often served the purpose of solving problems or as a means of creating an “us versus them” attitude against the French. Students would sit around and complain about “the library and the bureaucracy” or the French educational system and socialist tendencies. Anita said she and her friends were always complaining that, “‘yeah, I’m tired,” or ‘yeah, we have so much work. ‘” Another common complaint topic was about not achieving study abroad goals. Students would sit together and complain about not having made any French friends or about speaking too much English, then invariably they would make some sort of pact to do something to change that. Among Leia’s group of friends, complaint about weight gain and lack of exercise was common. Just complaining about these issues gave them a common topic to discuss:

Well, I was always bitching about the weight I’ve gained here. It’s a really bad thing. I don’t know if I said that last night here, but I have definitely gained like a lot of weight here and it’s like really depressing me and - I just - you know, I’ll complain to them, and then they’ll complain to me and they’re just like, “You know what, there’s only one time you’re here, you’ll get it under control when you get home.”
Students also complained about other students. For example, students might complain about someone because “she pisses us both off like crazy!” or because they feel some students are getting unfair advantages at IES by demanding too much attention or being taken care of just because they are having a harder time adjusting.

**Supportive Talk**

Supportive talk did not center on a specific context or topic, instead it crossed all subject areas and contexts. The purpose of supportive talk was to uplift another person or to be mutually uplifting, especially when one or more people were feeling down. Supportive talk can be its own entity, expressing care/concern for another or expressing a positive outlook/attitude about something. Or, it can be the vessel through which other forms of talk are conducted. For example, supportive talk could be the context for gossip, humor, advice, and so forth.

Of all the types of talk that students engaged in with each other abroad, Supportive Talk was the one that seemed to play the most significant role in helping students cope with daily stressors abroad. Gina offered the initial definition of supportive communication used in clustering this information,

I think just support in that you know that even if they’re not, they don’t necessarily have to be people like you, cuz I mean, Lisa was a good friend of mine while we were there for a good amount of time, but really her and I aren’t all that alike, but just someone who makes you feel comfortable and makes you feel like you can be yourself, and makes you feel like you can, you know if you need to talk to them you could, if you needed to. But you know, just some someone that gives you a personal sense of just “at that time” comfort to be around, you know what I mean? So you just don’t feel so isolated and so like “ah, it’s just random me amongst all these random French” you know, I think that, I think that’s the best way I can explain it.

For Gina, merely being around someone with a positive, pro-Paris attitude helped:
Kara is so pro-Paris, gung-ho, that even if I ever get in like a “I had a bad day” (whiny voice) you know, like if I’m around her, like before I can let that get me into a “Paris sucks” mood. It’s like “oh cool, Kara’s right, Paris is great!” you know what I mean and I think vice versa, I think we do that for each other sometimes, you know? Cuz she’s had this really, the day that she was coming here and she was like, “I’m lost, I hate Paris, oh my god” she got here and then we’re all like “Kara!” so it’s like we all bring each other back up to “Paris is cool,” you know?

Leia agreed with this sentiment saying that her study abroad friends were so similar to her and knew her so well that they were the only ones who could bring her up when she was “feeling down” in Paris. Leia also said that just seeing one of your friends when you were in a tense “I hate France moment” brought her back up. As friends, it was your responsibility to bring each other up. Elana expressed it like this, “I feel as comfortable around [my friends here] now.

Maybe, of course, your friends at home, they would know you a little better, but I think we got to know each other pretty quickly here – just the fact that we’re in a city and we need to take care of each other.” Friends offered positive esteem support, like Stace, for example who said to Leia (as recorded in her journal), “She told me she thinks I’m a really confident strong girl, and I come across as that, but she can tell that I lack self confidence in the way I talk about myself.”

Friends also helped each other deal with specific insecurity issues by trying to “be constructive with her and try and as much as I can get her to try and look at it from a more rational perspective.” Supportive communication was especially desirable after the “welcome period wears off,” when you are hit for the first time with the difficulties of living abroad. Students went to each other for support first, then tried to contact friends and family at home, and then in some cases also
spoke with the IES director or staff therapist. Supportive communication usually took the form of assuring someone that everything would be okay when they were having a difficult time adjusting, “don’t worry, I’ll help you through it,” “no, it’s great, it’ll be great,” or “I just know it’ll get better.” Friends also offer support during instances of cultural faux pas by sympathizing with their friend’s embarrassment or saying something like, “you’re not stupid, it just feels like it here.” Supportive communication also happened at random occurrences, as explained by Gina:

I think it’s cool because we’ll just be standing there all the time and we’ll just both kind of, you know, “I’m so glad I have you,” it seriously, I don’t know if it’s just because our family is a big lively family, but I know that I couldn’t do our family alone.

Supportive communication among IES friends also extended into the return, as students would send uplifting messages or just small “how are you’s” to friends in other states through e-mail or Instant Messaging. It was difficult for Kara and Gina, for example, because Gina returned home and Kara stayed in Paris. Nevertheless, they continued to send each other supportive messages, like this one described by Gina, “Kara’s really nervous that Kellie (housemate that replaced Gina) is too cute and too nice that the family is going to like her more than they like Kara. I was like ‘Kara you’ve been there, you have a rapport already, it’s totally fine, don’t worry about it!’”

Reasons for Talk

Now that the types of talk students engaged in across phases of the sojourn have been described, I now turn to the reasons why these types of talk emerged.
As evidenced by many of the talk types, a need for *connection* motivated several types of talk. Students expressed that being able to connect with someone through talk, through sharing stories and experiences was an important aspect of their study abroad experience. The first stages of talk, especially introductory talk, was conducted to start establishing points of similarity with each other. The idea was that if you found something in common you were able to use that as a springboard to start a friendship. There was an overwhelming feeling that “you just have to tell someone” what you are experiencing. Students found comfort in having a friend in Paris, because they had a “sounding board, just in case.” “Having those reminders of home” by talking with other U.S. friends was “nice when you’re feeling lonely,” because “you need someone to relate to abroad.” It was especially important to have friends with whom you could speak English, because you were able to reach a deeper level or meaning and comfort with each other.

Students also talked with each other to “express” and “cleanse” themselves and vent all their frustrations. For Michelle it was important to have someone to talk to otherwise it would get bottled up and come out all at once, “Yeah, I like talking (laughing) I’m like chatty chat, chat chat, all these things that like get bottled up and then like I never get to like fully express them!” Later she admitted, “I was coming here and I was thinking, I’m like, ‘yeay, I getta talk to Maggie, I getta unload,’ like this is like my, my keeping my sanity.” For Anita, talking with other IES students was “like exorcism,” it gives you a chance to let out all of the things that are in your head. Similarly, an excerpt from Leia’s journal reads, “definitely feeling a little down…just called Jill and Stace…good to
talk to them…crazy how talking makes me feel so much better. I can never just keep it in. Jill was like if you want just got eat 2 bars of chocolate and take a hot bath. Stay in there forever! Or do you wanna go get an ice cream Sundae now?"

On making friends quickly, Kara said, “we were like really eager to find somebody to talk to and to like release some of the insanity that was going on inside, I guess.” Others expressed that talking to friends abroad was like going through therapy, as you worked together to relieve stress and solve problems.

Finally, students engaged in various types of talk in order to interpret their own experiences. It was important for students to “hear other people’s perspectives on why things happen,” and “try to communicate with lots of different people.”

Being able to communicate with the other IES students fulfilled “the need to be real here.”
CHAPTER SIX:
DISCUSSING, LINKING, AND INTERPRETING FINDINGS

Whatever the state of Franco-American relations 
admittedly a bit frayed from time to time – we should not 
lose sight of the singular achievements of French 
civilization. Until now, I humbly submit, unacknowledged, 
yet it’s a basic and familiar anthropological truth: French 
women don’t get fat (Guiliano, 2005, p. 3).

The previous two chapters offer a descriptive account of the study abroad experience from a communication-centered perspective. The goal was to provide a descriptive telling of the sojourn and return by weaving my experiences in the field and as a student participant with those of the students with whom I interacted. While this descriptive tale provides insight into the study abroad experience and of the various communication patterns and rituals across the sojourn, this chapter moves beyond this narrative telling to get at the heart of the matter for this research endeavor. This research was guided by two underlying goals, to provide a detailed, process-oriented account of the communication and identity practices and patterns across the sojourn, and to identify specific communication and identity patterns that students engaged in across the sojourn. In doing so, I was not only able to identify specific patterns of everyday communication used by students abroad (as indicated in Chapter Five), but also able to integrate those findings with previous theory in order to situate these findings in the larger body of communication scholarship. I did this by exploring the relationships between sojourner stress and the communication practices students engaged in to manage that stress and achieve functional fitness and psychological well-being in Paris. This chapter goes beyond the mere reporting of
patterns that emerged abroad and attempts to answer the question, “why did those experiences evoke these communication and identity behaviors?”

At the onset of this research, my goal was twofold, (a) to locate patterns of communication used by students to help ease adjustment stress and achieve functional fitness abroad, and (b) to describe students’ identity processes across the sojourn. The extensive research on international sojourns made a strong case for the inherent stress that would accompany such an event. However, it became apparent soon after my relocation to Paris that in order to locate and understand students’ patterns of communication as a means for stress reduction, I needed to first understand the stress they were experiencing. Despite my initial attempt to focus only on students’ communication and identity processes, it became evident that I could not investigate communication or identity in a vacuum. Therefore, my main goal – to locate patterns of communication – took a temporary backseat as I began first to investigate the location of students’ stress.

The unlikely combination of two established communication theories shed light on the communication and identity outcomes in this research and helped me to bridge together findings from the role of student expectations across the sojourn to their eventual identity outcomes– an extract from Burgoon’s expectancy violations theory (1978) and Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. I argue in this chapter that stress resulting from unmet student expectations (as explained through EVT) can at least partially account for the communication patterns and rituals displayed by student sojourners. Further, I use the integrative theory of communication and cross-
cultural adaptation (ITCCA) to help to explain sojourner functional fitness and identity processes. Specifically, I argue in this chapter that stress resulting from students’ unmet expectations (as explained through EVT) primed certain communication and behavioral reactions to manage that stress. As students developed communicative patterns of stress reduction and adjustment, their functional fitness in France increased. And, as explained by ITCCA, increased levels of functional fitness not only allowed sojourners to adjust to living in France, but also to explore and sometimes alter their identity perceptions. Note that the use of EVT, and later ITCCA, in the following sections is neither a comprehensive review or explication of those theories, nor is it meant to offer a definitive or deterministic vision of the results of this study. Instead, I have borrowed lightly from each theory in order to further advance my own findings and interpretations of this research adding a new dimension to the results reported herein, but also a new dimension to previous research on intercultural communication. My purpose in doing so, therefore, is not to further advance or lend support to previous theory (though, happily that is a byproduct), but to use aspects of previous theory to further advance my own interpretations. Having found, for example, that unmet expectations played a significant role in shaping sojourners’ experiences, I would be remiss not to re-investigate these findings with an expectancy frame.

Unmet Expectations

As communication patterns emerged in Paris, I began to investigate not only the characteristics of that pattern, but why that specific pattern emerged. The
key to understanding initial sojourner stress and the salient communication patterns at the beginning of the sojourn was found not only in the daily observations and interactions with students, but also in the pre-departure and subsequent interviews. A comparison of these data indicated that initial levels of study abroad stress were heightened by the sudden awareness that their study abroad expectations were not being met.

Across the sojourn, students disclosed that they attributed a majority of their stress and difficulties to a series of expectation “let downs” or unmet expectations. Borrowing a few key aspects from the work of communication and expectation violations, I was able to explore the reasons why these unmet expectations were such powerful indicators of student stress as well as to situate those findings in the broader communication scholarship spectrum. Burgoon (1978) describes an expectation as something you believe will happen, as opposed to something you want to happen. As with the case of these students, expectations can stem from a variety of sources such as demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) and more individuating characteristics (personality, previous actions) (Miller & Turnbull, 1986), as well as social norms, stereotypes, personal experiences, and third-party information (Levine et al., 2000). Student sojourner expectations were derived from a variety of these sources and others as explored later in this chapter. An expectation violation is any deviation (whether positive or negative) from a held expectation (Burgoon, 1978). Burgoon (1992) proposes that expectation violations can be “arousing and distracting” (p. 60). Moreover, a violation of expectations, especially a negative
violation such as was often the case among student sojourners, tends to result in increased levels of uncertainty (Afifi & Burgoon, 2000). Uncertainty, especially in the cross-cultural context, is directly linked to anxiety or stress for the sojourner (Gudykunst, 2005). Further, “any behavior that falls outside a range of expected behaviors is theorized to produce cognitive arousal and trigger and interpretation-evaluation sequence that helps individuals cope with unexpected outcomes” (Afifi & Metts, 1998, p. 367). Thus, when faced with an expectation violation, or a series of violations, students were forced to deal with the stress resulting from a range of unexpected (and often undecipherable) outcomes. In addition to an interpretation and evaluation of the event, expectancy violations produce communication outcomes, “such things as comprehension, attitude change, trust, self-disclosure, attraction, and evaluations of the initiator’s credibility would be typical outcomes of interest” (Burgoon, 1978, p. 131). Typically, EVT contextualizes those communication outcomes within the interaction itself, however for this study it is beneficial to look at the long-term communication outcomes. In this case, the long-term communication outcomes were those communication patterns in which students engaged across the sojourn in order to manage the stress resulting from the expectation violation.

Intercultural encounters are prime areas for expectancy violations as many instances of culture shock or and intercultural blunders are examples of expectation violations (Burgoon, 1992). Hence, as suggested above, EVT offers insight into the stress and stress management experienced by these student sojourners. Borrowing aspects of Burgoon’s EVT to partially frame findings from
this study appears consistent with both the study of intercultural communication as well as original tenants of the theory. Burgoon writes, “the differences in world views, values, and normative behavior patterns across cultures, coupled with people’s relative ignorance about such differences, greatly increase the likelihood that heterocultural exchanges will entail violations of expectations” (p. 54). Therefore, the following sections address the types of expectation violations students experienced, where those expectations came from, and how students used communication behaviors to cope with the outcomes of those violations.

Students experienced high levels of stress as a result of unmet expectations in four areas: Academic/language expectations, social expectations, cultural/value expectations, and travel/cultural experience expectations. I developed these four expectancy categories from interviews, journals, and observations from pre-departure through the return. These categories represent the general types of expectations students held that contributed to experiences across the sojourn. The specific expectations that created each category are detailed below.

*Academic/Language Expectations*

Though the students had varying levels of educational experience and specific French training, all students believed to some degree that they would be able to at least communicate with the French people once overseas. Often the first level of shock and stress for the students was the immediate realization that even for the most advanced French students, it was extremely difficult to communicate in French. One of the most predominant student goals was to
“become fluent” in French while studying abroad. Students expected to be able to achieve at least some degree of fluency by perseverance, excelling in IES classes, and speaking only in French. Students also expressed a belief that they would be able to excel in their non-language classes. For all but a few students all three of those behaviors were extremely difficult to achieve. Students were under the impression that study abroad classes were “easier” than those that they would take at their home university. Students did not expect it to be difficult to learn another subject, art history or political science for example, in French. Moreover, students did not believe they would be held to the same level of academic responsibility in France as they had at their home university. What students found out after only a few days in Paris was that the academic responsibilities were, for most, equivalent to those at their home university, that despite their varying years of French language schooling they were at best novices in the language, and that even the “simplest” of IES courses, such as theatre or art, were a definite challenge due to the language and education differences. Thus, due to the nature of study abroad, students’ academic and language expectations were among the first to be dispelled resulting in stress and uncertainty about their eventual goal achievement.

Social Expectations

Students not only expected to be able to communicate in French, but also to be able to establish firm relationships with French people their age. Students planned to go beyond merely speaking French with French people and to develop “permanent ties” and lasting friendships. Prior to departure, students articulated
the thought that these permanent ties would serve three primary purposes: to
develop a social network with whom to interact in Paris, so that they could
continue a long distance relationship once they returned to their home, and to
always have a friend or family to return to in Paris. Students not only desired
complete integration into the French social scene, but they also expected “normal
French interactions,” that would simply replace the social interactions to which
they were habituated in the States. Given the difficulties students had with just
communicating effectively in French, creating meaningful social ties with
potential French friends was even more challenging. Adding to this challenge was
the cultural and gender differences present in cross-national friendship formation.
U.S. American females, for example, found it difficult to understand that cross-
sex friendships were rare in France, and that women almost never joined sports
clubs as a means for exercising or socializing. Whereas the U.S. American
students were used to socializing in large groups, French students preferred
smaller, more intimate groups. French students tended to make friends in a
specific context, such as social or academic groups, whereas the U.S. students
were used to making friends outside of any specific context. Finally, the concept
of friendship differed between the French students who preferred a few very close
friends and the U.S. Americans who could equally enjoy a large group of less
intimate friends. Students rapidly became discouraged about their ability to make
French friends and quickly resorted to strengthening bonds with other
international students. The ensuing result was stress not only about not being able
to make French social ties as students had expected, but stress over whether or not
they would be able to make friends at all.

