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Pepperdine One Semester Abroad: Group Satisfaction & Emotional Well-being

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Pepperdine University One Semester Abroad: Personality, Subjective Well-being, and Group
Satisfaction

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Abstract

Students who decide to study abroad experience great transition as they adapt from one culture to the next. Interestingly, with so many students studying abroad, it is recognizable that during this change, some students thrive while others do not. Therefore, this study explores the possible factors of what might cause students to report having a positive abroad experience. Specifically, this study analyzes Pepperdine University students to collect data and examine the effects of extraversion and subjective well-being on group satisfaction levels. Although the results could not be generalized, the results concluded that subjective well-being more than extraversion predicted an individual's group satisfaction and overall abroad experience satisfaction. Finally, the study concluded with the limitations and suggestions for future research.

Key Words: personality, extraversion, group satisfaction, subjective well-being, study abroad

Pepperdine University One Semester Abroad: Personality, Subjective Well-being, and Group Satisfaction

Change is inevitable. Each stage of life invites the inescapable need to adjust to new environments, new communities of people, and new routines. Yet, during these times of change and transition also come the feelings of anxiety and vulnerability as a person strives to grasp the unknown. A prevalent example of extreme transition is when a college student studies abroad in a foreign country. Students decide to study abroad to see the world, travel, enhance their cultural knowledge, and have fun. However, living in a foreign country involves emerging oneself into a new culture of people who have different lifestyles, traditions, social norms, and in most cases a different language. Interestingly, with so many students having embarked on the abroad journey, it is clear that some students flourish more than others. Many assume that people who are more adventurous, extraverted, and open to change undergo a smoother adjustment into a new culture and group dynamic; and therefore, they result in having an overall positive group satisfaction and abroad experience. However, not all college students who study abroad encompass the same characteristics; and yet, they still thrive. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the factors that result in group satisfaction for students who study abroad. Specifically, to explore this question, this study analyzes the Pepperdine University students who transitioned from the Malibu campus to one of the six international programs around the world. The study strives to provide new knowledge for Pepperdine University students who are considering studying abroad. Moreover, although the study is unable to generalize its findings, due to the nature of its sampling, it hopes to also contribute to the growing research by providing more insight for other students interested in studying abroad during their college years. Before presenting the findings

of this study, it is important to review the relevant bodies of literature including group satisfaction, the Big Five personality traits, and subjective well-being.

Literature Review

Group Satisfaction

Group satisfaction can be defined as when a person feels a sense of social acceptance or a “feeling of comfort with other people” in a group (Joshani et al., 2012 p. 641). Furthermore, group satisfaction is “a sense of fulfillment about how well group members work together” (Park, 2008, p. 91). For example, in the workplace, employees express group satisfaction when there is collective participation, interaction, feedback, motivation, and progress toward the group goal (Park, 2008). Moreover, members obtain group satisfied when they feel a sense of belonging within the group and a sense of personal contribution toward the overall goal of the group (Park, 2008). When students study abroad, they strive to connect to a new group of students in their program in addition to a new group of people in the foreign community. Consequently, when the students feel this sense of connection and acceptance, they result in group satisfaction of the group and of the overall abroad experience. Therefore, the first research question is:

RQ1: What are the predictors of group satisfaction?

The Big Five Personality Traits

The Big Five personality traits list consists of the five core personality characteristics of extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience (Joshani et al., 2012). Past research states that personality is connected to how a person adjusts (Albrecht, Dilchert, Deller, & Paulus, 2014) because personality characteristics influence the nature and success of dyadic relations (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009). For example, Burke, Watkins,

and Guzman (2009) found that conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, and agreeableness were positively related to cooperating with other students in an international work performance. In another example, Joshanloo et al. (2012) found that if people express high neuroticism, they tend “to experience negative emotions” (p. 642) and can be “irritable and ill-tempered and may prove difficult to associate with” (p. 624), causing difficulty connecting with others and resulting in low group satisfaction. Therefore, past research suggests that possessing certain personality traits over others can determine whether a person cooperates or not with others. Cuperman and Ickes (2009) concluded, after observing all five personality traits in initial dyadic interactions, that extraversion and agreeableness contribute significantly to a person’s group satisfaction and transition. To further analyze those results, this study specifically focused on how extraversion affected students’ abroad experience.

