Educational Policy Studies Dissertations

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Spring 3-31-2014

Finding Ourselves Abroad: How African American Women Successfully Navigate The Study Abroad Process

Sonya S. Henry
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/eps_diss

FINDING OURSELVES ABROAD: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN
SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE STUDY ABROAD PROCESS

By

Sonya S. Henry

Under the Direction of Dr. Jodi Kaufmann

ABSTRACT

Study abroad has become an integral component of the American college experience. Although student participation is rising, the numbers do not reflect the current enrollment trends in higher education. Minority students significantly lag behind in study abroad participation, and this is especially true for African American college students. This study highlights the stories of African American women who successfully completed study abroad programs of one semester or longer. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of narratives, I examined how five Black American women navigated the study abroad process and uncovered what the experience has meant to them. Employing a womanist theoretical perspective, this study proposes that Black American women use agency to overcome obstacles they encounter while studying abroad, and are ultimately empowered by engaging in this unique experience. The findings from this study also suggest an expanded model of the study abroad process as it pertains to African American women. This study concludes with recommendations to international education professionals on how to better serve this population and guidelines for African American women on how to manage the study abroad process.

Keywords: African American, women, Black, study abroad, transformation, international, travel, womanism, narrative

FINDING OURSELVES ABROAD: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN
SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE STUDY ABROAD PROCESS

By

Sonya S. Henry

Under the Direction of Dr. Jodi Kaufmann

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Science

In the College of Education

Georgia State University

2014

iii

FINDING OURSELVES ABROAD: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN
SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE STUDY ABROAD PROCESS

By

Sonya S. Henry

Committee Chair:

Jodi Kaufmann, Ph.D.

Committee:

Joyce E. King, Ph.D.

Tiffany S. Russell, Ph.D.

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Academic Assistance
College of Education
Georgia State University
May 2014

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to **all** of my sister-women who are ready to go and see the world- with their minds open, cameras charged, and "traveling shoes" on!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this thesis has been a beautiful experience- challenging and exciting at the same time. I did not accomplish this alone and I must acknowledge and thank everyone who helped me to make it possible. First, I give thanks to The Most High who strengthens me and has given me this amazing journey called my life. To my Mom who loves and supports me in everything I do- thank you for being my reality check. To everyone in my personal network- thank you for keeping me balanced.

To Dr. Jodi Kaufmann- thank you for taking me on as a Master's student! You are truly a fantastic Advisor, and I really appreciate your prompt, positive and constructive feedback. I could always see a significant difference in each draft after listening to your comments. Thank you for challenging and encouraging me throughout the process. To my two committee members, Dr. Joyce King and Dr. Tiffany Russell, thank you for establishing such a powerful intellectual legacy of Black women. I am honored to have your expertise contributed to this study. Dr. King, our conversation about womanism and Black feminism was pivotal. Thank you for helping me to craft one of my favorite interview questions. Dr. Russell you are the embodiment of womanism, and I so admire who you are and what you do.

Lastly, to all of my participants/co-researchers, thank you for trusting me with your stories. This work would not be what it is without your invaluable input. You all are intelligent, gifted, and fearless women. I hope you will continue to look back on your study abroad experiences fondly and remember the courage and strength you had to make it happen.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Study Abroad Participation and College Enrollment

International learning experiences have become increasingly important in higher education as these institutions seek to educate "global citizens" who can cross international and cultural borders and follow the rapid movement of information, technology, communication, and business. Current discourse suggests that those individuals who can successfully navigate a globalized world gain unmitigated access to advancements in culture and commerce and secure positions as stakeholders in the new global economy (Welch, 2013). Study abroad programs are at the forefront of the mission to enhance the global competency of today's students.

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2013), 283,332 American students studied abroad in 2012. While this shows a three-fold increase within the past two decades, this number only represents 1.4 percent of the total enrollment of American students in U.S. higher education. However, when evaluating the U.S. undergraduates who studied abroad specifically during their Bachelors program, the number increases to 14.2 % (IIE, 2013). Of the students who studied abroad in the 2011-12 academic year 76.4% identified as White, 7.7% as Asian, 7.6% as Latino or Hispanic, 5.3 % as Black or African American, 2.5% as Multiracial, and 0.5 % as Native American. Moreover, 64.8% of study abroad participants were female and 35.2% were male (IIE, 2013).[1] Despite the generally low numbers of participation, study abroad is becoming an increasingly important education opportunity for students and a topic of interest for researchers and professionals.

---

[1] See Figure 1.1 in Appendix

While study abroad numbers slowly but steadily increase, the rate of participation is not evenly distributed across all students in higher education and does not directly reflect the current population trends in America's colleges and universities. On one hand, the U.S. Census Bureau's School Enrollment Report for 2011 (Davis & Bauman, 2013) showed that of the students enrolled in higher education (undergraduate and graduate schools), 62.2% were White, 15.42% were Black, 14.47% were Hispanic, and 5.89% were Asian.[2] On the other hand, currently Black female and Asian students show the highest percentages of higher education enrollment in terms of their total respective populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In other words, considering the total population of all self-identified African American women living in the United States, 9.2% are enrolled in college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)[3]. Except for Asian women who show an equal percentage, this proportion is highest among the female population. Notably 7.6% of Hispanic women and 7.0% of Caucasian women are currently enrolled in college or university, a lower percentage than their African American and Asian counterparts. In general, current study abroad participation rates fail to reflect both minority enrollment in higher education and the total college enrollment population trends in terms of race.