Cultural/Value Expectations

Interestingly, unlike students’ general perception that they would become
fluent in French and establish some semi-permanent bonds with French friends,
students’ cultural and value expectations varied. Some students articulated an
expectation for some sort of culture shock upon arrival in France, while others
expected very little shock, because it is, after all, “a civilized Western nation.”
And, although each student experienced culture shock to some degree, these
experiences were highly personalized depending on their previous expectations.
Most shocking and stress evoking for students was the realization that the French
culture, or specifically Paris and the Parisians were not what students had
imagined. As detailed in Chapter Four, students were anticipating an ideal
experience conjured up from a romantic view of Paris in which every second
would be simply amazing. Many students were gearing up for how to manage
such an eventful, passionate city, “fireworks when I got off the plane,” when
instead they were confronted with a busy, moderately distanced city that had little
time to entertain wide-eyed Americans. Students were prepared to be impressed
by French cuisine, art, romance, and high fashion. Instead, they were met with
many foods they found unpalatable and the inability to enjoy better cuisine
because of the steep prices, long lines and hoards of tourists detracting from the
fine art somewhere located on back walls of the Louvre and Musee D’Orsay,
French women who did not look twice at American men and French men who
could not refrain from sexually harassing American women, and clothing that was too macabre, too expensive, and too darn skinny for most of the American students. Many of the U.S. American students were ready to “turn loose on Paris.” With several students celebrating their 21st birthday abroad, and others being of legal drinking age in France anyway, the culture clash of the reserved, wine-sipping French, and the U.S. notion of competitive drinking was primed. Students had a difficult time adapting to social norms that are deeply rooted in the French culture such as dining for hours, enjoying one glass or two of a very good French wine with dinner, closer personal spaces, and lack of public eye contact and smiling among strangers. One final and poignant point of distress among U.S. American students was the tension between students’ desire to please and be agreeable and the French penchant for argumentation and criticism. Though personal criticism was a typical communication sport for the French, often for the purpose of getting to know a person better or just “being frank” with someone, and not to insult them, U.S. Americans are trained to respond as though it was a personal attack. Students were often wounded by comments of a personal nature such as those about one’s weight, appearance, language ability, food and drink practices, and especially political associations. In most cases, the stress resulting from a misunderstanding or complete incomprehension of French cultural values pushed students away from engaging in French practices and they retreated to their co-national identity groups. For a handful of others, the enigma of cultural differences was a challenge to be met as students tried hard to understand intricacies of French culture. The short amount of time students were in France
coupled with communication difficulties and academic responsibilities created an atmosphere wherein students were unable to satisfactorily decipher the French culture. Whether students turned their backs on the French culture or tried to embrace it, they were all met with the resulting unanticipated stress of not being able to fully understand or fully function in their new environment.

*Travel/Cultural Experience Expectations*

Finally students experienced stress when their expectations for travel outside Paris (and usually outside of France) or for cultural experiences were unmet, such as picnicking on baguettes, cheese, and champagne by starlight under the Eiffel Tower. First, although students had many “cultural experiences,” they were not the charming “c’est la vie” moments they were looking for, but were often moments of difficulty when trying to negotiate language and cultural barriers. For example, a quick culinary trip to Dijon, a wonderful cultural experience by most accounts, was accompanied with instances of anti-Americanism, a petty theft, and an attempted hotel break-in. Second, despite the widespread belief that travel is efficient, easy, and affordable in Europe, many students were faced for the first time with tight finances and imposing academic obligations rendering them unable to travel. Moreover, upon arriving in Paris, students with limited French skills found travel within and outside of France a daunting prospect, unless of course they took the Chunnel to London (which many of them did as a means of escaping the French language and culture). Students not only wanted to live in and become part of Paris, but they also wanted to spend every weekend traveling to other foreign lands. Thus, they expected to
be able to both travel throughout the European continent gathering a variety of other cultural experiences and ground themselves firmly in Paris. For most of the students this was a financial and logistic improbability, but realizing this did not reduce the level of stress and guilt they felt for not engaging in more travel and having more cultural experiences. For a small group of wealthier students who were able to travel, the stress was found not in an inability to travel and experience different cultures, but rather in that due to the time they spent outside of Paris, they were never able to make Paris their home.

Sources of Expectations

Basic student expectations became salient as I began comparing pre-departure interviews with those across the sojourn. I was able to work in an iterative fashion between a communication pattern, such as complaint, and the expectation that may have contributed to its presence, such as not meeting achievement expectations. While finalizing patterns of expectations as they related to communication behaviors, I uncovered a third pattern to help shed light on why these expectations resulted in certain modes of communication. Until that point, the equation was that certain unmet expectations resulted in stress, which yielded certain communication patterns. I had determined the what that surrounded expectations, but not the who and why. Students’ intercultural communication expectations followed a typical pattern as described by Burgoon and Hubbard (2005), “Inasmuch as most stranger and intercultural interactions entail very little personalized knowledge about other interactants, expectancies revert to cultural or subcultural norms and stereotypes” (p. 151). As evidenced in
their interviews and informal discussions, many of the students self-constructed some of their expectations – a combination of mediated images (movies and television), travel stories from previous sojourners, and schoolbook presentations. However, a great majority of the expectations were placed on students from outside sources: IES, co-students, friends/family at home, host family, and the home university. Students were faced with the challenge of trying to reconcile the differences between their own and other’s expectations and the reality in which they found themselves. Students were frequently faced with a double-edged sword of expectancy violations. Not only did students have to manage the outcomes of their own expectation violations (whether their own or those placed upon them), but they were also often the source of an expectation violation for friends, family, and university personnel who held expectations of them. The external sources of expectations placed on students are offered in detail below in order of most to least significance.

**IES**

As indicated in Chapter Four, perhaps the most significant source of stress resulting from outside expectations was that which came from the IES center. From the orientation sessions where students were urged to live every moment like a Parisian and disregard any previous or potential U.S. American ties, to the readings IES distributed laying out the seven steps of sojourner success, the predominate message emanating from the IES center was to succeed. From my perspective, the expectations that IES placed on students were little more than those that would be anticipated in the States – attending all classes, completing
assignments, arriving on time, and so forth. The addition was, of course, that students were expected to use IES only for academic, and not social, purposes. This was in direct contradiction to most of the students’ expectations for a university setting wherein U.S. American students form primary social ties at the university. IES’ expectation for success was partially centered on students’ ability to speak coherent French and form social ties with their French host families at the very least. But, the overt expectation was that students would reject the English language and their tendency to associate with other U.S. Americans at least while in the confines of IES. Unlike many of their own expectations and the barrage of messages from parents and friends, which supported a laissez-faire attitude toward academics and pressure to gain cultural experiences, IES expressed their expectations that students make academics their priority followed by assuming a normal Parisian lifestyle.

Co-Students

Purposefully or not, significant outside expectations were placed on students sojourners by other students. This was especially the case when two friends or good acquaintances studied abroad during the same semester, had overlapping terms abroad, or studied abroad in consecutive semesters. Having a friend who had already studied abroad was helpful because she was able to offer an abundance of helpful hints. Students had a difficult time, however, separating their own study abroad experience from those of students who had studied abroad before or who were studying abroad at a different location. For example, if a friend “partied” in Odeon every Thursday night, she expected her friend to do the
same when she was abroad. Friends or acquaintances who studied in Paris
together held not only personal expectations, but they had equally strong
expectations from their friends, such as taking the same classes together, doing
equally well or equally poorly in classes and with French in general, make the
same friends, enjoy the same foods and so on. Students had a hard time
disentangling their own expectations and goals from those presented to them by
friends and an equally hard time managing their own study abroad expectations as
well as the expectations put on them by other sojourners.

*Friends/Family at Home*

Letting down IES or other student sojourners by not meeting their
expectations was one thing, however, not meeting the expectations of friends and
family at home was quite another story. In spite of the fact that more U.S.
American students are studying abroad than ever before and that study abroad has
in many cases become an accepted part of the university experience, students who
do study abroad are still among a unique population (Jacobs, 2005). Constraints
placed on finances, time, university programs, academic success, and plain old
spirit of adventure continue to discourage many students from studying abroad.
For many families and friendship groups sending someone abroad was more than
just an opportunity for that person to experience a new culture, but an opportunity
to bring those experiences back home, and maybe even to provide a reason and
the means for a transatlantic visit. It was unsurprising that friends and family who
remained in the States expected their daughter, son, or friend to experience
*everything* so that s/he could bring those experiences back home. Unlike IES who
expected students to excel academically, and unlike their own expectations to “make Paris their own,” friends and family expected student sojourners to get a sampling of everything Europe (and in some cases North Africa and the Middle East, too!) had to offer. One key expectation was that students would make the most of their time and money. Because students were already stationed in Europe, it was a prime time to explore all Europe had to offer. This was especially important from the vantage point of the parents who were often footing the bill for this additional academic experience. The idea was “since I can’t experience Europe, I want you to experience it all for me.” For this exceptional experience it seemed that friends and family at home were willing to put aside any academic expectations for the sake of encouraging maximum cultural experiences. Upon return, however, it became apparent that these expectations were not without strings. Students perceived receiving the most amount of criticism from, or the feeling that they somehow disappointed, friends and family upon return because they had neither achieved a high level of French proficiency nor had they established relationships with French people. Though students perceived familial and friend expectations to come from the heart and have in mind the student’s best interest, they also placed the most expectations, and largest scope of expectations, on their sojourner. This was softened only by the feeling among most students that especially family, but friends also to an extent, maintained an unconditional love and acceptance of them regardless of their “success” overseas.
Host Family

Of all the external expectations placed on students, the ones that took most students by surprise were those that were imposed on them by their host families. Not all host families articulated expectations of students, at least not that were perceivable by the students, but a great majority of them did. Some host families were extremely overt about their expectations for how a student sojourner should use her time abroad and offered sharp criticism of students who did not meet their expectations. Students were expected to be home at a punctual time and be present for the contractual bi-weekly dinners as well as participate in the Paris social scene. Students were also expected to adopt French cultural norms such as dining practices and dress. Other host families were subtler about their expectations and offered praise for students who behaved appropriately instead of criticism for those who did not meet expectations. Whether overt or covert, host family expectations were the most difficult ones to swallow because they were the most unexpected expectations. Prior to departure, must students had an awareness that host families are like a bag of mixed jellybeans, sometimes you get a good one and some times you don’t. Despite this knowledge, most students still hoped for (and expected to an extent) a host family that would treat them like an extension of their own family rather than as a novelty, a babysitter, a money-bearing tenant, or English tutor.

Home University

The last, and in this case probably the least, source of external expectations came from students’ home university. The home university played a
more significant role in *creating* student study abroad expectations than it did *imposing* them. Depending on the university, students received varying levels of pre-departure support and information. Universities differed as well on the amount of interest they placed on study abroad as a part of the academic program. Students from smaller colleges and universities appeared to have received more direct support and advice (and therefore external expectations) from academic advisors or foreign language instructors, while students from larger, anonymous universities such as Penn State received more general university support and direct support from the international education office than from their instructors. Students who received most of their encouragement from a direct source, like an advisor or instructor, felt expected to use the study abroad as an academic experience – to become accomplished in French language or French literature. Moreover, direct influence to study abroad most often came from instructors or advisors who had previously studied abroad. In such cases, perhaps unknowingly, those people also placed expectations on students to experience and succeed at study abroad they way they had. Students receiving most of their information and support from a more generalized location, such as the international education office, had more balanced expectations. For those students, the international education and national IES offices were more careful to present a more realistic version of the study abroad experience. They articulated a wide breadth of expectations covering everything from appropriately representing the U.S. to attending classes, but a fairly shallow depth of expectations. For example, pre-departure orientation sessions focused on basic expectations such that students
would try and interact with the French culture and would at the very least attend the majority of their classes. They also articulated expectations that students would use their time abroad to build upon their identity, to experiment, and to experience new things. At the very least students were expected to maintain grades enough to stay in the program and then to return to the U.S. Upon return to the U.S., students were expected to integrate their new international experiences in their learning and potential career choices, as well as become advocates for others to study abroad. Because of their experience with numerous and diverse student sojourners, home universities appeared to have the most realistic expectations for the students as well as expectations that appeared most congruent with study abroaders themselves. These final points address the finding that as compared to other external sources of expectations, students did not struggle as much with the expectations placed on them by their host university.

Managing Stress of Unmet Expectations Through Talk

Afifi and Metts (1998) argue that after an expectation has been violated, people engage in an evaluation and interpretation process to help cope with the unexpected outcomes. Among this group of sojourners, part of the evaluation and interpretation process was a social effort. Thus, as part of this coping mechanism, students engaged in a variety of communication behaviors to (re)interpret and (re)evaluate their experience. For example, students who expected to excel in class and found themselves struggling would frequently engage in the information sharing, gossip, and comparison communication patterns to determine whether other people were experiencing the same difficulties and re-assess their
experience and academic expectations. Students who expected to love France the moment they stepped off the plane, but instead realized they did not like France often sought supportive communication and advice from others about whether to stay for the second semester or return home. Students whose expectations to make friends easily were violated often engaged in superficial introductory communication to form friendships with other IES students. Students who expected to gather cultural experiences like precious stones, but who rather felt short changed or disappointed with the experiences they were having often used humor and storytelling to offset their frustration.

The more students experienced expectation violations and evoked one or many communication behaviors to offset the resulting stress, the more able each individual and the group as a whole was to cope with the violation in the future. This finding is consistent with proponents of EVT that suggest “with repeated interactions, intercultural expectations presumably should shift from heavy reliance on cultural- and sociological-level data to greater emphasis on psychological, particularized, and idiosyncratic data.” (Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005, p. 153). In the case of these student sojourners, the communication surrounding expectation violations helped students to manage the stress resulting from the violation as well as make sense of the violation. For most students, managing the stress through communication in addition to repeated exposure to various violations on the part of an individual or the group lead to an eventual re-assessment of expectations and more culturally appropriate interpretations of the
expectation violation. Consider the following (abbreviated) “epiphany” as explained by Kara:

I realized that I wouldn’t have put myself in that kind of a situation in the States, even speaking in English I would never go to this country house with someone I had never met before and meet all their friends I had never met before and expect to have a good time. That’s kind of too much to ask of myself. But I did it in France, just because I was like feeling like I had to do it and it was totally, totally hard, and I felt so awkward the whole weekend, … but that just reaffirms my like initial epiphany that it’s totally not within my reach to just make friends with anybody I see on the street, it takes time, you have to break through barriers, cuz the language barrier’s so confusing. You’re going to have to like find a lot of other means of like relating to these people, and then an element of chance because you’re not just gonna find the first person right on the street that’s going to be your best friend for the rest of your time here. So, I feel really relieved to have that pressure off myself to an extent. I’m still going to obviously wanna try hard to put myself in situations where like I’m slightly uncomfortable if that’s what it takes, but I know now that I can’t just, it’s not just like will, it’s like luck, too, and time, and mutual effort, if I want somebody who will wanna be my friend, like try as I might, they’re not going to be my friend. … you can’t just like “want” people into being your friend. … I needed to know that I don’t necessarily have to have a French friend anymore. And I feel it’s pretty obvious if you think about it, and I should have realized a long time ago.

Kara’s so called “epiphany” did not occur as result of a long weekend of expectation violations in which she unknowingly went on a double date with a French man, got stranded in an unknown area of Paris after the Metro closed without money for a cab, met a friendly Frenchman who walked her to her door, and attended a party in the countryside with a group of French people she had never met. Rather, her epiphany occurred after talking through and interpreting these experiences with her U.S. American roommate Gina and deciding together
that some of her expectations to make friends, for example, were perhaps too high and she should re-evaluate her expectations and her goals. Kara was comforted when she realized her expectations were *just expectations*, expectations that she could change herself, and expectations that she did not have to live up to.

In describing the ways in which each pattern of communication helped students manage stress resulting from an expectation violation, it is difficult not to give a false impression of these types of talk. Student sojourners’ talk did not occur as separate instances of communicative engagement. In their interactions, there was rarely a moment when one pattern of communication would stop and another would begin. Instead, the discourses were most often overlapping. Various types of talk would occur within, or as part of, another larger pattern of talk. Many talk types prompted a second type of talk. Talk types were often complimentary and sometimes competing. In many cases, one sojourner would engage in one talk type while the other(s) would engage in another. Finally, individual interactants might operate more than one type of talk at any moment in a conversation. Despite the dynamic connectedness of these types of talk, below I offer a somewhat simple description of the ways in which each talk type helped specifically to manage stress that resulted from an expectation violation. While these descriptions are supported by the data, and can stand alone as significant patterns of communication, they are “simple” in that they represent an effort to disentangle and compartmentalize patterns of communication that in their natural context would occur as a dynamic interconnected system.