Extraversion. Extraversion is conceptualized as a person being social, talkative, prone to self-disclosure, and smooth in interaction (Cuperman & Ickes, 2009). Furthermore, extraversion is defined with facets like “warmth, gregariousness, and assertiveness” (Joshanloo, 2012, p. 624). When students are more extraverted, they make easier connections with other group members, assisting with the overall group satisfaction. Consequently, when these students feel a sense of connection and a part of the larger group, they result in a positive abroad experience. Therefore, this study’s first hypothesis is:

H1: A student with higher levels of extraversion will predict higher levels of group satisfaction.

Subjective Well-Being

Not all students who thrive abroad are characterized as extroverts. Therefore, this study also examined the students’ subjective well-being to further determine the factors that yield

group satisfaction. A person's subjective well-being is determined by an individual's personal reports of levels of satisfaction in his or her current state, encompassing his or her evaluation of "what is happening in their lives" (Joshani et al., 2011, p. 105). In other words, the way individuals view themselves and the world around them can overcompensate for the reality of the social situation. Furthermore, "social well-being deals with the person's attitudes towards and perceptions of the whole society" (Joshani et al., 2012, p. 641). For example, in their study analyzing the predictors of social well-being for students in an Iranian Muslim University, Joshani et al. (2011) state that social well-being is related to "perceived social support, psychological sense of community, identification with the community, self-esteem, and self-efficacy" (Joshani et al., 2011, p. 641). People who have a positive attitude and perceive the situation in a positive light, will yield satisfaction in the situation. Therefore, in addition to personality, the study hypothesized:

H2: A student with higher levels of positive subjective well-being will predict higher levels of group satisfaction.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study gathered participants using a snowball sampling method. Researchers surveyed 67 undergraduate students at Pepperdine University who studied abroad for only one semester during their sophomore year at one of the six international satellite campuses. However, only 46 participants qualified, and only 36 of those participants completed the survey. There were 23 female participants and 13 male participants. The average age of the participant was 20.14 years old. The vast majority of the group was European American or White (69.4%), the second largest group of participants was Asian (11.1%), and the next largest was African American or Black

(5.2%). The survey reported that 13.9% of the participants reported multiple racial identities. The program response rate are as follows: the Malibu, California program (33.3%), the Lausanne, Switzerland program (19.4%), the Florence, Italy program (13.9%), the Buenos Aires, Argentina program (11.1%), the Heidelberg, Germany program (11.1%), the London, England program (5.6%), the Washington D.C., USA program (5.6%), and finally the Shanghai, China program (0.0%). The questionnaire was created through the online survey site called [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). The link to the survey was distributed on the Facebook groups of each of the 2013-2014 study abroad programs.

Measures

The questionnaire first consisted of demographic questions. Then, in order to examine the participants' group satisfaction, extraversion, and subjective well-being, the questionnaire consisted of questions derived from three previously existing scales. An example of the questionnaire is presented at the end of the study in the Appendix.

Group Satisfaction. Group satisfaction was measured using Anderson, Martin, and Riddle's (2001) Small Group Relational Satisfaction Scale (SGRSS) assessment to determine perceptions of satisfaction with relationships in a new group setting. The participants indicated to the extent of which they agreed or disagreed with the 11 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). A sample item included: "The group members spend time getting to know each other."

The Big Five Personality Traits. The personality traits were measured using Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann's (2003) abbreviated Big Five Inventory (BFI) scale to assess the following dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with the 10 items on a 5-

point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Although the study's primary focus was on evaluating extraversion, the study included all of the elements of the Big Five Personality traits list to provide variety in the questionnaire. This abbreviated scale showed consistent results and high validity with other self-report scales (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann Jr., 2003) because the shortened scale demonstrated appropriateness when other scales were present in the questionnaire. Further, the scale used polarity rotation of items for control, and it rotated bipolar adjectives in order to generate responses. A sample item included: "extraverted" and "enthusiastic."

Subjective Well-Being. Subjective well-being was measured using Watson, Clark & Tellegen's (1988) PANAS scale. The 20-item, semantic differential scale included emotional words that ranked feelings, emotions, and moods. Respondents indicated the extent of their emotions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very slightly or not at all, 5 = extremely), in both the beginning and end of the semester. Sample items included "interested," "distressed," and "excited."