While the specific percentage of Black women who studied abroad in 2011-12 was not published in the 2013 Open Doors Report, based on the data that reported 5.3% of study abroad participants were African American, it is known that the rate of participation by Black females lies somewhere between 0% and 5.3% (IIE, 2013). This same logic can extend to Caucasian females who represent between 0% and 76.4% of all study abroad participants. Therefore, compared to their white counterparts who compose up to 66.2% of the total university population and up to 76.4% of the study abroad population, African American women represent no more

---

[2] See Figure 1.2 in Appendix
[3] See Figure 1.3 in Appendix

than 15.42 % of the higher education population and less than 5.3% of all study abroad students. Given the disparity between the higher education enrollment rates and the study abroad participation rates, one might ask: Why do so few African American female students study abroad? As study abroad becomes a more integral component of the American college experience, additional research must be conducted to better democratize the opportunity.

Overview of Study Abroad Literature and Research

As study abroad solidifies itself as an integral aspect of the American college experience, scholars and professionals regard it as a relevant research topic. Education abroad literature has focused on the academic (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Dawson, 2000; Posey, 2003), professional (Burkart, Hexter, & Thompson, 2000; Stroud, 2010), and personal (Dolby, 2004; Jewett, 2010; Milstein, 2005; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Savicki & Cooley, 2011; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013) outcomes students gain from the experience. In fact, Posey (2003) defined study abroad as "a condensed, intensified, contextual collegiate experience encompassing many of the benefits often attributed with attending college that could result in positive psychosocial and skill development, which correspondingly could be reflected in greater academic and professional growth" (p. 5). Other studies have examined factors that affect study abroad participation (Dessoff, 2006; Goldstein & Kim, 2006; He & Chen, 2010; Penn & Tanner, 2008; M. Salisbury et al., 2009; Taylor & Rivera, 2011; Walker et al., 2011; Williams, 2005); the barriers that exist for students to pursue study abroad options (Dawson, 2000; Dessoff, 2006; Shih, 2009; Taylor & Rivera, 2011); and the development of various program types to promote the opportunity to a wider audience of students, such as service-learning projects abroad (Acquaye & Crewe, 2012).

Additionally, a notable body of research has examined minority students and study abroad, with an explicit focus on the barriers that hinder this population from participating and recommendations to better market the experience to these underrepresented groups (Brux & Fry,

2009; Burkart et al., 2000; Salisbury et al., 2010; Zambito, 2002). For example, Brux and Fry (2010) found that minority students are indeed interested in studying abroad, especially "in regions of the world corresponding to their heritage." However, Dawson (2000) found that "African American students tend to participate in more short-term experiences, such as internships" that appear to be more directly related to their career interests (p. 124). Moreover, a review of the literature yields fewer studies that consider the international education experiences of African Americans in general (Acquaye & Crewe, 2012; Dawson, 2000; Day-Vines, Barker & Exum, 1998; Penn & Tanner, 2008; Walker et al., 2011; White et al., 2011) and African American women specifically (Chapman, 2007; Evans, 2009; Morgan, Mwegelo, & Turner, 2002; Talburt & Stewart, 1999).

Overall, prior research has rallied the positive outcomes of education abroad, analyzed factors that influence study abroad interest and participation, and noted the challenges in minority student enrollment. However, few studies were found that deeply explored the experiences of African American women who actually succeed at studying abroad. Specifically, there is a dearth of research that investigates the resources African American women use to navigate the study abroad process and adjust to the changes they experience both abroad and upon their return home.

Purpose of Current Study

In light of the rarity of Black female study abroad participants and the shortage of studies concerning this topic, additional research needs to be conducted to gain a better understanding of the Black experience abroad. The purpose of the current study is to examine how African American women succeed in studying abroad and the meaning they create from completing this endeavor. This study specifically seeks to answer the following research questions:

a. What challenges do African American women encounter throughout their study abroad experiences?

b. What personal, social, and institutional resources do African American women use to overcome the challenges they encounter during the study abroad process?

c. What experiences do African American women have during their international study programs that are meaningful to them?

d. What transformations do African American women experience after completing a study abroad program?

This study investigates the experiences of Black women who attended a state university in the South and completed study abroad programs of at least one semester. Therefore the scope of this study is contextualized specifically to this unique group of African American women.