*Advice*
Advice was often triggered as a response to an expectation violation when a student was confused, or at a loss about what to do, and needed help to make some pressing decision. Advice answered, “what should I do in the face of this expectation violation?” Advice was an especially helpful, and common response for academic or language violations. Because students were removed from academic advisors and others they trusted to help them make the best scholarly or academic decisions, students turned to each other for help because they were the most likely to understand their specific difficulties. Although advice surrounding academic and language expectation violations were common in the beginning and toward the end as students were registering for classes at home or in France for the following semester, advice surrounding social and travel expectations was a common pattern throughout the sojourn. Upon realizing that making social connections or having cultural/travel experiences was not as easy as expected, students began to solicit advice from those who had some success in that area. Common threads of advice were “what’s the best way to make friends,” or “what should I do when I get to, or how do I get to, Prague?” Because there were a variety of different success stories in this area, offering advice also gave some students a sense of self-importance as their experiences put them in the position to help someone else. At times this was beneficial, because it raised advice giver’s confidence and self-esteem, but was sometimes done in such a way that it patronized the other. Some students offered advice not necessarily to honestly help another student, but instead to bolster their own esteem. Finally, advice was especially helpful in the arena of cultural/value expectation violations.
Cultural/value expectation violations were often the most face threatening for students, because their natural mode of behavior or thought was directly challenged by that of the French culture. Thus, students often engaged in advice because they needed a framework for understanding what happened. Specifically, this form of advice followed a pattern of asking what one should do in a given scenario. Students sought advice in order to deal with an encounter that they did not already have a cultural script for, or when their cultural script was violated. Advice was a common response to cultural/value violations because once students left the IES center they were likely to have 125 different encounters with varying levels of success that they could then bring back the next morning.

Superficial Introductory Talk

Superficial introductory talk appeared to emerge as a result of expectation violations for two primary reasons. First, students frequently used their “shocking experiences” as a topic for light conversation. Secondly, participants in second-language encounters were often forced to resort to more superficial forms of communication. One reason this form of communication emerged from day one was that because of academic and language requirements at IES, students were obliged to speak to each other in French. Due to their varying levels of French competence and confidence, students had to communicate from their most basic language building blocks, in this case, superficial communication. Two social expectation violations primed students to engage in this form of talk – the realization that study abroad was much harder than they expected and that they needed a supportive friendship network to “get through it together,” and the
realization that their expectations for making French friends seemed impossible. Thus, students were compelled to foster friendships with other IES students. As indicated previously in Chapter Four, students experienced a sort of desperation to make friends in France. Prior to departure some students attempted to establish contact with other IES students by soliciting basic demographic (such as their home university) and practical information (such as when they were arriving). However, superficial talk emerged at full force during the first few weeks abroad as students made every attempt to find similar others in the vast sea of what they perceived as people who were different from them (the French). Though superficial introductory talk did not appear to play a very significant role in violations to cultural experiences/travel expectations except to serve as a talking point for students, it did help students neutralize violations to cultural/value expectations they held. Talk on a superficial level, or “cocktail party talk” as one international student put it, is a widely practiced form of talk in the U.S., a type of talk that came naturally and felt comfortable to all of the U.S. Americans abroad. However, in the French context, this type of talk was often frowned upon and seen as false and insincere. Unlike in the U.S., in France it is uncommon to “strike up a conversation” with a stranger. Thus, students who starved for human connection and were unable to foster that with French people were easily able to turn to other U.S. Americans and engage in small talk about anything.

Information Sharing

When students were faced with a violation of expectations, they were often left wondering what to do. In the face of a violation, information sharing
was a way for students to attempt to figure out “what do I do in this situation?” or “what did you do in this situation?” Unlike advice seeking and sharing, information sharing relied less on personal opinions and more on established rules, normative patterns for behavior, and “facts.” Students who did not meet academic and language expectations were especially prone to engaging in information sharing because they needed all of the available resources to understand directions and complete academic tasks. Moreover, when faced with an unexpected situation, or in anticipation of one, students would often ask others for information regarding how to say something in French. Across the sojourn, information sharing was a particularly useful pattern of communication for students as they encountered violations to their social and cultural/travel experience expectations. It was particularly valuable, because the more individuals and groups gathered and dispensed information regarding culturally appropriate, or at least effective, means of traveling and/or making French social contacts, the better equipped the group was as a whole. Finally, information sharing was a valuable means of managing stress resulting from expectation violations in the cultural/value arena as it helped students decipher cultural meanings and reasons why something happened the way it did. For example, students who learned about the history of the Système D were able to then share that information with other students and thereby increase cultural understanding. 

Comparison

Whereas expectation violations in the four key areas (academic/language, social, cultural/travel experiences, cultural/value) had some direct implications on
the previous three patterns of communication, the final six patterns were more globally influenced. Comparative talk, for example was initiated across the board following an expectation violation regardless of what type of expectation violation had occurred. Comparative communication helped students to establish new expectations and new norms following an expectancy violation. It allowed students to compare their previous expectations, and others’ expectations, with the reality of any given situation. Students engaged in comparative communication across the sojourn and upon return to assess their situation. Through this type of talk, students were able to compare their own expectations with others’ as well as find out if other people were having an equally difficult time or sharing similar experiences. Students spent a good amount of talk time asking each other “what did you think it was going to be like?” in which case the “it” could be anything ranging from IES classes to finding a French boyfriend and living with a host family. As students compared their experiences to each other and to their expected experiences, they created new expectations and set new normative boundaries. For example, students who compared their first nights expressed shock at the unanticipated feeling of loneliness and isolation and admitted to crying and seeking comfort by calling home or talking to their housemate. Upon hearing several similar stories, the new expectation that you would feel lonely and might cry when you arrive at your host family’s home emerged. By comparing their expectations and expectation violations, students were able to normalize their experience and refine expectations.
Humor

For some students, the first reaction to an expectation violation was dealing with it through humor such as joking about it, making light of the situation, or just laughing. Frankly, in the international setting, expectation violations can be quite funny as long as no one is in any impending danger. Like several other communication patterns, humor was an all-purpose solution to almost any expectancy violation. Humor was an especially common reaction to expectation violations that created embarrassing situations. Students used humor to dispel stress related to academic and language challenges, social foibles and ineptitudes, unexpected events that happened during travels and/or for cultural blunders. Unlike the other patterns of communication (with the exception of information sharing), humor was a communicative response that occurred both in the moment of an expectation violation, as well as later on in friend or group setting. In this way, humor appeared to offset stress of an unexpected outcome by offering an immediate, face-saving response as well as a point of conversation in future settings. Moreover, students bonded through being able to share a laugh over embarrassing or disappointing situations that arose from expectation violations. The more embarrassing or awkward things that happened to a person, the more likeable that person was to a group, as long as they were willing to laugh at the situation, because it showed their vulnerabilities as well as a good natured approach to dealing with expectation violations.
Story Telling

Comparable to using humor as a means of buffering the stress felt in the face of an expectation violation, story telling served in a similar capacity in that expectation violations also make for a great story providing you survive to tell the tale. Story telling in response to an expectancy violation in the international setting is perhaps the most well regarded and anticipated communication outcome. Centuries of travelers have employed the “I survived to tell about it” form of story telling not only to bolster their own swashbuckling personality, but also to dispense information about foreign lands. In the case of these student sojourners, stories served as warnings and hypothesized outcomes of what could happen to you in the face of some specific expectation violation. Some stories ended with a triumph in the face of an unexpected event, but the most persuasive ones, and the ones that were most often retold, were those in which the student had a failing outcome. Stories were shared as a means of sharing information in a more entertaining mode than the mere question and response that typified information sharing as a talk type. Stories also served to transmit normative expectations for the student sojourners. In this way, stories helped sojourners prepare for, understand, and cope with expectancy violations. Often in the retelling of an unanticipated event or encounter, the sojourner was able to rework a troubling episode and articulate what it was about that episode was challenging. In doing so, stories served a personally therapeutic function as well as a learning function for other sojourners.
Gossip

Gossip was one of the more interesting ways of coping with expectancy violations across the sojourn. What was particularly interesting was that gossip could either be about an episode of expectancy violation (usually someone else’s) or it could be a way of interpreting an expectancy violation committed by another student sojourner. Thus, in response to an expectation violation, gossip was sometimes evoked as a means for students to evaluate and critique how others managed a violation, or simply to talk about the ways in which someone else was the source of an expectation violation. Like comparative communication, people engaged in gossip to be able to position themselves and their experiences against others’. Thus, gossip served as a way for students to determine if what they were feeling, or how they were reacting was “normal,” compared to others. Also like comparative communication, the major benefit to gossip as a stress management pattern was that it enabled the creation of new expectations and norms. However, gossip was much more effective, efficient, and prolific than was comparative communication. The difference was found in the fact that in the instance of comparative communication, at least one of the interlocutors had to have had first hand experience with the issue at hand. Conversely, gossip was either telling someone else’s experience or talking about another person (usually in a negative way as defined in Chapter Five). Thus, gossip occurred more frequently than comparative communication, it was more efficient in that more people could engage in a particular string of gossip at one time with multiple groups of people, and because of the tendency for gossip to be negative in nature it tended to have
more impact than merely comparing events. An additional difference between gossip and comparative communication was that gossip tended to create in-group and out-group identification and thereby was a major channel through which new norms for pockets of student sojourners were created.

Complaint

Given that the most stress-provoking expectation violations were negative violations, complaint as a response outcome was not surprising. Upon realizing that a particular event or episode was not what was expected, sojourners would often erupt into sessions of contagious complaint about the reality of a particular situation. Like the types of talk immediately preceding complaint, complaint was as likely a response to a negative violation of academic and language expectations as it was to social or cultural expectations. For example, students complained about the amount of homework, the difficulty of the language and classes, and the amount of responsibility placed on them as students. They complained about how hard it was to make French friends, or even to just socialize outside of IES. They complained about the lack of possibilities for true cultural or travel experiences. And, they complained about the “French way” in general. Though some students felt guilty after complaining, for most students complaint appeared to have an element of fun and entertainment and helped them “get frustrations off their chests.” Complaint served as a way for students to articulate and rid themselves of their various disappointments and challenges as they related to an expectation violation. Complaint often gave way to comparative communication, humor, and story telling, as students took turns trying to outdo each other’s stories.
Supportive Talk

Finally, in the after wake of an expectation violation or in the face of a series of violations, students looked to each other for supportive communication in order to manage their stress. Supportive talk changed shape across the sojourn as students learned to cope with expectation violations and establish new ones. From pre-departure throughout the return, students sought support from others, but that support was particularly valuable for students who were in the midst of trying to negotiate an expectancy violation. One of the most damaging aspects of expectancy violations was that they often resulted in a lowering of student self-esteem and self-efficacy. For example, expectancy violations often left students with the feeling that they were unable to accomplish even the simplest of tasks and/or were completely inept at socializing. Violations to their academic and language expectations left them feeling unintelligent. Violations to their social expectations made them feel like an outcast and disliked. Cultural/travel experience expectation violations left students feeling as though they were wasting their time or worthless. Cultural/value expectation violations often made students judge their own norms and behaviors as wrong, inappropriate, or even immoral. In these situations, students often looked to each other to validate who they were as a person – that they are competent, that what they did was okay, and that just because they were different, it did not mean they were wrong. They wanted someone to tell them “everything would be/was alright.” Supportive talk helped students manage stress resulting from an expectation violation by
positively validating a person and/or their experience, most often at a time when the student is experiencing lowered self-esteem.

Summarizing Expectations and Types of Talk

Students used the types of talk described above to manage the stress that often accompanied a negative violation of their expectations. Some patterns of talk occurred more frequently than others, while other patterns of talk were used predominantly during only one phase of the sojourn. Often more than one pattern of talk occurred in the same conversation. By employing an expectancy violations theory frame to analyze the types of talk, I can offer not only a description of the types of talk as they occurred throughout the sojourn, but also the impact they had on helping students adjust to living overseas. A focus on the outcome of unmet expectations sheds light on the reasons why these specific types of talk emerged. Those reasons can be narrowed to three. First, by using these patterns of communication, students were able to evaluate and interpret their own experiences and assess whether or not those experiences were “normal.” Second, by engaging in these patterns of communication, students were able to assess whether or not what they were feeling or experiencing was “okay” or “appropriate.” Third, and most importantly, through these types of talk, students were able to make minor or major adjustments to their norms and expectations across the sojourn and alter their behavior accordingly.

In summary, these patterns of communication were invaluable tools for students across the sojourn as they offered students a mode through which norms and expectations could be interpreted, evaluated, and modified. These types of
talk allowed students to make daily cognitive and behavioral adjustments across the sojourn. Such cognitive and behavioral adjustments allowed students to manage the stress resulting from an unexpected outcome as well as to anticipate, prepare for, and modify future interactions. Employing an expectancy violations frame highlights the source of some sojourner stress and the (communicative) adjustments used by students to manage that stress, however, it does not offer a trajectory for the sojourner beyond the immediate communication outcomes and the refinement of sojourner expectation and norms. To further understand the individual sojourner’s trajectory, I tapped into Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (ITCCA) to understand the link between the sojourner adjustments indicated above, sojourner functional fitness, and eventual identity shifting.

Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Kim’s (2001) ITCCA is centered on the idea that cross-cultural adaptation is both problematic and growth producing. As such, her theory is grounded in a stress → adaptation → growth model. This model takes the shape of a spiral whose circular motion gets tighter as time progresses and the sojourner becomes more culturally adept. This model is not necessarily deterministic in nature (i.e., suggesting that there is a point at which a person reaches total “growth” and no longer engages in the stress and adaptation cycle), given the assumption that humans are always engaged in dynamic lifespan processes to which they are ever adjusting. In the cross-cultural arena, the model indicates a “draw back” and “leap forward” motion, such that as the sojourner experiences stress (e.g., a
violation of expectation) she withdrawals, which then activates an adjustment sequence (e.g., a communication pattern) through which she is able to manage the stress and reorganize herself, which then subsequently propels her to “leap forward” with her new insight. With each cycle, the sojourner becomes more culturally practiced and experiences less stress while at the same time becoming more culturally effective. Thus, overtime, students develop more successful interaction patterns and experience less stress, and the draw back and leap forward motion becomes less severe leading to an eventual “calming” (Kim, 2001, p. 59). At the core of this perspective is the notion of achieving a “fit” between the environment and the individual. This is made possible by cultural engagement, withdrawing to regroup in the face of an adjustment stressor, developing a more functional cultural perspective and/or interactional style, and then trying again, each time getting nearer to the individual-environment fit. The ITCCA then moves forward to propose that as sojourners learn ways to manage cross-cultural stress, they become more functionally fit in the host society. Functional fitness is related to greater psychological health. Finally, the theory proposes that as sojourners internalize new ways of being, thinking, and interacting abroad their identity begins to shift from one that is bound to one cultural identity (U.S. American in this case) to one that is more intercultural in nature. The key to this entire process of becoming, according to Kim, is communication. This process as it relates the students in this research is outlined below.
Managing Stress and Becoming Functionally Fit

By highlighting the findings from this study with Kim’s (2001) ITCCA, it is possible to see how students were able to shift from a culturally inexperienced position where students were forced to negotiate many first time encounters to a culturally experienced position where students were able to engage in everyday activities without cognitive overload. The first step in this process is stress management, as it is only because of this stress, argues Kim, that sojourners are compelled to make adjustments. Broadly, Kim defines stress in the cross-cultural setting as “a manifestation of the generic process that occurs whenever the capabilities of the individual are not adequate to the demands of the environment. Stress is a direct function of the lack of fitness between the stranger’s subjective experiences and the prevailing modes of experience among the natives” (p. 55).

Among these student sojourners, one source of their adjustment stress was their unmet expectations and realization that their normal mode of interaction was ineffective in Paris. Thus, students’ stress resulted from their unexpected lack of ability to function and interpret meanings in Paris. Confronted with situations for which students had no means of understanding and or/interacting, students’ personal and social identities were challenged resulting in a feeling of inadequacy or incompetence. For example, several students went abroad with a certain self-concept (“I am a good French speaker” or “I don’t get homesick”) only to realize that self-concept was false or incomplete. Students not only had the challenge of managing unexpected outcomes in the social setting, but also challenges to their self-concept upon finding that their typical approach to everyday problems and
tasks did not work. For example, gregarious students who had no difficulty forming social ties in the U.S. were unable to use their usual charming ways to make friends in France. Students who in the States could achieve As in their French classes without studying were unable to do so in France.

The stress and resulting feelings of inadequacy created a situation in which students were forced to withdraw, regroup, and reorganize. Students engaged in the spiral stress, adaptation, growth sequence across the sojourn to continue to refine and test cultural understandings as they faced continued cultural challenges. For these students, stress resulted in specific patterns of communication that helped them buffer the stress, as well as reformulate the norms and expectations that were not supported by their daily encounters in Paris. Once students were able to manage minor daily crises, students were presented “with an opportunity for new learning and for strengthening his or her coping abilities” (Kim, 2001, p. 36). Thus, through communication, students were able to create culturally sanctioned norms and expectations and begin the process of cultural adjustment. Once that process was initiated, students were on the path toward “increasing proficiency in self-expression and the fulfillment of their various social needs” (Kim, 2001, p. 58), thereby increasing levels of functional fitness abroad. Kim summarizes this process as:

Through continuous interaction with the various aspects of the cultural environment, the individual’s internal system undergoes a progression of quantitative and qualitative changes by integrating culturally acceptable concepts, attitudes, and actions; thus the individual becomes fit to live in the company of others. This internalized learning enables the individual to interact easily with others in the
cultural community who share similar images of reality and self (pp. 46-47).