Results

The first hypothesis stated that a student with higher levels of extraversion will predict higher levels of group satisfaction. A correlational analysis was executed and concluded no significant correlation between the two variables ($r = .06, p > .05$). Thus, the hypothesis was not supported. The second hypothesis stated that a student with higher levels of positive subjective well-being will predict higher levels of group satisfaction. A correlational analysis found that positive levels of subjective well-being at the beginning of the semester connected to overall positivity at the end of the semester ($r = .41, p < .05$). The positive affect reliability was .89 for the beginning of the semester and .90 for the end. The negative affect reliability was .86 for the

beginning and .93 for the end. Thus, the hypothesis was supported. The findings from the two hypotheses indicated that subjective well-being, not extraversion, predicted an individual's level of group satisfaction.

Discussion

Implications

To answer the proposed research question, the data collected showed that subjective well-being, more than extraversion, predicts group satisfaction. The first hypothesis, which predicted that high levels of extraversion would yield high levels of group satisfaction, was not supported. But, the second hypothesis, which predicted that high levels of positive subjective well-being would yield high levels of group satisfaction, was supported. The data found that the positivity at the beginning of the semester was connected to positivity at the end of the semester. If the student began the semester as a happy-go-lucky, optimistic individual, then that student was more likely to end the semester the same way. This positive subjective well-being caused individuals to view the transition in a positive light, resulting in overall satisfaction for the abroad experience. Different than many assumptions, being adventurous and outgoing does not automatically result in an easier adjustment into a new place. Instead, this study found that students' overall attitude and outlook toward the abroad experience caused higher group satisfaction and abroad satisfaction. Although these findings cannot be generalized, due to the snowball sampling method, it still provides further insight for students studying abroad. The data infers that an individual's happiness is a result of his or her own conscious attitude toward the situation at hand. Therefore, as students prepare for abroad, they should internally consider their subjective well-being prior to the transition.

Strengths and Limitations

While the findings showed many strengths, there were also limitations to the study. First, one limitation was the scaling. Since the BFI Scale was abbreviated, the personality elements were not measured to the fullest degree. Also, the reliabilities between personality types were inconsistent. However, extraversion was the only variable to yield a significantly high reliability, therefore justifying the data analyzed. If this study is conducted again, the full length version of the BFI Scale should be used. Second, another limitation was the small, Pepperdine University student sample size. This sampling prohibits generalization to all college students because the participants were limited to the specific University. Furthermore, since no students from the Shanghai, China program contributed to the study, the findings are limited and cannot fully represent the Pepperdine student abroad population. Therefore, the results also cannot be generalized to Pepperdine University.

Future Research

If repeated in the future, this study should consider executing a longitudinal type study, instead of a conducted cross-sectional survey method. Students could keep a journal of their attitudes, behaviors, and view of the group dynamic throughout the semester. Researchers could then conduct a content analysis to examine the symbols of the communication and find emerging themes. Similarly, future researchers could also conduct in-depth interviews and/or focus groups with the students to gather a deeper understanding about their abroad experiences. Additionally, another future recommendation would be to expand the study of the personality variables from the Big Five Personality list. With more personality variables examined, more insight into their effects toward group satisfaction can be concluded. Finally, a larger sample size is recommended to allow for generalization.

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Appendix

CONSENT INFO:

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study.

RESEARCHERS

Lauren Amaro, Ph.D., a professor at Pepperdine University, along with Stephanie Cota, Shannon Tefertiller, and Carly Hanna has invited your participation in a research study.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to enhance the study abroad experience for Pepperdine undergraduate students who study abroad for only one semester.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of personality, group cohesion, and wellbeing.

If you say YES, then your participation will last for about 5 minutes. You will be asked to complete 3 Likert-type scales for this survey. Approximately 45 subjects from Pepperdine will be participating in this study.

RISKS

There are no known risks from taking part in this study, but in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS

The possible/main benefits of your participation in the research are advancing the individuals' understandings at international programs office of students' wellbeing abroad.

CONFIDENTIALITY

"The information that you provide in this survey is in no way linked to your name or identity in any way. The results are anonymous, and the researchers will not seek connection to your data."

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is ok for you to say no. Even if you say yes now, you are free to say no later, and withdraw from the study at any time. Student participation is voluntary, and nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect grades, treatment, care, or enrollment status at Pepperdine University.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

There is no payment for your participation in the study. Extra credit may be offered at the discretion of the professor.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

Any questions you have concerning the research study or your participation in the study, before or after your consent, will be answered by Professor Lauren Amaro, who may be reached at lauren.amaro@pepperdine.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk; you can also contact Professor Lauren Amaro or the Seaver College Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University.

This form explains the nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project. By proceeding with the survey, you agree knowingly to assume any risks involved. Remember, your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. In signing this consent form, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be offered to you at your request.

Proceeding with the survey by clicking the link below indicates that you consent to participate.

1. How long did you study abroad in the 2013-2014 year?

- I did not study abroad.
- I went for one academic year.
- I went for one semester only.

*** 2. What is your age in years?***** 3. Are you male or female?**

- Male
- Female

4. What is your race/ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African-American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- From multiple races

Some other race (please specify)

*** 5. Where were you in Spring 2014?**

- Buenos Aires
- London
- Washington D.C.
- Lausanne
- Heidelberg
- Florence
- Shanghai
- Malibu

*** 6. In this instrument, we are measuring how you felt in your 2nd semester group (Malibu or abroad program). Please use the following scale:**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. The group members spent time getting to know each other.
2. The members made me feel a part of the group.
3. I looked forward to coming to the group events.
- *4. I do not feel part of the group.
5. The members made me feel liked.
- *6. My absence did not matter to the group.
7. I could trust group members.
8. We could say anything in this group without worrying.
- *9. I preferred not to spend time with members of the group.
10. Some of the group members became my friends.
11. The group atmosphere was comfortable.

7. This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to the word.

*****Answer based on your feelings during the FIRST FEW WEEKS of your 2nd semester during the 2013-2014 academic year.*****

very slightly or not at all a little moderately quite a bit extremely

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| **1. interested | | | | | |
| 2. distressed | | | | | |
| **3. excited | | | | | |
| 4. upset | | | | | |
| **5. strong | | | | | |
| 6. guilty | | | | | |
| 7. scared | | | | | |
| 8. hostile | | | | | |
| **9. enthusiastic | | | | | |
| **10. proud | | | | | |
| 11. irritable | | | | | |
| **12. alert | | | | | |
| 13. ashamed | | | | | |
| **14. inspired | | | | | |
| 15. nervous | | | | | |
| **16. determined | | | | | |
| **17. attentive | | | | | |
| 18. jittery | | | | | |
| **19. active | | | | | |
| 20. afraid | | | | | |

*** 8. This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions.**

Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to the word.

*****Answer based on your feelings during the LAST FEW WEEKS of your 2nd semester of the 2013-2014 academic year.*****

very slightly or not at all	a little	moderately	quite a bit	extremely
1	2	3	4	5

- **1. interested
- 2. distressed
- **3. excited
- 4. upset
- **5. strong
- 6. guilty
- 7. scared
- 8. hostile

- **9. enthusiastic
- **10. proud
- 11. irritable
- **12. alert
- 13. ashamed
- **14. inspired
- 15. nervous
- **16. determined
- **17. attentive
- 18. jittery
- **19. active
- 20. afraid

*** 9. Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

- 1. Extraverted, enthusiastic.
- *2. Critical, quarrelsome.
- 3. Dependable, self-disciplined.
- *4. Anxious, easily upset.
- 5. Open to new experiences, complex.
- *6. Reserved, quiet.
- 7. Sympathetic, warm.
- *8. Disorganized, careless.
- 9. Calm, emotionally stable.
- *10. Conventional, uncreative.

*Items starred have been reverse coded

**Positive Affect items (the remaining items are Negative Affect)

Table 1

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.922	.596		6.584	.000
	PA1_SCALE	.251	.131	.292	1.922	.063
	NA1_SCALE	-.367	.149	-.375	-2.468	.019
2	(Constant)	3.217	1.075		2.993	.006
	PA1_SCALE	.258	.117	.300	2.202	.036
	NA1_SCALE	-.394	.147	-.403	-2.677	.012
	Outgoing	.089	.101	.125	.883	.385
	Agreeableness	.408	.127	.463	3.206	.003
	Conscientiousness	-.231	.126	-.259	-1.831	.078
	EmoStab	-.212	.130	-.247	-1.638	.113
	Openness	.136	.146	.143	.936	.357

a. Dependent Variable: RSS_SCALE