Among these students, increased functional fitness yielded increased social and psychological health enabling them to function more confidently and competently as the sojourn progressed.

Thus, students’ stress resulting from unmet expectations prompted students to make adjustments in order to manage the stress and increase social effectiveness. By and large the adjustments students made were communicative in nature yielding both communicative stress management patterns, as well as a means through which to change their norms, expectations, and behaviors. The extent to which students were able to use this process to make more functional expectations, norms, and behaviors, given their new environment, increased their chances of succeeding abroad. Further, as suggested by the ITCCA, “increased functional fitness in carrying out daily transactions, improve(s) psychological health in dealing with the environment, and a movement from the original cultural identity to a broader, ‘intercultural’ identity” (Kim, 2001, p. 61). The following section moves beyond students’ communication patterns and functional behaviors by using key components of ITCCA to explain their identity shifts across the sojourn and into the return.

Identity Shifting

Identity is akin to self-concept – an understanding of who you are (Tracy, 2002). Identity, according to Hecht, Jackson, and Ribeau (2003), is a code for being that “provides the means for understanding self, interaction, relationships, and society by defining the nature of self and social life” (p. 231). Identities are
mutable and negotiable (Jackson, 1999), and an inherently communicative process (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Jackson, Pitts, 2005). Sojourner identities and identity transformations were gleaned through talk (e.g., identity-work) and through direct questioning. “Identity-work” refers to the process of bringing certain identities to the surface through everyday talk (Tracy, 2002). As part of this process people’s identities also shape the way they talk (Tracy, 2002). For the students in this study, their journey overseas served to heighten their sense of self as they were continually faced with challenges to their core identity. Kim (2001) proposes that with each adaptive challenge, sojourners are offered “an opportunity to grow beyond the perimeters of the original culture” (p. 6). Moreover, “through prolonged experiences of trial and error, the stranger begins to ‘earn’ a new, expanded identity that is more than either the original cultural identity or the identity of the host culture” (p. 65). Many students had the philosophy that as part of the travel and study abroad experience, they were able to leave their “old self behind” and pick up new ways of living:

I think what's important in like going abroad and traveling so much is for you to pick up like the good things from the different cultures, and not go and just bash at them and not look at the negative sides, just forget about those, just go and see what they do well, see what you like there, and absorb all these things and come back and become a better person. It's kinda cheesy, but that's true (Anita).

For students abroad, this new identity formation included an expanded sense of who they were in relation to the rest of the world, as well as an expansion of their understanding of others. Student identity shifts are indicated by expressions such as, “I am becoming the person that I want to be,” “I know
myself better, now,” “this experience had definitely given me a broader sense of the world and seen how other people live and how I don’t NEED NEED NEED,” and “I guess France has a lot to do with the way I can now see this differently. . . it’s weird how my perception on social standing has changed.”

Students could sense the changes in their identity across the sojourn. Some students expressed feeling more at home in Paris than they do in the U.S., that they “liked” themselves better in Paris. Other students expressed feeling a sense of freedom to explore an identity they had either closeted or ignored in the U.S. One young man was finally free to express and take pride in his gay identity by engaging in romantic relationships, spending time in gay clubs, and feeding his shopping fetish. Two young women who came from bi-religious families (Jewish and Catholic) were confronted with aspects of their Jewish identity that were new to them. One young woman living with an Orthodox Jewish family experienced an increased sense of pride in her Jewish heritage and embraced many of the traditions she hadn’t fully embraced before. The other young woman lived with a Catholic family in which the grandmother frequently criticized her beliefs and made offensive and public moral judgments of her.

These identity transformations took place on many fronts across all levels of social and personal identities. One young woman wrote in her journal, “I feel a change… can’t really explain properly, but it seems that the way in which I relate with people kinda changed. Or, maybe it is Paris. I feel that in a sense I have become more tolerant, but at the same time I’m still kinda an arrogant bitch sometimes.” The one form of identity shifting that held consistency across
sojourners was that of an enhanced understanding of what it meant to be
“American.” In talking about wanting to go back to experience the U.S. after
having been abroad, Annie said she wanted to experience

living through *being in* America, because now that we’re here, we’re living through *being Americans*, but not all the *shit* that our culture has, like you’re not directly involved in it everyday, I suppose. I mean you kind of are, because you represent it, when you are abroad, but at the same time, you’re not faced with it, like in your face, every single day, how we have highways everywhere, that are just crappy for the environment and stuff.

The conversation below further describes U.S. identity enhancement:

Annie: Wait, I never really realized how much of an American I am until I traveled abroad. And like, I always really hated America and was really like no I’m gonna move (deep voice), I’m gonna get rid of my citizenship and just become French or something.

Alan: [Oh yeah?]

Anita: [Are you serious?]

Annie: Yeah. Before I left the country, and then I realized I was an American?

Alan: So you feel like you don’t appreciate certain things until you experience other things and decide that they-

Annie: Well, certain, certain things you’re just not aware of-

Anita: How do you feel now?

Annie: I don’t know.

Anita: Aren’t you a little bit more proud of being American now?

Annie: I feel like, yeahhh. And I also fee like it’s one of the places on the Earth that I can actually make a difference, because like I’m a citizen there, and understand what it is to be there.

Anita: And it’s your home!

Annie: Yeahh.

Anita: Isn’t it?

Annie: Yeahh.
By the end of the semester people expressed having, “a better understanding of my own culture, my own country now that I have seen it through other eyes.” One student went so far as to explain that his experiences in France were more American than French:

Maybe I’m having an American experience more, because people here are from all over the states. At Penn State, they’re also from all over the state, especially east coast and Pennsylvania, but here, everybody’s from places I haven’t been to, Texas, California, so this is an American experience, and they say, I notice they say, “oh I’m from Boston,” and the other person says “I’m from South California.”

For another student, the study abroad experience helped her to realize and solidify parts of her personhood, “I know what kind of culture I wanna live in, I know what values I have, you know, everything from like what role education should play in society to how I want to eat dinner at night and what kinds of food I wanna eat.”

Identity shifts were also evident in students’ reentry experiences. Upon returning students reported being “very different now.” These “new” identities prompted behavioral changes upon return, such as “just taking one day at a time” as opposed to “always looking ahead,” and “pulling back a little bit from my friends” (who did not study abroad). They also included cognitive changes such as “putting less emphasis on work.” Despite their varied experiences abroad, even students who expressed having an overall negative experience abroad described ways in which their semester abroad influenced who they were. The following excerpt describes one such realization:
I got off the plane in State College and I was trying to think if I was hungry, if I needed dinner. And I was like “god, they served us such unhealthy food on the plane!” I was like, “they gave us chips, they gave us a Twix bar, they gave us so much like unhealthy, cheese, they gave us ice cream,” it’s like I can’t believe that anyone would ever serve us food like that! (laughing) And then I realized, I was like “oh my gosh, I’ve become European!” (laughing). So, I had pizza that night just to fight the Europeanness (Sheila).

However, not all students were as easily able to articulate in what ways their identity changed, only that they were “changed.” As Leia explained, “I do feel like I changed and like coming back to something that was familiar was hard.” Elana further explained the identity challenges related to returning to the U.S. and letting go of an identity:

as soon as you get away from that environment, that French speaking environment, and go back to the States, you become another person again, and you have to re-become the person, the French speaking person, cuz it’s not, even though the language might always be there. The French person, persona that you once had goes away as soon as you leave, or like if you’ve been living long term in another country, so I think that it does, no matter how much past experience you’ve had around French people, you’ll always have to restart.

Despite experiencing differing levels and directions of identity salience, these student sojourners changed. No matter how small, no change was insignificant. Students’ identities shifted, at least a little, in two significant ways. Students became more aware of themselves reaching new levels of understanding who they are as people and how they respond to challenges. By looking across the sojourn at who they felt they were before the sojourn and who they became upon return, students were able to internalize a new aspect of their personal identity.
But more than just internalizing a new sense of self from their sojourner experiences, students also experienced shifts in their social identity – who they are in relation to others. Students experienced an enhanced sense of what it meant to be an American as well as a better understanding of what it was to be a “global citizen.” In this way, students were truly on the path of becoming intercultural, an identity that “links a person to more than one culture and, ultimately, to humanity itself” (Kim, 2001, pp. 191-192).

Going Beyond the Data – Linking Up with Theory

This chapter represents the abductive reasoning that I engaged in across the research journey. As opposed to traditional forms of inquiry, abductive reasoning allows the researcher to move fluidly between patterns of inductive and deductive logic. As a result, I was able to inductively categorize meaningful forms of talk among sojourners from an insider’s perspective while deductively representing those categories in larger theoretical schema. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe this process as

Abductive reasoning or inference implies that we start from the particular. We identify a particular phenomenon – a surprising or anomalous finding, perhaps. We then try to account for that phenomenon by relating it to broader concepts. . . in other words, abductive references seek to go beyond the data themselves, to locate them in explanatory or interpretive frameworks.

The purpose for which is to go beyond the data, to go beyond the interpretations made in this project, and to link up with other scholarly ideas. The end result is not only a much richer understanding of the phenomena under investigation, but a way to make sense of these data and these findings in the larger communication
studies and other social scientific contexts, thus adding to the larger scholarly
discourse on cultural adjustment, communication, and identity processes among sojourners. Most importantly, the central focus of this study was on naturally occurring communication behavior across time. This specific focus on communication patterns and the powerful role such patterns played on sojourner’s overall experience lends weight to the importance of the study of communication as a discipline.

As shown in this chapter, previous theory, specifically Burgoon’s (1978) expectancy violations theory and Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, served to enhance the understanding of the findings from this study. The combination of these theories offered me the tools to make insightful connections without which I might not be able to make. Neither my own interpretations nor those enhanced by EVT or the ITCCA was sufficient enough to fully explain the findings from this research; however by combining my own interpretations with proponents of previous theory I was able to achieve a synergetic outcome yielding a new and fuller understanding of these data that would otherwise be unachievable. This process was not, however, uni-dimensional. The findings from this study offer an equally valid theoretical insight especially in the cross-cultural arena with a high degree of ecological validity. Findings from this study offer a glimpse into how natural communication patterns emerge to help people manage stress inherent in an international.
Each theory in and of itself highlights and contributes to the interpretive meaning of certain aspects of the data, leaving others aspects in the background. EVT, for example highlights and prefaces the role of stress across the sojourn in the following ways: Students come into the study abroad with a variety of expectations. Those expectations can be grouped into four broad categories. Those expectations are the result of students’ own expectations as well as expectations placed on the sojourner from external sources.

Upon arriving in Paris, students quickly realized that their expectations for life abroad were not being met. Such a realization forced students to cope with the stress and make adjustments to their expectations through communicative processes with other study-abroaders. Figure 3 depicts this process. Specifically, using proponents of EVT I was able to identify four specific domains of expectancies among student sojourners (i.e. academic/language, social, travel/cultural experiences, and cultural/value) as well as the origin of those expectations (i.e. IES, co-students, friends/family at home, host family, and the home university). Further, findings from this research suggest that the communicative outcomes to expectation violations may occur and be most helpful outside of the immediate encounter (e.g., privately among student sojourners after a challenging encounter). Finally, while EVT proposes that “a communication outcome” will be the result of an expectancy violation, there is no evidence suggesting what kind of outcome might occur in this setting or how that communication outcome helps to manage the stress from the violation. This research points to nine specific types of talk that these students used in order to
Figure 3: Model of Expectation Violation and Stress
manage the stress resulting from unmet expectations (i.e. advice, superficial introductory talk, information sharing, comparison, humor, story telling, gossip, complaint, and supportive talk).

Interpreting the data with an ITCCA lens further highlights the essential role that communication plays in helping sojourners adjust to their new context. Such a view places less emphasis on the exact sources of stress, but instead focuses on the sojourner adjustments made to manage the stressors sojourners encounter abroad, resulting in personal growth and eventual identity shifting. Figure 4 depicts this process. To be specific, this study provides strong empirical support for Kim’s claims that “communication” is at the key to cross-cultural adjustment, but it goes even further by offering a specific pattern of communication that help sojourners to achieve functional fitness abroad. The pattern to which I am referring (as opposed to the nine patterns outlined above) is that of using the co-national support system as an important and potentially positive mode of communication. This finding appears to be in contradiction with Kim’s (and other’s) claim that in the long run, co-national support is more harmful than helpful in the sojourner’s adjustment process. On the contrary, it was through the use of this co-national support system that the students in this study were able to achieve functional fitness in such a short time abroad. While the co-national support system may prove ineffective for long-term sojourners, for short-term sojourners it appears to be both effective and efficient. Moreover, the findings from this research offer some clarity to what is meant by the “communication” as the means through which cross-cultural adaptation occurs.
Figure 4: Model of Stress and Identity Shifts
Finally, these findings suggest that the mundane daily communication patterns used by these students offer the context in which sojourners were able to make the cognitive, behavioral, and affective adjustments necessary to increase functional fitness abroad.

While each theory provides a map for navigating the findings of this study, set alone they do not fully capture the intricacies of student adjustment. However, when placed together these theories offer a fuller picture of student adjustment and identity processes. Much like a three-dimensional picture, by layering these two theories in the context of this study, a new, more detailed picture emerges. By layering EVT with ITCCA, as shown in Figure 5, we can see that the elements of stress and the students’ communication patterns are points on the figure where the theories align, setting those parts of the figure in the foreground. However, each theory extends and wraps around the stress and communication patterns adding more depth to the initial communication findings. Moreover, the extensions of the stress \( \rightarrow \) communication model further serve to demonstrate an element of pressure that dynamically interacts in a cyclic fashion with the stress and adjustment elements to eventually push the sojourner toward individual growth and identity shifts as experienced by the students in this study.

Advancing Knowledge of Sojourner Adjustment

As identified at the outset of this research, the purpose of this research is to describe the communication practices that sojourners use as they adjust to their term abroad and how those practices are perceived to relate to sojourner identity processes across the sojourn and reentry. The findings presented here
Figure 5:
Layering Expectations, Stress, and Identity Shifts
accomplish that goal, and go well beyond findings offered by other similar studies. First, the findings shown here are the result of a longitudinal ethnographic study designed to draw out daily processes and patterns especially as they relate to communication behaviors and identity across the sojourn. Such an investigation allowed for certain findings, such as the use of story telling as a warning or gossip as a tool for social comparison, to surface as significant only because I was able to systematically record seemingly uninteresting communication interactions across time. Communication behaviors that occurred primarily during one phase of the sojourn (pre-departure, orientation, reentry, etc.) would not have been captured without such an approach. Second, while previous research praises the importance of communication (especially social support) in cross-national adjustment, to my knowledge none of these studies have mapped out the types of communication used by sojourners and to what effect.

The findings presented in this and the two preceding chapters extend our knowledge in the area of cross-cultural communication and sojourner identity. First, these findings underscore the importance of communication in the overall study abroad experience. This finding is neither surprising nor is it very original, because generations of communication and culture scholars have insisted on this “truth” for decades. What is original, and perhaps surprising to some, were the specific ways in which communication played a role in sojourner adjustment. It moves largely beyond previous cross-cultural adjustment studies by maintaining a direct communication focus throughout the duration of the entire sojourn. Such a focus yielded patterns that are immensely important for sojourners, but rarely
make a blip on the communication screen, let alone in the cross-cultural context, in other research. In fact, to my knowledge, only one broad form of co-national communication among student sojourners has received any specific attention to date – social support. With the exception of my previous work on student sojourners (Pitts, 2001), even the study of social support across the sojourn has been conducted with broad strokes. Previously, I identified and described seven domains of social support that led to sojourner adjustment (kinds of support given, who provided support, bonding with study abroad participants, support formation, how was support given, when support was activated, and lack of support). Only a small part of which was focused on the actual patterns of support, which yielded eight types (supportive messages, talking, complaining, listening, advice, being available, visiting, and giving resources). Given the scope of that research project I was unable to fully explore those patterns of support. Having already out mapped out the social support territory in my earlier research, in this study I sought to hone in specifically on the communication practices (including, but not limited to, social support) student sojourners engaged in throughout their sojourn. Additionally, the ethnographic nature of this study gave me a behind-the-scenes look at how students were communicating on a daily basis from major “let’s sit down and talk about this” communicative events to the more quotidian “what did you have for lunch today” conversations. The result is the first in-depth look at how student sojourners use communication to aid in their adjustment abroad and the finding that co-national communication is a significant contributor to students’ overall study abroad experience.
Second, the research presented here represents a longitudinal, process-oriented investigation into the everyday patterns of communication used by student sojourners as they adjusted to living in Paris. Such an approach increases the opportunity for more subtle and nuanced patterns of communication to be noticed. This is especially important in this context, as it is difficult for sojourners to reflect on the initial days of their sojourn after they have returned, as is done with some sojourner studies. It is equally difficult for researchers to tap into underlying patterns of communication (either because they are so subtle, or not active at a given point in time) in cross-sectional data. This study is unique in that it encompassed all stages of the sojourn, from pre-departure, throughout the semester abroad, and into the reentry. As such, it offers insight not only into the nuanced patterns of communication, but the way those patterns developed throughout the sojourn.

Third, these findings contribute to the on-going research and scholarship surrounding identity processes. While there is no dearth of knowledge and theory surrounding the role of communication in identity, there is a lack of observational research surrounding identity transitions. The context of this study makes it a great venue to study the intricacies of communication and identity, because of the heightened sense of self that students encounter abroad. Students identity changes across the sojourn are palpable and thus often at the very forefront of their own talk without prompting. The methods used in this study allowed me to observe students’ outward identity expressions and transitions, such as was seen in their change in clothing and accessories, as well as their greeting and other non-verbal
interaction patterns as they became more reserved across the sojourn. My daily communicative interactions with students gave me the opportunity to hear students talk about the ways in which they experienced (or resisted) change across the sojourn. In-depth interviews allowed me to ask probing questions about students identity processes. And, access to students’ journals across the sojourn gave me access to their more private musings and identity expressions.

Fourth, and most directly in line with the specific purpose of this research, this study offers a detailed description of the interconnections between sojourner stress, communication, and identity as they were experienced by students. This finding in particular stretches our knowledge of sojourner adaptation by bringing to light specific locations of sojourner stress, specific patterns of communication used to manage that stress, and the ways in which these intersected across the sojourn to influence sojourner identity. Further, these links were primarily made evident by the unique combination of two communication theories. The synthesis of these two theories helped me to push interpretation of these data beyond my own myopic limitations and beyond the limitations of each theory in particular to create new ideas and interpretations. Such an approach not only pushes the limitation and scope of my own interpretations, but it also pushes the limitation and scope of previous communication theory while at the same time adding to it.

Putting it into Perspective

Across the globe people are crossing cultural boundaries more easily and more frequently than ever before. This is especially true for people participating in short-term stays for business, travel and tourism, and academic purposes.
Student sojourners are a particularly important area for investigation because study abroad is becoming a popular option for students across the nation (Open Doors, 2004a). While study abroad is becoming more common, the institutionalization of study abroad programs is also resulting in higher expectations for study abroad students, as evidenced in findings from this study. Students are being sent abroad for shorter amounts of time (Jacobs, 2005; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Open Doors, 2004a), but with greater expectations for success. The reason for this is found in within the driving goal of most study abroad programs – U.S. American students are encouraged to study abroad in order to foster world mindedness and create possibilities for cultural enrichment and bridge building. On the Penn State campus specifically, students are being encouraged to participate in study abroad as part of the strategic planning for undergraduate education. Addressing the importance of study abroad, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and International Programs writes:

The opening of global markets, the explosion of trade, the effects of technology, and the rapid spread of environmental and health problems to countries around the world redefined the global playing field, and with 9/11, terrorism replaced the cold war as one of the driving concepts of American foreign policy. These recent changes have made it clear that our students are world citizens who need to include cross-cultural and international awareness, understanding, and ultimately, international competence, as part of their education (Jacobs, 2005, p. 1)

Many universities incorporate a pre-departure preparation session for students before they begin their sojourn, however these are often conducted in one day or in a few evenings. Due to their short duration it is difficult to provide the kind of information, support, and training students need before they embark on their
sojourn abroad. Moreover, previous research on study abroad participants focuses too much on practical outcomes and does not place enough emphasis on the process. Too little attention is paid to those things that contribute to a positive sojourner experience *during* the sojourn. And, students are being sent abroad with little or no training on how to make a positive experience. Without such training and preparation, students’ experiences abroad might not serve to foster a more global perspective, but might instead increase ethnocentrism. This is especially true for students who do not have or acquire the skills of cultural empathy and communication competence abroad. The stress resulting from expectation violations and a myriad of other challenges in the cross-cultural setting is particularly harmful for students who are not able to turn negative experiences into positive, growth producing ones. The results from this study offer students and study abroad program personnel a view into the ways in which students abroad manage stress through various communication patterns. This research also highlighted major sources and domains of stress for student sojourners as well as a trajectory of growth and identity shifts for student sojourners. The knowledge gained from this study can be used to train both students who study abroad as well as study abroad program facilitators. By offering students ways to positively manage cross-cultural stress, we will be one step closer in reaching the goals of increased world-mindedness on the part of the students, as well as create a space for much needed cultural bridge-building.
Practical Consequences

With the findings from this study, students can be better informed about the study abroad experience before departing. Increased training, opportunities for support, and information for students and their families will help to ensure the student has a positive study abroad experience. Findings from this study can be used as a practical guide for training and preparing students who study abroad and study abroad program facilitators.

As a first step, study abroad program directors and staff can receive training that includes the important role of communication across the sojourn. For example, communication training could include the important function of various forms of social support across the sojourn. Such training should include an emphasis on the importance of social support from sources within and outside of the study abroad context such as family and friends at home, the home and host university, the study abroad program, and other study abroad students. Study abroad program facilitators would also benefit from a better understanding of the role co-national communication plays as a mechanism for stress management and adjustment across the sojourn in helping students to have a positive experience. Finally, a training program for study abroad personnel could include information on the role of expectations across the sojourn, especially the expectations they actively create with and for the students.

Second, prior to studying abroad, students should be encouraged to take courses with a specific focus on cross-cultural adjustment. A one-credit course held throughout the semester preceding the study abroad would be more effective
than the typical one or two preparation sessions currently in place at most institutions. This one-credit course should be considered part of the “study abroad” package, meaning that it should not incur additional costs to the student and the credit should be applicable to the student’s academic program if possible or at least count toward the study abroad credits. Such a course would offer students the opportunity to get to know other students studying abroad. Students would benefit from a course that focuses primarily on cross-cultural adjustment from an interdisciplinary perspective, including but not limited to communication studies, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, leisure recreation, and education. In addition to presenting the historical and current context of international travel, the course would also offer theories related to cross-cultural adjustment and academic fulfillment, as well as offer practical advice. Providing students the tools to effectively adjust abroad or reduce the stress and anxiety involved in a study abroad may seem counter-intuitive to the goals of study abroad. Specifically, one might ask if it isn’t to their disadvantage to learn the “keys” for successful adjustment or cross-cultural adjustment rather than just to experience it. A course with a specific focus on cross-national adjustment will help students understand and interpret their adjustment as they experience it, but will not lessen the impact of their cross-national experience.

Third, program facilitators could create opportunities for students, as well as their friends and family, to discuss expectations and desires for the upcoming study abroad. Students could be presented with guidelines for developing positive, yet realistic expectations for their sojourn, and encouraged to develop plans for
achieving their goals. Fourth, and relatedly, study abroad programs should put an emphasis on student expectations and student goals for the study abroad and try to reduce external sources of pressure and expectations.

Fifth, students would benefit from a better understanding of the types of stress they are likely to encounter abroad. Students could be trained in how to identify sources of stress, the ways in which stress manifests itself physically, socially, and mentally, and in techniques to manage that stress. This training would help students anticipate stressful situations, prepare for unavoidable stressful situations, and circumvent others.

Sixth, once students are abroad they should be encouraged, rather than discouraged, to use their built-in co-national support system. Students could be given the opportunity to establish supportive networks and communication systems before they study abroad. A pre-established comfort zone will help students to have a sense of belonging when they arrive abroad and will have a system in place for necessary social support and information sharing. Once students are abroad, a seventh suggestion is to create ways in which students can institutionally integrate with French students. Students need to be encouraged to integrate with the French and also given specific procedures and/or contexts for doing so.

Finally, the eighth point suggests a similar set of guidelines for student reentry. Again, program facilitators should be trained in the important role of communication post entry. Although it would pose several logistical difficulties, a one-credit course concerning reentry and ways to make the most of a study abroad
experience would be ideal. However, at least minimally students should be offered a reentry training session. Program facilitators and students could be given additional information on expectations and experiences upon reentry to help sojourners create positive, but realistic expectations for their return. Students could be encouraged to and provided with the opportunities to maintain contact with each other post sojourn. Finally, students and their friends and family could be informed about reentry stress and the ways in which they could manage that stress especially as it relates to changes in the sojourner and changes that occurred among friends and family at home.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ilsa – But what about us?
Rick - We’ll always have Paris.
(Casablanca)

Conclusions are difficult to make when you know the story continues.

This study represents a very specific time frame capturing communication and identity behaviors among a group of students from March, 2004 to May, 2005. Yet, both communication patterns and identity change day-to-day across the lifespan (Nussbaum & Coupland, 2004). Not only are they both bound for change in the future, but communication and identity can also change retrospectively. Human experiences affect our identity and the ways we communicate. They can alter/affect who we are in the moment, who we will be in the future, and who we were. Age, wisdom, and experience give us a new lens to look back upon our old selves. For the students who participated in a study abroad, and the participants in this study in particular, time and experience will alter their perception of their time abroad, some in good ways, others in bad. Regardless of how students interpreted their experiences abroad, those experiences will directly and/or indirectly shape each student in the future in the same way that most life experiences do. Thus, to conclude a study on communication and identity that surrounded what will become a significant life event for many of the participants is to offer a perspective on a point of time knowing that the future will change that perspective. Thus, like a “choose your own adventure” novel, the end of this chapter does not offer closure, but rather represents a doorway of options for
participants, study abroad facilitators, and researchers. Before deciding on the next research or study abroad adventure, it is best to have a complete understanding of the options and challenges that surround this type of research. Therefore, in this chapter I do offer conclusive remarks about this particular study. I also point out limitations and challenges that accompanied me on this research journey. Lastly I offer a few personal reflections about the study in general. But most importantly, what I offer in this chapter is not an ending, but a beginning.

A Summary of Findings

The findings presented in this document begin with a description of the daily study abroad experience. It starts with a description of the pre-departure sessions when students were disconnected and distracted from each other and ends with a description of the students’ return and feelings of connection with each other, but no one else. Everything in the middle was just the process of getting there.

The descriptive account sets the scene for the roller coaster of cross-cultural adjustment. It conveys students’ feeling of lack of preparedness and sense of confusion upon arrival. Students experienced disappointment and anxiety when they realized that the Paris they had envisioned was not the reality they stepped into. Students held high expectations for their study abroad experience, to become fluent, to make only French friends, to truly immerse themselves in and make Paris their own, and to become more world-minded – a global citizen. Instead of fireworks the moment they got off the plane, they were met with seemingly
insurmountable language and cultural barriers. To overcome these barriers and take some relief by interacting with people who understood them, students began desperately to converge upon arriving at the IES center the first day. From that point forward, the friends and acquaintances they made at the IES center were their support system. The first need these groups fulfilled was the need to feel a sense of belonging. Within a very short amount of time abroad IES students formed little pockets of friends with whom they faced all challenges. An “all for one and one for all” attitude seemed to capture these groups, at least in the beginning. Through this support system, students were able to tackle and solve daily problems as a group – problems that ranged from feelings of severe isolation and loneliness to figuring out how to open doors. These groups offered the necessary means for students to pool their resources and start making sense out of their new environment. Within these groups students were able to cope with the il faut profiter pressure to succeed and make the most out of their sojourn. Their friendship groups helped them to deal with the realities of Paris in the face of their disappointments that it did not match up with their expectations. Further, their groups served as a means through which they could validate, challenge, and try out their old and new identities across the sojourn and into the return.

It was not just the virtue of being in a group that helped students to eventually negotiate their ways in and around Paris. For they did eventually become a part of Paris in one way or another. It was what the groups offered that helped students find their feet abroad. Groups offered a context in which a complex system of communication emerged to help students manage the daily
stressors of living abroad. “Just having someone to talk to” was the first step
toward psychological and social well-being. Within their groups students felt they
could talk about *anything* with *anyone*. Listening to and engaging in normal
conversations day in and day out in Paris gave insight into how their
communication patterns were more than “just talk.” After spending just over four
months with this group of students I was able to decipher nine different types of
talk that students used throughout their time abroad. This “talk” allowed students
to make daily adjustments abroad, which eventually led to their “success”
overseas. Students asked for and offered *advice* about various aspects about study
abroad from the moment they were accepted into the program throughout their
eventual return. Advice helped students make immediate decisions and gave
others the opportunity to share their “expertise,” and their “success stories.”

*Superficial and Introductory Talk* served an immediate purpose upon arriving in
Paris. It allowed students to form preliminary friendship groups and establish a
sense of belonging overseas. Students engaged in *Information Sharing* across the
sojourn, but most explicitly in the beginning when they were still trying to figure
out how everything worked in Paris. Students shared information about
everything from travel to making telephone calls. The group context made
information sharing effective and efficient. Through their small groups, students
were quickly able to gather and disperse information to the entire IES student
body. Students engaged in *Comparison or Comparative Communication* across
the sojourn as a means of establishing normative boundaries. Students compared
their experiences with each other to assess how they “were doing” in comparison
to the other students. *Humor* played an important role across the sojourn by allowing students to laugh about difficult situations they faced in Paris. It also served as means to foster closeness among sojourners, as they were able to laugh with and at each other across a variety of contexts. Like humor, students engaged in *Story Telling* as a means of entertainment, but also to convey messages such as warnings or social norms. Story telling also conveyed a sense of friendship and connection among those who actively participated in telling the story. Students used *Gossip* as a means of conveying social norms and establishing in-group and out-group boundaries among sojourners. Like comparison, gossip offered students a mode compare themselves against others, but unlike comparison this was almost always done in a negative way and was *not* in the presence of the comparison point. *Complaint* emerged as a type of talk that primarily helped students vent and articulate their frustrations about everything from the Parisian way of doing things to how much schoolwork they had. Students used complaint to commiserate and bond with each other. Finally, students used *Supportive Talk* as a means to bolster someone’s esteem or to mutually raise each other’s spirits. Supportive talk helped students establish a sense of comfort abroad. Most importantly supportive talk offered students an “I’m okay, you’re okay, it’s going to be okay” perspective.

These communication patterns helped students to manage the realization that the Paris they got was not the one they were expecting. Moreover, they helped students negotiate the identity changes and challenges that are inherent in such a sojourn.
After a semester in Paris, students were faced with the challenge of going home. For most of the students their return home was both a honeymoon and a heartbreaking experience. Students looked forward to going back to a comfortable environment where they did not have to work so hard just to accomplish simple daily tasks, but they also knew they would miss the life they had grown to enjoy in Paris. By the end of the semester students had finally adjusted to living overseas. They established a new and functional identity overseas and learned to make sense out of their new context. Then, they were called back home to start the whole process again. For many of the students it was not until they returned home that they came to realize how much they changed overseas. Being surrounded by friends and family who had not experienced as much change during the semester, and resuming the life they led before the sojourn, students were suddenly aware of how much their experience overseas had changed them. This realization once again left them with the question of who they were in that context and if there was anybody who could understand that new person. Fortunately, the students could turn to their study abroad friends and once again find solace in knowing that they were experiencing the same thing.

Although I was able to establish the importance of the types of talk students engaged in as they adjusted to life abroad, I went even further to account for why those patterns emerged and how they led to adjustment and identity shifts. After describing the experience abroad and the patterns of talk that emerged, I sought an explanation for why it all happened the way it did. I found some answers in the combination of two communication theories that helped me
explain the dynamic roles of expectations, stress, communication, and identity overseas – Burgoon’s (1978) expectancy violations theory and Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Using key components of each of these theories I posed the following explanation for the patterns I witnessed overseas. Students went overseas with several internal and external expectations. In addition to their own expectations for the study abroad, students also had the burden of carrying other peoples’ expectations (e.g., IES, co-students, friends/family at home, host family, and the home university). Students’ expectations fell largely within four categories, academic/language expectations, social expectations, cultural/travel experience expectations, and culture/value expectations. Almost immediately upon arriving in France, many of the students’ expectations were violated and students realized that many more of their expectations would be unmet. These expectation violations created and enhanced the stress already present in the international sojourn. In order to manage that stress and start to make sense of their new environment, students engaged in a process of adjustment facilitated by the use of specific patterns of communication, namely, advice, superficial introductory talk, information sharing, comparison, humor, story telling, gossip, complaint, and supportive talk. These types of talk not only helped students buffer stress abroad, but also gave them a channel to refine and create new expectations and social norms. Students used these types of talk to make daily adjustments abroad in the face of challenges. The more challenges they faced, the more they were forced to make adjustments. Students continued to make daily adjustments and eventually were able to successfully
navigate life in Paris. As students’ functional fitness increased overseas they became more confident in their abilities, and they began to take notice of the ways in which they were changing. This resulted in a shifting of student identities overseas, which would extend long into their return. Their “new” identities included a range from becoming a “global citizen,” to a new understanding of what it means to be “an American,” to very personal aspects of their identity such as becoming more independent and self-sufficient.

Challenges, Limitations, and Ways to Overcome Them

Not surprisingly, the very things that made this study unique and possible, were also those that posed the biggest challenges in the field and the biggest limitations to the findings. Two of the most important aspects of this research – that it was a longitudinal and multi-sited study – posed unique limitations. First, it was difficult to track participants throughout the duration of the study. This was a challenge from the outset, as students were scattered across the U.S. during the summer prior to departure. Students arrived in and departed Paris with widely varying schedules sometimes a month or so apart. Once in Paris it was difficult to maintain tabs on participants because they traveled within and outside of France almost every weekend. Returning to the States did not prove to be much easier to locate and schedule students for an interview because of hectic course loads, graduation, and some students did not return to the U.S. or moved to a different state. This was especially a challenge for my “precious few” primary participants, because I was unable to maintain a master schedule of interviews, observations, or journal collections for all the participants and was instead forced to create a
separate schedule for each one. This was a limitation in that their varying schedules made it so that a pre-departure interview might have occurred within a week of departure for one student, but a month before another student’s departure. Such limitations made it difficult to make comparisons across the individual sojourners. I attempted to correct for this limitation by encouraging students to maintain their journal so that I could glean some insight during the same periods of time. Additionally, once abroad I was able to overcome this limitation by the shear amount of people who participated in observations and interviews across the sojourn. I conducted at least one interview a week in Paris, and sometimes up to five. So, although I was unable to conduct interviews with the primary participants during the same time frame, I was able to interview several other participants during all phases/time frames of the study abroad. In this way, from the journals, observations, and frequent interviews, I gathered data from almost every day abroad that accounts for the general process of adjustment over time even if it was not just from the primary participants.

The final limitation to the longitudinal nature of this research is determining when to stop collecting data for this phase of the study. Reentry data was the most difficult to obtain due to the challenges listed earlier as well as the fact that not all students had returned from France at the end of that semester or even the academic year. Reentry is an important part of the sojourner experience and deserves to be investigated in-depth and across time. Although this study reports reentry findings from two weeks to five months post-sojourn, this is not enough time to truly understand the process of reentry and the impact the entire
sojourner experience (including the reentry) has on the sojourner’s identity in the long run. Researchers who which to undertake a similar study in the future would be wise to extend the research until several months or even years after the return.

A second limitation to this study is that these data were collected from participants engaged in one study abroad program, specifically the International Education of Students Paris (IES-Paris) program. Although the majority of the data represented here were gathered from students attending college throughout the United States and Canada, including some international students, with the exception of three participants, they were all involved in the same study abroad program. Many of the findings from this study are specific to the IES Paris center. For example, the IES center had its own rules, courses, excursions, and orientation sessions that shaped the students’ social and academic experiences abroad. Other study abroad programs would shape students’ experiences somewhat differently. I did not let this limitation weigh to heavily in my analysis, however, because data gathered from a previous study (Pitts, 2001) indicated that students’ experiences were similar across different study abroad programs. In addition, the interviews and socializing I did with students from other study abroad program indicated other study abroad students experienced the same difficulties as the IES participants. Similar studies in the future would benefit by including observations from other study abroad programs and interviews with study abroad students in other programs. Alternatively, follow-up studies could take place in programs other than IES in order to provide a point of comparison across all locations.
The final limitation to this study is one that is familiar to all researchers, but was a significant constraint in this study in particular. This study carried with it a considerable amount of financial and academic responsibility. These challenges were somewhat relieved by a one-semester course release granted to me by the Research and Graduate Studies Office (RGSO) and a small monetary grant awarded to me by the Office of Education Abroad to offset the cost of the program tuition, without which I would have been unable to conduct this study. The costs of research were exasperated by the fact that I had very few resources in Paris other than the equipment I brought with me, namely my lap top computer, a video camera, audio recorders, and boxes of blank tape. I had little to no access to printers, copiers, and library materials. These costs were in addition to those inherent in international research including visa and passport fees, international flights, and additional housing. Beyond the financial responsibilities associated with ethnographic research, my access to students and the IES center necessitated that I enroll as a full-time study abroad student. Thus, in addition to my responsibilities as a graduate student at Penn State and my research responsibilities, I was also held responsible for a full course load in French while I was abroad. Financial and academic responsibilities constrained my research by infringing on my freedom to choose which activities I could participate in abroad. On the one had, I was able to empathize with students’ complaints about having too much work and not enough money. When it was time for our final exams, everyone crowded into my apartment for an insightful “study session” which was really just another chat session. However, when a group of students went to
Amsterdam for an impromptu four-day weekend or skipped class to go to happy hour, my academic and financial responsibilities often left me grounded. This was unfortunate because those were the kinds of activities that students engaged in that provided insight into their communication patterns and specifically the ways in which they developed and maintained friendships across the sojourn. To overcome this limitation, I engaged in as many different social engagements as I could across the sojourn and the reentry, but I also made a point to ask students to tell me the story of their weekend or night out when I was not able to be present.

Getting research funding is no small feat, but a necessary feature for future research. Researchers interested in conducting a similar study in the future would be well-served to apply for a Fulbright or other distinguished international grant. One final way to overcome some of these constraints would be to obtain full access to students and classes without having to enroll as a full-time student.

Directions for Future Research

As promised, the conclusion of this study is really just the beginning of another. Results from this study point in any number of directions for future research in the areas of cultural adjustment, communication, and identity. However, in this section I have narrowed it down to what I think are the three most important directions future research could take. The following future directions are suggested as a means for theory development in an abductive, multi-methodological, and longitudinal manner.

The first and perhaps most obvious direction for future research is to continue a series of similar studies in different locations through different study
abroad programs. Continuing this research in other sites would offer insight into the *transferability* of these findings and answer questions about whether similar patterns would emerge from an Anglophone or more remote country. An increased number of cases across a variety of settings would assist researchers in the development of a grounded theory of cross-cultural adjustment among student sojourners. Given the continued upward trend of study abroad participation, such a theory would be useful to program participants, facilitators, and sponsors.

The results from this study point in a secondary, but similar direction. In addition to increased cases, there is evidence from this research that future scholars could significantly increase the participant pool and test these findings in a larger population. Specifically, researchers could generate hypotheses based on the findings from this study and test them in the context of Burgoon’s (1978) expectancy violations theory and Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Such testing would not only generate more knowledge about sojourner adjustment, but would also contribute to the strengthening of those theories.

The final point is more of a prophecy than a suggestion; it nevertheless deserves attention. The future direction for this specific study is to continue to “study” the participants with whom I studied abroad at intervals throughout the future. I intend to interview and/or solicit narratives from all the students who participated in the Fall, 2004 IES-Paris program approximately one year after their return and every few years following that. Ideally, I will be able to maintain contact with these students over a several years and see how and in which ways
their “junior year abroad” influenced their life choices across the lifespan. If future researchers also heed this suggestion, in a short amount of time a good deal of information on students’ reentry experiences, as well as the ways in which their study abroad influenced other areas of their life (e.g., academics and language acquisition, career choice, travels) will be collected. Such a database will help us to better understand and account for the much-anticipated outcomes of participating in a study abroad program, such as increased world-mindedness and cultural understanding. And, of direct interest to this study, it will also offer insight into the ways in which study abroad shaped and continues to shape student sojourners’ identity.

By working inductively and adding more cases to the study abroad scholarship while at the same time working deductively to begin testing case findings on larger populations a theory of short-time sojourner adjustment should emerge relatively quickly. Moreover, by extending sojourner studies beyond their semester or year abroad scholars will be able to point toward specific long-term outcomes of the study abroad. A theory of short-term sojourner adjustment and specific knowledge of the way such an event shapes lives will help future sojourners and program facilitators to better prepare for the sojourn as well as the long-term effects.

Le Bilan

In our final days of class, our grammar instructor asked us to provide “un bilan en haut voix” (a summary out loud) to the rest of the class about our experiences. It was easier to summarize the entire experience in French because
our vocabulary was so poor that a statement like “it was great; I learned a lot” seemed profound. Although that sentiment would certainly summarize this research, perhaps a more in-depth reflection is necessary. In this final section I offer my *bilan* of this study.

This study offers unique insight into the everyday lives of students as they spent a semester abroad – an experience that will no doubt influence who they become in the future. Engaging in this research reminded me of the importance of my own study abroad experience as a junior in college and the impression that made and continues to make on my identity, though that was a long time ago. And though among the student sojourners I was jokingly known as “the coolest old person” they had met, I did not feel far removed from the students as we experienced this semester together. I had age and experience on my side, they had youth and resilience on theirs. One focus of this project was on identity across the sojourn, and for the most part that focus was on the participants, but my identity shifted as well. I am habituated to working with undergraduate students having taught many classes of undergrads in the last six years. Yet, this was the first time I felt a distinct difference between them and myself. In that difference I was able to admire and respect this group of students as though they were something quite different from me, yet familiar. I imagined myself having transcended some sort of generational boundary in my life for the first time since I was a teenager. And, having finally transcended this generational boundary I was able to look upon it with much greater clarity much as we do when we revisit our childhood in our adult years. I was truly able to look upon this group of students as unique
communicators and participants with a significant story to tell that was different from my own and very important. I was in the unique position to be close enough in age to the students that they behaved naturally (or at least in a very unreserved manner) around me and invited me on their wild weekend adventures. I was also just old enough and just experienced enough that they confided in me, asked for my advice, and trusted me.

I gained a new respect and appreciation for undergraduate students and their plight to make sense of their world and who they are thanks to the students who participated in this study. One of the interesting personal outcomes of this research is my sharpened ability to be able to validate opposing concepts. I had to be able to hear one story, one way, from one person and hear it as a truth and hear another person tell the same story in a different way and hear it as truth as well. I had to be able to fully engage in a social context with one group of people and then turn around and be equally engaging with the target of the previous group’s jealousy or dislike without, and without appearing to, play favorites. In this way I grew as a person, I expanded my own identity as a researcher, of course, just by the nature of engaging in another research adventure, but also as a friend, a mentor, and a confidante.

As a result of this study, I am more confident than ever in the importance of study abroad and the need to make the study abroad experience a positive one. Every person we come into contact with we have the opportunity to influence. In an international sojourn, I argue that this includes the opportunity to have a positive affect on the French and other nationalities, even on other U.S.
Americans abroad, but most importantly, this can include having the opportunity to introduce yourself to and have a positive influence on a “new you.” International sojourns can be a positive life shaping experience that has the potential to reach beyond the individual, but to make a difference in the lives of all the people with whom a sojourner interacts. I, for one, agree with Fulbright (1976), “if large numbers of people know and understand the people from nations other than their own, they might develop a capacity for empathy, a distaste for killing other men, and an inclination to peace” (p. 2). I urge other scholars to continue working to encourage cross-cultural bridge building and to continue developing theories and guides to assist future sojourners in this goal. As for me, I hope to have the fortune and fortitude to continue such studies in the face of global confusion and chaos – to make a difference in how other nations perceive the people of the U.S. by our behaviors and our gestures in the international context. It is possible to change the face of America though our relationships with people all over the world. We can create positive intercultural relationships, but only if we give our sojourners the tools to do so.
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Appendix A
Interview Guide

**Before scheduling the interview get:**
Name, Age, Contact Information, Year in School, Major, and Minor.
(demographic/background)

**Pre-Departure Guiding Questions**
Talk to me about how you decided to study abroad. (past/behavior)
   Why? (past/opinion)

Do you speak French? (present/knowledge)
   Other languages

Have you studied abroad before?  (past/knowledge)
   Talk to me about that experience.

What are your thoughts about your upcoming semester abroad? (future/opinion)

What are your feelings about your upcoming semester abroad? (feelings/present)
   How do you feel now? (feelings/present)
   How do you expect to feel when you arrive? (feelings/future)
   Throughout the semester abroad? (feelings/future)

What have you been doing to prepare for your semester abroad?
(present/behavior)
   Mental preparation
   Physical preparation

How do you think you will spend your days abroad? (Future/behavior)
How would you *like* to spend a typical day abroad? (future/behavior-opinion)

What do you hope to gain from your semester abroad? (future/knowledge)

**During Sojourn Interview Questions**

How are you feeling? (present/feeling)
   What are you feeling good about?
   What are you feeling bad about?
   Health
   Stress
   Attitude toward sojourn
   Attitude toward self
   Attitude toward others

What do you do with those feelings? (present/behavior)
What helps you manage those bad feelings?

What helps you create or maintain the good ones?

Tell me about how you have been spending your days in general. (present/behavior)
- Tell me about time that you spend alone.
- Tell me about time that you spend with others.

Who do you socialize the most with? (present/behavior)

Talk to me about what that is like. (present/feelings)
- What do you do? (present/behavior)
- Why do you do it? (present/opinion)

How do those behaviors make you feel? (present/feeling)

Do you believe your behaviors are similar or different from other study abroaders? (present/opinion)

Tell me about the most significant event that has happened to you since our last discussion. (past/opinion)
- Why was that significant?
- How did that make you feel? (past/feeling)

**Post-Sojourn**

Tell me about your experiences since you returned from France. (present/opinion)

How do you feel since the return? (present/feelings)

Looking back at the semester as a whole, tell me about your experience. (past/opinion)

What were some of the highlights (positive and negative)? (past/opinion)

Describe for me your typical day in France. (past/behavior)
- What were atypical days?

How did that change across the semester? (past/opinion)

What did you gain from this experience? (present/knowledge)

Do you believe you have lost anything from this experience? (present/opinion)

What advice would you give a friend who was going to study abroad next year? (future/behavior)
Appendix B
Research Logs and Memos

Analytic Log

4/21/2005 - 3:32:29 PM THURSDAY

My goal all this week was to start playing my first analytical attack... In order for me to complete this project this summer, my co-chairs and myself decided I need to focus this project on a very specific, smaller portion of the larger study... My first stage in the analytic process is to put a focus/filter on my data so that I can analyze it with a very specific purpose for this dissertation. I do this with full intention of coming back to the data to answer the rest of my questions.

1) Place a filter on your data to speak to a specific area of your research.

Do I focus on friendship and interpersonal relationships?
Do I focus on identity?
Do I focus on the cross-cultural relationships?
Do I focus on a stress-coping model?

Ideas:

Filter data looking for ways in which students use communication to manage the stress resulting from study abroad unmet expectations --> sources of expectations --> communication patterns that help (information seeking, gossip, social comparison, competitive complaint, story telling, humor, sharing experiences, self-reflections, advice).

Filter data looking for turning points for student sojourners in adjusting to living overseas.

Filter for communication processes and patterns used by student sojourners in adjusting to their host country.

Look at only a few specific forms of communication, say three for example, and go into depth about them - Information Seeking (includes advice), Social Comparison (includes gossip and complaint), Story Telling (includes humor, sharing experiences, and self-reflections).

At the moment, I feel like I can start analyzing for ways students used communication to start coping with the unmet expectations. On preliminary analysis of the data, this is the first thing that popped out to me, it is likely a very surface level finding, but could be a very useful start and seems fit nicely with an academic paper. It also has the most immediate application uses, as it is
practically useful to pinpoint where student expectations are coming from, what those expectations are, and how students deal with those expectations.

I feel this idea came almost too easily. I know I can push this further, but I don’t want to ignore these interesting findings about expectations. Or, perhaps it is coming this easily because I was there, living it, writing it, experiencing it, hearing it and now that I have completed all my transcriptions, it seems very salient.

I am going to continue to brainstorm to see what other filters I can put on the data for the first document.

2) There is a question that pops up here about how I am going to write it up.

This is to be a narrative tale. I wish to write it in chapter segments that start with a popular media quote (Sabrina, French Kiss, Me Talk Pretty One Day, Moveable Feast, Almost French) and a quote from a participant. Each chapter should be focused on either one concept such as a communication pattern, or written chronologically, moving from the pre-departure through the return.

If I go with the expectations --> expectation violations --> stress --> communication coping patterns filter, then the write up should be chronological. Telling the tale from the process perspective - what I am thinking going into this - oh my gosh, this wasn’t at all what I expected - I don’t know what to do - let’s talk about it - what I am thinking about going home -

In that case, the beginning chapters can really be the “getting ready” information. It can start with the importance of studying this topic. Then move into background information on study abroad (traditionally the literature review). Then, it will go into pre-departure interviews and student expectations. Then go abroad, walk off the plane, start to hear the students’ overseas adventures unfold. Bring in the observations. Discuss how what is happening at the beginning is not what they expected. Discuss the level of stress students have. Where is this stress coming from? How can you see it, feel it, hear it at IES? (people breaking down in class, people getting sick, people very anxious, people talking with Diana). Write about the ways in which students clump together to start dealing with this stress as small groups - communal coping. Describe the ways they talk, where they go, what they do. Go further into the study abroad and write about how students reach a turning point where they start reflecting upon their experiences - they catch up with themselves in their new cultural location. After two months most students level out although there are the outliers. Friendships are developed - this is the point where you know whether or not you have a *true* friendship or if it was just something you *needed* in the beginning. Then, students start preparing to go home. They once again become desperate to accomplish all of their goals in France. Students again realize that some goals were impossible (at least perceived as impossible) to achieve (fluency, making lasting French friends,
seeing/doing everything). Students develop expectations for their return. Students return and try to get back into living their previous lives, even though much has changed. For the first time students are aware of how much their identities shifted as a result of studying abroad. Then I can have an application chapter where I address things that students, parents, friends/boyfriends, and program facilitators (as well as departments) can do to help ensure a successful sojourn. (realize your expectations and your limitations, hear the advice from these students, develop social bonds, take note of your goals, forgive yourself for making lots and lots of errors!)

In the pre-departure interviews look specifically for expectations and who the students are talking to and about what prior to their trip over seas.

You also need to get basic demographic information about these students - previous experiences, who they “are.”

I should also start a story line for each of my core participants, “main characters” (Penn Staters and Kara) and a short bio for the “chorus” (one timers). I need a file for each participant -as well as to fill in their attributes.

3) What order to I analyze the data in?

This is a good question! Should I do this chronologically? Or should I do each participant in order and then move on to the next participant? Should I start with field notes, journals, or interviews?

What if I took a few transcripts, fieldnotes and journals across time (cross-sectional data) to see where that might take me - to get a feel for what was happening for people at that time. That might help me to determine the order in which I should analyze data.

4/22/2005 - 11:24:35 AM

The next decision I have to make is what order to start coding the data in. Either way, it will be chronological in a sense, but either chronological across all data forms or in groups of students and data types.

Pros and Cons

If I analyze it straight across, day by day, in chronological order I would get a sense of the process - how things unfolded - but this would be a group vision - a full view - and might lack details.

If I analyze data in groups of data across time (all the interviews, journals, then all the observational stuff) there would be too much of a separation between what I observed and what participants said and were writing about in their
journals. What would the benefit be of doing this? I would be able to focus specifically on one form of data, so I wouldn’t have to switch analytic tactics. But, the majority of data types are interviews, anyway, so the rest is “just supplementary.” And, the journals are not going to be the strongest source of data.

I really have to try and get an IRB amendment to solicit everyone’s journal from the IES program. For now, though, I could just solicit those from the participants I already have. I should also see if I can get someone to type up the written journals I already have or at least scan those into a word document.

If I analyze my data by individual students I could miss the group effect (ex: analyzing all of one participant’s data, then going on the next participant in order). But, it would make it possible to really get at the individual experience. Then, I can compare each individual case.

Ah ha! The question I am asking here is less about the order in which I should analyze the data (although this is a part of it) the question really is what are my units of data! (pat on back). Ok, well, that is a good question. I believe that my units of data are the individual participants. So, each individual is a package unit (some larger than others) that are comprised of interviews and journal entries. Some units of analysis are only comprised of one single interview and maybe some observational data. The question here, however, is what do I do with the observational stuff? My field notes and reflective memos don’t usually go into depth about specific people, they are more global statements and “mood capturers.” Can you have two types of units of analysis? Ok, maybe this as an approach.... each participant is a unit of analysis. I am a participant, therefore, I am also a unit of analysis, and my observational notes and reflective memos are part of my packaging. This sounds good.

In which case, the question is answered. I will take each unit of analysis and analyze them one at a time. I will either start with my Field and Observational Notes --> Core Participants --> Supplemental Participants OR Core Participants --> Supplemental Participants --> Field Notes

I have decided to use the Field Notes --> Core Participants --> Supplemental Participants

I made this decision because I think it will help me to re-visit my observational notes before I start looking at participants’ information. It will “get me back into the scene.” (Although I wish I could really just go back to Paris and get into the scene, scene). It will get my head in the right analytic space.

5/4/2005 - 3:35:54 PM

People tell stories as a warning:  
story about getting strangled
story about last year IES students getting broken noses at Odeon
story about the bombing in Madrid and how they couldn’t contact some
missing people
story about dragging drunk people off the boat last year

Students are “Expected” to create a “third space” in which they can start
making connections with French people. They are expected to go out and become
friends with French people and to avoid hanging out with American students.
These expectations are placed on students, and they are expected to do it by
themselves. They are solely responsible for their experiences in France, for
making French friends, for adjusting to the culture, for making the most out of
their time abroad.


I was just thinking about “why” the gossip. I am coding passages as
“gossip, gossip, gossip,” but I don’t have much of what the actual gossip was, just
that we were doing it, and about whom. Then it hits me, we are setting our
boundaries. It is really social identity theory, we are deciding who “we” are in
comparison to who “they” are. The “we” in this scenario is the group of friends or
to-be friends who are trying to figure out who we are, if we are any good, are we
doing the study abroad “right,” etc., the “they” are the people we make fun of or
compare ourselves too. “they” are our comparison group. We don’t really
compare ourselves to the French, because they are not in our comparison level.
The Americans at least start off on the same base as we do. We then sort of go
through a list of what we think are extremes on either side of us and naturally feel
like we “are normal.” For example, we might gossip and/or make fun of someone
who has more money than we do (popular kids group), people who speak better
French than we do, or who speak worse, people who travel too much, people who
don’t do anything.

So, gossip is, perhaps in part, a social identity process through social
comparison.

5/12/2005 - 9:46:28 PM

Ok, now that I have finished all of the field notes and all of the interviews
for “my first” participant - Michelle - I think it is best to go ahead and do the
interviews for one person across the sojourn and then do their journals (if they
gave them to me). I will summarize their journals and type them in. This will help
me by allowing me to track all of their changes across the sojourn - especially
identity - and then I can compare the participants with each other in chunks of
time (first interview, second interview, etc.)

My advisors want a “solid first draft” by July 1st. So, I am thinking that I need to stop coding when I finish my PSU participants plus Kara and then start analyzing from there. I have already coded enough documents that there are some very clear patterns forming and I have enough evidence to talk about their talk patterns and expectancy violations.

So, I hope to finish all the coding mid next week and then start collapsing codes and engaging in deep analysis.


The difficulty the students experienced really boils down to balancing dialectical tensions and managing expectation violations. On the one hand, students want to be fully immersed into French society (language fluency, blending in, having French friends) yet at the same time they enjoy/need the companionship of other US Americans or international students. Ok, so the overall desire is a sense of connection of fitting in, of belonging. Although all students disclosed a desire to achieve this sense of connection (at least to some level) by integrating in the French system, they were not all able to do so. However, the need for connection still existed and had to be met in an alternate way. Thus, the US American/international student base fulfilled this need. The less the students were integrated in the French system, the more they held on to their co-national and international network despite the fact that this was associated with feelings of guilt and being unsuccessful.

Um, well ok, maybe not dialectics. Maybe just expectation violations? Not sure. I have to think further. but there has to be something here.


I have decided on an Expectancy Violation frame a la Burgoon. It is not exactly what she had in mind as far as EVT goes and is taking it one step removed from what she and others typically say in that there is a violation and then the communicator has to evaluate it and react to it, this typically happens within in the communicative exchange. However, in this case, I think the reaction to a violation happens outside of the immediate violation and students cope with the stress resulting from the violations through their patterns of talk. EVT hints at the way people eventually create better expectations so that they are not violated later, but doesn’t directly address this. So, I am bringing back Young Kim’s stress-adaptation-growth model and her theory to then explain how as students get better at managing stress, they become more functionally fit, and experience identity shifts. I am not sure how all this is going to fall together, but I think these two theoretical frameworks are complimentary and **really do** add insight into my findings!
7/23/2005 - 8:36:33 PM

Wow! Okay, the theories really do help, I need to also make some kind of a visual representation of how they work together. I see it kind of holographically now, EVT explains where the stress came from (the who and the what) and how the communication patterns helped students to cope with the expectations and reformulate expectations. Then, Kim’s ITCCA takes over from there, as she starts with the stress, and then I use the same comm patterns to explain how students reduced the stress, and then it moves into growth, functional fitness, and what I am calling identity expansion. The holographic or 3-D part would be the middle, the stress and the comm outcomes should stand out when I layer these to theories. I wish I had some innate graphic art ability!!!!

Process Log

4/21/2005 - 3:23:50 PM THURSDAY

Goal:
Today I am continuing to set up my N-VIVO file. I have transferred all of my completed interviews to date, as well as all of the typed observational documents. I need to edit the attributes that I created before I left for Paris. This is likely going to be an on-going process, as I expect “new” attributes to pop up as I begin coding. I also hope to lay out a “game plan” for tackling the analysis. See Personal Log for more description on this.

What I accomplished:
I just wrote in the analytic log. I am still trying to figure out what my approach to data analysis is going to be.

4/22/2005 - 9:35:35 AM FRIDAY

Goal:
Look over Analytic Log, see where I am.

Make Attributes.

What I accomplished:
I filled in all the cells for the attributes that I had already created. I also created a new attribute, “change in length of stay” to capture those students who either changed from a semester only program to a year or those who changed from a year to a semester.
I copied all of my field notes and participant journals. I also filtered through some of the “documents” that I had from the semester abroad and copied a few of those things for coding.

I still have to print out all of my participant interviews so that I have a hard copy.

I might try to do that on Tuesday morning and Wednesday.

Wednesday I think I will try to get some of the photos up on a website or something. I guess I should get a dot com, actually, so that I can always post my research and stuff like that.

I have to solicit my participants for their journals. I counted, and I have a total of 40 participants, although there are several of them that I did not interview.

GOALS:

I will start reading/coding the field notes that I have in N-VIVO. I will likely not bring my computer to school tomorrow, I can bring the hard copies of field notes that I don’t already have in the computer and start coding on them directly.

I am going to start with the earliest notes and code the notes chronologically.

Accomplished:

Re-named field notes to have the date first.

**note** it works nicely to click “date created” on the document explorer, because I imported all of the docs in chunks, so although they are not in chronological order because it doesn’t read the numbers right, if I click that, I can easily see (because I color coded them) what data types I have and the order they go in.

Completed Documents:
3-17-04
3-18-04
Start with 9-6-04

Starting with 9-6-04

Completed 9-6-04

The field notes are hard to “code” because so much of it is just my description of what is going on. I don’t know how useful they are, really. I think they will just add some depth to the statements I make about the other forms of data.

Start with 9-9-04 green print


Completed 9-13-04 Cross Cultural Adaptation Session Notes

Next: 9-13-04 Cafe Daguerre chatting

I just counted up my documents. I have 75. If I do 3 documents a day, I should be able to finish coding all the documents in 25 days. Then, I will have to collapse all of my codes and start making links. That will take another solid week or so. Sadly, there is NO WAY I will be able to finish by summer deadline.

I will have to code at least 3 transcripts a day, but I should strive to do more of the observational notes, because they are shorter than the interviews, and it might be too hard to do more than one interview a day. Regardless, the new goal is to do THREE documents a day.

4/30/2005 - 5:23:20 PM SATURDAY

start with 9-13-04 Cafe Daguerre chatting at the green part.

My goal for this evening is to complete
9-13-04 Cafe Daguerre
9-13-04 Lang Exam
9-14-04 Lang Class

I completed 9-13-04 Cafe Daguerre. It took longer than I had expected. But, overall it was good data. Since it was a conversation that occurred among a group of people at the beginning who didn’t really know each other, it was great to capture some of the “getting to know you” interaction that I had been observing that whole week.
5/2/2005 - 4:00:34 PM MONDAY
My goal is to complete the following 2 transcripts since it is so late in the day:

9-23-04
9-24-04

Completed:

9-23-04 (week 2)
9-24-04 (week 2)

Both of these documents were relatively short, so it didn’t take too long to code them. I am going to finish coding all of the observational stuff and then I am going to start either making cases or putting them into trees to move them out of the way. But I want to wait until I am finished with all of them first.

I am moving on to 9-26, 9-27, and 9-29.

Completed both.

Next:
10-03
10-31
11-03
11-18
11-18 (gossip)
11-22


I copied Anita’s journal this afternoon.

10-31 COMPLETE
11-03 COMPLETE
11-18 COMPLETE

Ok, I completed the three for the day, but since there is one more, I should just go for it!

All of the field notes that I had in the computer have been coded. I made analytical notes when things popped into my head.

I realize now that there are a ton of notes still in the journal, so I will need to start coding those. what I would like to do is just type up the most important
portions and import those in N-VIVO so that I can code them. I should be able to code them, then type them up and just drop and drag.

Tomorrow:
Start coding paper journal documents.


It seems like it would be easier to bring the paper documents into the office and code them there, using the computer here to code the computer documents, then I won’t have to lug everything in all the time. But, that is such a minor issue. I should just continue where I said I should continue, instead of re-shuffling. So I am going to clear off my desk and start coding on the actual field notes that I have. I don’t have any idea how many I have, but my goal will be to finish those today. Once I finish them, I will import them into N-VIVO.

I just finished reading all of the field notes I took in my journal. There were 61 total pages of field notes in the journal.

I made notes on the margin of the field notes that describe in a sentence or a phrase what was going on in that portion of the field note. The purpose of which was for me to filter through the notes to pick out notes that need to be imported for analysis. I can quickly skim through these pages now and type in the field notes so that I can bring them into N-VIVO and code them with the rest of the observational documents.

I am now going to work on typing up the important info in a word document to import when I am finished.

I completed re-typing portions of my field journal as a word document and imported it into N-VIVO.

Next I am going to work on entering the loose-leaf entries into a word doc.

I typed up and imported all of the bilan reports.

I typed up and imported the note Kara wrote me in class about her “divine intervention.”

I am finished for the night.

Tomorrow I will start with the remainder loose leaf notes that are on the desk and then go through my little black notebook in my computer bag to see if there is anything there.
5/6/2005 - 8:14:12 PM FRIDAY

I said I was going to start “wrangling” the free nodes. I am not sure how that is going to progress, but I do know that I need to make it a more parsimonious system. I think I will start making some very loose tree nodes and plunking the free nodes in there as large categorical orders. However, that doesn’t sound like such a good idea, because then I am placing them in a category (no matter how large) that might render them unlikely to be “seen” as anything else. Need to look at my nodes and think about what to do. One option, I guess, is to start another brand new N-VIVO file for the interviews. I could do one file for each participant. I wouldn’t be able to Merge them, however, because the master document would become too HUGE! But, the machine is already slowing down with the number of codes that I do already have. So, I need to do something.

Oh! I just realized that I should have made SETS of all of my documents to make it easier to search them and just to code them in order, actually! I thought color coding was the best idea there, but not really, because there aren’t enough colors. So, brainstorm! I put the documents in SETS! I have a SET for FIELD NOTES, a SET for PRE-DEPARTURE INTERVIEWS, a SET for SEPTEMBER INTERVIEWS, a SET for OCTOBER INTERVIEWS, a SET for NOVEMBER INTERVIEWS, a SET for DECEMBER INTERVIEWS, a SET for RE-ENTRY INTERVIEWS. I will also need to make a set for the journal entries if I make those electronic. I don’t have a set for my logs, but I don’t think that is necessary.

5/8/2005 - 5:00:25 PM SUNDAY

I have just completed going though all of my codes with paper and pencil to see if I had any duplicates and to see if I could combine some of them. I only had a few exact duplicates, I already merged those nodes. I now have 731 nodes. My next step will be to start combining some of the obvious ones using the “tree” function on N-VIVO, as I do so, I will “tighten up” node names and descriptions and start merging more together. After the preliminary look, I can start forming nodes into about 66 large categories with a remainder of over 100 nodes (I’m estimating) that didn’t “fit” anywhere or need to wait for friend nodes from interviews.

I have started to move some of the larger categories into the tree nodes. This is going to take a long time. I should move things into categories when I finished a document from here on out now that I have some things established.

Finished looking at all the free nodes for a second time. I only moved a few nodes to trees in this pass through. My next task will be to start with the interviews.

Student Expectations --> Where they come from --> How they use communication to cope with it.

I am just going to peek at my first interview (Michelle, pre-departure) to see what it is going to look like, then I will likely call it a night.

Tomorrow I will start coding Michelle’s pre-departure. I hope to code her first interview in Paris tomorrow as well. 5/9/2005 - 9:47:23 PM


I started collapsing Sheila’s codes and somehow either realized that at some point I deleted an entire tree node concerning the integration and not separation of French and US students, or else I just deleted it right before noticing that. Either way, it is gone. I am really irritated. However, I saved a copy recently, so I know most of the subcodes under that tree node, although they will no longer be attached to their data. I had an old node report that listed all the open nodes under that tree, so I just used in-vivo coding to at least make another file for them, even though there is no data attached. My old saved document (6-1-05) on a CD (dissertation) will still have the majority of those codes listed and linked with their data. So, on the one hand, I am thankful that I have been backing things up from time to time and running node reports every so often. I need to make sure I run a node report every day, now. Had I done that...I wouldn’t have really lost any data, just their links. oh well. I am still thrilled with myself for doing what I did. 6/5/2005 - 2:18:34 PM

6/12/2005 - 6:46:38 PM SUNDAY

Well... I am at the point where if I am to reach the goal of starting some analysis tomorrow, I am going to have to push through tonight and code all of Kara’s transcripts. This is totally do-able, since I have a few hours of “daylight” aka “burning the midnight oil work time” to get this done. In fact, I think that since 2 of Kara’s interviews were with Gina’s, then there are really only 2 transcripts that remain. It should take about 4 hours total.

Finished. So tomorrow I start doing MAJOR code collapsing!

New goals:
Collapse and categorize all codes by next Sunday (the 19th July)
Preliminary thematic analysis by July 26th.

6/19/2005 - 4:14:56 PM SUNDAY

I don’t know if I will EVER finish. I need to go through all of my TREE nodes today and make sure they are internally consistent, and then start combining my TREE codes. If I can place the remaining Free codes, that would be good, too, but I don’t think I can. I now have 1909 TREE NODES and 0 FREE NODES. I am combining TREE NODES now to make super tree nodes with really saturated tree and free nodes within. The nodes are not yet mutually exclusive and still need to be pushed around until everything falls in the right place. At this point I am taking all of the little tree nodes and putting them into huge similar chunks of parent tree nodes. For example, right now the Tree node “Hmsk-roller coaster” has just about everything in it that has to do with adjustment across time. This node is just chaos right now, but will have to be cleaned up. Once I get a few super tree nodes, I can start pulling them back apart to get a better picture of how each of these nodes plays with the other ones. I am not ready to make any claims about patterns, yet, because although I have several groupings of findings, I can’t get a clear picture of how they relate to each other.

6/21/2005 - 10:24:50 AM TUESDAY

Goal for today is to finish collapsing all the TREE nodes and then finding harmony within them. Tomorrow I can start formulating an outline of what I will write for the results.
Okay, so what is it exactly you think you’re gonna get out of this Study Abroad thing, anyway?

Picture this: one September Saturday afternoon we decide to go sightseeing at my college for the very first time. I stand grilling kielbasa just outside the end zone at Pfitz Field when I see Jack Bradley. Many Saturdays before, Jack and I began our junior year abroad together as IES in Paris. I catch his eye and wave and he goes over to him. Jack’s face lights with delight as he explains how happy he is to see me. He wants to know what I’m doing in life, and we exchange domestic pleasantries for a minute or two until his face abruptly darkens and he asks, “Bern, do you still think about Paris?”

“Aside from you,” I admit. “Paris is the only place that’s ever made me homesick, even all these years later. How about you?”

“Bern,” he says, his tone suddenly grave, “I think about it every day.” He gets on to elaborate, and we pass ten or fifteen minutes analyzing the mark Paris had made on our lives. When he needs to return to his family, we shake hands, smiling, but as I walk away he calls after me. When I turn back, his face has gone grave again. He holds up a finger to mark his point, but I forget.

“Moveable Feast, Bern,” he says. “Moveable Feast.”

He’s never forgotten, and neither have I.

My first day at IES-Paris was almost my last. Everything seemed to go wrong. My landlady didn’t show, and I had no idea where I was going, and I couldn’t understand the taxi driver, and when we arrived at my new address I realized I’d left most of my clothes on the sidewalk in front of school. I had to convince the taxi driver to take me all the way back while the concierge kept the rest of my luggage—all this using more sign-language than French!

Unspooling later that night I came across my journal and, out of sheer curiosity, opened it to September 5—exactly one year before, to the day. Here’s the quote I had entered, from Ernest Hemingway:

“If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a movable feast.”

I was stunned, because a year before I’d had no idea about study abroad, and knew nothing about Paris. I’d just thought it was a lovely thought, a romantic sentiment. But who knew?—maybe it planted a seed.

In any case, Hemingway turned out to be right, and for me his words proved quite prophetic.

Paris became the moveable feast in my life, and it’s followed me wherever I’ve gone. When I came back to the US, a piece of me—the wide-eyed, eager 20 year-old—stayed on in Paris. So I’m always missing that part of me—a part of me I have to come back and visit from time to time. The amazing thing is, I can come back and regain that 20-year-old whenever I want, because Paris is still here, remarkably unchanged. And the 20-year-old me still lives here.

All my IES classmates brought home lots of wonderful memories, souvenirs, and pictures, and for them Paris remains a past experience they will never forget. But for a lucky few of us, Paris isn’t just at all, it’s still a part of our lives—and it will be for the rest of our lives.

You see, the fruits is that when I left IES I was ready to go home, and I was happy to see my parents and my brother and sisters, my old room, my old friends, and to return to the life I’d known before. But something had changed, and within a few days I realized something was wrong. It wasn’t until the last of senior year that I figured out what it was.
I'm writing to let you know this:

Paris can be YOUR unforgettable travel, too—
but only if you really want it.

One night for a reason, walking at Barre de l'Alma in Montmartre, I passed a young American woman, about 20, standing in front of the Eiffel Tower. I noticed she was wearing a beret and a scarf, which is not typical attire for a tourist. She was taking pictures with her smartphone, but she also had a map in her hand and seemed to be looking for a particular location. I decided to follow her and see where she was going.

She led me to a small café on the Boulevard de Clichy, where we sat down and had a cup of coffee. I asked her why she was in Paris and she told me she was a student at the Sorbonne and was studying French literature. She had just moved there from Los Angeles and was finding it difficult to adapt to the new environment.

I asked her if she had any advice for me, since I was also planning to study in Paris. She said that the key to adapting was to immerse oneself in the local culture and not to be afraid to make mistakes. She recommended taking classes at the Alliance Française and practicing with locals.

We spent a few hours chatting and laughing over our coffee. She told me about her favorite places in Paris, such as the Louvre and the Notre-Dame Cathedral, and I was grateful for her insights. As we said our goodbyes, she handed me her business card and told me to call her if I needed any help or advice.

I followed her advice and ended up studying in Paris for a semester. It was one of the most memorable experiences of my life, and I credit that young woman with helping me to adapt and make the most of my time there. She showed me that Paris is not just a city, but a way of life, and that it takes a genuine effort to become part of it.
[Image 144x208 to 540x720]

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Now suppose you've understood the challenge and you still want to go ahead anyway.

How do you get past those hurdles?

The answers are not great mysteries.

[Image 144x208 to 540x720]
with the French people you do meet—indeed, they will find you more attractive if you show interest in their culture!

The classic scene: An American in Paris meets with Latin priests and some French ladies bustling up. He

sells, and all remember for always, the way: "Maybe we always Paris hat ways of making people forget."


Bonnet would open your mouth and you stay that way.

---

You can stay that way, too.

Just let Pains reach in!

Now, how about this stuff up:

"7 Basic Steps to Making Yourself at home in Paris"

1. Find a good Hotel, and make Yourself a Regular there.
2. Accept the delays, handling more time on Paris means less time for other things.
3. Break out of the "sightseeing" routine—’til you have time again.
4. Let yourself feel lonely sometimes.
5. Promise yourself that this is the "Europe" you’ll never have another chance to LIVE here.
6. Work with the language barrier, not against it, immerse yourself.
7. Aim to meet anybody, not just students.

---

What does your score mean? Are you ready to make Yourself at Home?

50-100: Two very relaxing (alcoholic) drinks.

50-70: Sipping coffee within your reach.

70-90: You’ll need an umbrella offer to shop.

80-70: Think about this. What do you REALLY want?

90-60: Sitting room isn’t your priority.

20-50: Stay open to the possibilities around you.

---

Now, Take the Quick Quiz to Rate Your Readiness for the "Morelable Feen"
### I.E.S Paris Fall 2004 Calendar

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<td>September 3</td>
<td>Arrival</td>
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<td>September 13</td>
<td>Language intensive program begins</td>
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<td>September 17</td>
<td>Excursion to Versailles</td>
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<td>September 17</td>
<td>IES-coordinated course begins</td>
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<td>October 8</td>
<td>Excursion to Chartres</td>
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<td>October 9</td>
<td>Excursion to the Mont St Michel and the</td>
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<td>churches of Normandy</td>
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<td>October 11</td>
<td>Open House event for all courses</td>
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<td>October 19</td>
<td>Excursion to Paris</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 23</td>
<td>Excursion to Vendôme-Chamonix and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fontainebleau</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 25</td>
<td>Drop/Add deadline for outside courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 29</td>
<td>Excursion to Chartres</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 3-5</td>
<td>Add-term occurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 11-14</td>
<td>Optional field trip to Provence</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 11-14</td>
<td>Optional field trip to Antibes</td>
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<td>November 12</td>
<td>Anniversaire No. Carol</td>
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<td>November 17</td>
<td>Thanksgiving (last day of session)</td>
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<td>December 17-21</td>
<td>Final exams</td>
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<td>December 21</td>
<td>Farewell dinner</td>
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<td>December 22</td>
<td>Program ends - departure day</td>
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<td>December 30</td>
<td>Last day to stay with host families</td>
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</table>

Students participate in two of the IES-sponsored field trips at no extra cost. Each field trip has 14 spots, with the exception of the trip to Provence which can take 30 students. Student will sign-up on site.

* Students interested in the optional field trips to Provence and Antibes are required to cover a portion of the costs. More information will be provided during the registration program in Paris.
Français 421
Automne 2004
Langage et culture groupe 6

Professeur: Véronique Teyssandier
email: vteyssandier@hotmail.com
tel: 01 42 21 97 60

Cours du 28 septembre au 16 décembre le mardi et le jeudi de 9h15 à 10h45

Exercices écrits fournis par le professeur.

Grâce à ce cours :

- vous élargirez et approfondirez vos connaissances en grammaire française.
- vous perfectionnerez votre expression orale.
- vous développerez votre expression et compréhension orale.
- vous enrichirez votre vocabulaire.
- vous vous familiariserez avec les différents aspects de la société française contemporaine.

Chaque séance est ouverte autour d'un point de grammaire et d'un thème de société. Ces thèmes ont été choisis, pour la plupart, sur les sujets qui ont été l'objet de débats cette année ou l'année dernière en France. Ce programme est susceptible d'être légèrement modifié en fonction de l'actualité et de l'intérêt plus ou moins grand que susciteront les différents sujets abordés.

Une participation active de chaque étudiant est absolument nécessaire au bon déroulement de ce cours.

Vous serez évalué par le biais du contrôle continu. Votre note finale sera calculée comme suit :

- 90 % participation
- 10 % moyenne du semestre (grammaire + compréhension orale)
- 10 % moyenne du semestre (grammaire + compréhension écrite + expression orale)
- 20 % note d'oral (participation régulière + interventions orales + compréhension orale)
- 25 % note de grammaire
- 25 % note d'expression orale
semaine du 27 septembre
grammaire: les temps du passé
thème: La famille

semaine du 4 octobre
grammaire: le style indirect
thème: Paris: La banlieue - La province

semaine du 11 octobre
grammaire: le subjonctif
thème: Paris: La banlieue - La province

semaine du 18 octobre
grammaire: le subjonctif: Hiérarchie, antériorité, simultanéité
thème: La famille

semaine du 25 octobre
grammaire: antériorité, postériorité et expressions de temps
thème: La famille

semaine du 1er novembre
attention! le 4 novembre: examen de mi-semester
grammaire: les pronoms relatifs (qui au programme pour l'examen de mi-semester)
thème: les jeunes

semaine du 8 novembre
le jeudi 11 novembre est férié
grammaire: correction examen mi-semester
thème: L'école

semaine du 15 novembre
grammaire: l'hypothèse, la condition, les phrases avec si
thème: L'école, le laïcisme

semaine du 22 novembre
grammaire: La cause
thème: L'Europe

semaine du 29 novembre
grammaire: la conséquence, le but
thème: L'image et l'écrit

semaine du 6 décembre
grammaire: l'opposition et la concession
thème: L'image et l'écrit

semaine du 13 décembre
grammaire: révision générale
thème: La loi peut-elle s'occuper de toutes les problèmes de coeur vécus?
INSTRUCTOR: Sophie Fendjian (sofiefendjian@hotmail.com)

HOURS: Lab:Mon 98/15-9845

LANGUAGE OF PRESENTATION:
Les cours sont en français et les étudiants parlent français.

DESCRIPTION:
Ce cours a pour ambition de donner aux étudiants une grille de lecture de la sociétés française. La connaissance des faits seule ne peut suffire à leur compréhension. Il est nécessaire de les appréhender dès leur naissance et à travers leur mise en discours. Cette manière d'envisager le réel est à sombrer dans le sens commun. Nous mènerons donc de front une analyse des thèmes contemporains français et l'acquisition des dernières réflexions en matière de sciences sociales.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:
Les étudiants doivent en plus de l'assiduité aux cours, lire à l'avance le texte qui accompagne chaque thème afin d'être en mesure de participer activement à la discussion.

Préparation et participation en classe (lectures, participation orale): 20%
Devoirs (deux fois 1000 signes): 7 X 10% : 70%
Évaluation de remise-séminaire: 20%
Examen final: 20%

AUCUN DEVOIR NE SERA ACCÉTÉ EN RARY.
COMMENCEZ A PRÉPARER LES DEVOIRS AU MOINS DEUX SEMAINES À L'AVANCE.

Content: Les lectures obligatoires sont à faire avant chaque séance. La préparation au cours implique que vous puissiez des notes pendant le texte et que vous vous mettiez des commentaires pour chaque thème dans la colonne « préparation au cours » pour réfléchir, et surtout que vous appreniez à la discussion en classe. Ces préparations seront extraites avant chaque séance par le professeur.

Le syllabus est susceptible de subir des modifications selon l'actualité et les intérêts des étudiants.
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<tr>
<td>27 09 94</td>
<td>Introduction au cours</td>
<td>Panorama de la pensée française</td>
<td>Prêter aux questions existentielles pour la suite...</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 09 94</td>
<td>Introduction aux sciences sociales françaises</td>
<td>* Sociologie. L'institution, Ses concepts*, Dictionnaire de la sociologie, Larousse, Paris, 1990</td>
<td>Qu'est-ce que l'institution ? Prêter aux questions sociologiques pour la suite...</td>
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</table>
| 04 10 94 | La société française | « La population française au début de l'ère 2000 » par Guy Doisneau | Qu'est-ce que l'ère 2000 ? Comprendre l'idée du 3ème millénaire ? | 3
| 06 10 94 | Le cinéma, antologie d'un art | * Nouveaux regards sur la culture. L'évolution d'une société en évolution sociale. Danser, Chanteur, Spectacle Humain*, 71, nov. 1993 | Qu'est-ce le cinéma de la culture ? Qu'est-ce qui change dans le concept de culture ? | 4

**Pédagogie et Éducation**

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<tr>
<td>11 10 94</td>
<td>Logique scolaire français</td>
<td><em>La France d'aujourd'hui</em>, Civilisation. Nelly Varchamp, pp 46-54</td>
<td>Prêter au sens didactique critique en aux études que nous comprenons pas bien...</td>
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| 18 10 94 | Films | Les 50 films, François Truffaut, 1955 | Quelle est l'œuvre numéro 5 Qu'est-ce qui nous plongeait ? Les films du cinéma français dans la méthode française d'éducation ? | 7
| 20 10 94 | La famille | *La famille, les familles françaises. L'institution familiale* | Que pensez-vous de ce que vous avez pu observer, à Paris, du fonctionnement de la famille traditionnelle ? | 8
| 25 10 94 | La famille, construction | « La jeunesse n'est qu'un raccord » Pierre Bourdieu, le Question de sociologie, id. de Minuit, Paris, 1990 | Que va faire ce que vous avez pu observer, à Paris, du fonctionnement de la famille traditionelle ? | 9
| 11 11 04 | L'immigrant républicain | « Quelques centaines secrètes d'Amérique », Louis Waquant. Le Monde Diplomatique mai 2002. | Que t'envoyons au sein de la | Que t'envoyons au sein de la | 15 |
| 22 11 04 | La religion en France | Ceux qui croient au vrai et ceux qui ne croient plus. La France des « sans-religion » Denis Viré, Le monde diplomatique, n° 2081, pp 22-23 | Observer les chiffres et comparer avec ce que vous connaissez de la religion aux États-Unis. | 17 |
### Pouvoir et Population

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<td>01 2 95</td>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Les glaces et la glaçaise, Agnès Varda</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Quelles sont les principales questions que vous souhaiteriez discuter ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 2 95</td>
<td>Solidarité et protection sociale</td>
<td>La protection sociale</td>
<td>Le blog pour tous, Les rejetés noirs</td>
<td>Comme les systèmes sociaux français, ils sont créés pour qui ?</td>
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### France, Persistance et Changements

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<tr>
<td>08 1 94</td>
<td>Paris et province</td>
<td>La France, Aurore, Paris, pp. 36-37</td>
<td>Nelly Mauchamps, op. cit., pp. 40-49</td>
<td>Trouver une information sur la province qui reste cachée de ce que vous savez sur cette province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 12 94</td>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Murcia et Jamon, Robert Oublié</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Quelles sont les différences entre les réalisations françaises et espagnoles dans ce film ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 12 94</td>
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Vita
Margaret Jane Pitts

Education
PhD: Communication Arts and Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University, 2005
BA: Human Communication, magna cum laude, Arizona State University, 1999
BA: Modern French Language, magna cum laude, Arizona State University, 1999

Employment
Visiting Lecturer: Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara

Publications


Honors and Awards
Carroll Arnold Award for Excellence in Research by a Graduate Student (2005).
Grant-in-Aid Funding ($725) awarded by the Office of Education Abroad to study and conduct research abroad in Paris, France (2004).
Research and Graduate Studies Office (RGSO) Course Release ($4,000) to conduct dissertation research in France (2004).
Kathryn DeBoer Award for Excellence in Teaching by a Graduate Assistant (2004).
Outstanding Thesis Award from the International and Intercultural Division of the National Communication Association (2002).
Research and Graduate Studies Office (RGSO) Travel Award (2002) $200.