Overall the current study is important because there is a paucity of literature that examines the experiences of African American women who complete study abroad programs. It is assumed that by highlighting the success stories of Black female study abroad participants, space will be opened to promote undertaking of this endeavor by other Black women in the future. Specifically, the findings from this study can provide information to education abroad advisors, higher education administrators, and faculty program directors on the factors to consider when organizing, promoting, and developing study abroad programs to better attract African American female participants. More importantly, this study can offer African American women who plan to study abroad relevant information on how to best navigate the process and how doing so may transform their lives, by broadening their sense of power, identity, and cultural awareness both abroad and at home.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Study Abroad? Educational Framework and Program Types

The Institute of International Education (IIE) broadly defines study abroad as "receiving college credit from a U.S. accredited institution after returning from studying in a foreign country" (Penn & Tanner, 2008). Prior researchers have posited study abroad as a form of experiential learning (Gardner, Gross, & Steglitz, 2008; Perry, Stoner, & Tarrant, 2012; White, Hollingsworth, Allen, & Murdock-Sistrunk, 2011; Zambito, 2002), where knowledge is gained through contact with one's immediate environment. Experiential education both recognizes "the pedagogical value of each individual's experience as the basis of learning" (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011, p. 1149) and "involves increasing one's overall knowledge by applying what has been learned in the classroom to real life interactions" (Zambito, p. 94).

Employing Dewey's concept of educative experiences and Mezirows's transformative learning theory, Perry et al. (2012) proposed that through critical reflection, short-term studies abroad can significantly change students' worldviews. Namely, this critical reflection provides a student the opportunity of "opening his/her frames of reference, discarding old ideas/habits, and adapting new ways of thinking/believing, eventually changing one's assumptions and ways of seeing the world" (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011, p. 1142). Relatedly, White and colleagues (2011) applied Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) and found that reflective essays aided minority male students in increasing global business awareness and overall personal development. By combining direct experience and critical reflection students reify what they learn during their programs abroad. Since study abroad is framed as an experiential education opportunity, educators must find innovative ways to facilitate and evaluate learning outcomes for students who engage in this academic endeavor.

The umbrella term "study abroad" includes a multitude of program types, durations of time abroad, and sponsoring institutions. Students may participate in programs offered by their home universities, such as academic exchanges wherein two institutions formalize an agreement to send students to study at a partner university for a period of time. Additional university-sponsored study abroad opportunities include faculty-led or island programs in which a faculty member takes a group of students abroad for a specific course. Students may also choose to study independently with companies that specialize in international education programs. These program providers offer a comprehensive selection of options across various locations and academic disciplines. The length of study abroad programs typically varies according to program type. Programs may be as short as one week and as long as it takes to earn a full academic degree. However, the average duration is one week to one month for faculty led programs and one semester or an academic year for exchange programs. Program provider companies offer opportunities of various time frames along this continuum.

How long should one Study Abroad?

The ideal length of time to study abroad (to receive the maximum benefits of this opportunity) is a highly contested issue within the field of international education. Some proponents of short-term studies abroad conclude that general travel in conjunction with "faculty-student engagement, experiential learning opportunities, dialogue and group discussions focused on students' experiences, and reflection assignments connected to experiences and readings" can garner positive outcomes that alter students' worldviews (Perry et al., 2012, p. 682). However, Behrnd & Porzelt (2012) found that the duration of the stay abroad was actually more important than having travelled abroad at all in achieving increased strategic intercultural competence (six months) and affective intercultural competence (ten months) for a group of

German study abroad students. Moreover, Williams (2005) stated that while all study abroad programs "may differ in varying degrees of immersion, it is presumed that spending 4 months abroad will provide ample opportunity for participants to interact with people of the local culture" (p. 358). While there is no consensus on the optimum duration to study abroad, Taylor & Rivera (2011) have offered a well-balanced explanation of the issue: "the recommended duration of a study abroad program is at least one semester. However, because of the many barriers for students to study abroad, short term study abroad programs are gaining momentum...to democratize the opportunity" (p. 61). Despite what theorists believe is the optimal amount of time to spend abroad, during the 2011-12 academic year, 37.1 percent of students who studied abroad did so during the summer for short-term programs and 35 percent spent one semester at a university in another country (IIE, 2013). According to IIE, while these two timeframes have remained most popular with study abroad students, their respective percentages and rankings have fluctuated over the past decade.

Why Study Abroad? The Proposed Outcomes

Study abroad is an important educational experience because it offers a variety of positive academic, personal, relational, and professional outcomes for student participants. Additionally, one's motivation to study abroad is often related to the expectation of achieving these proposed outcomes, which often entail the desire "to learn about a different culture, to broaden the mental horizon, to extend professional knowledge at a different university, or simply to improve language skills" (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012, p. 213). Prior research has stated that the central academic outcomes for study abroad participants include improved foreign language proficiency (Dawson, 2000; Ryan & Twibell, 2000) and enhanced leadership skills (Dawson, 2000). Development of these skills can ultimately prepare students to be more competitive

8

candidates in the job market (Dawson, 2000). In their study of African American male participants of a short-term summer program, White et al. (2011) found that the experience fostered the expectation of and desire for future international work opportunities for this group of students. Moreover, in his doctoral dissertation, Posey (2003) compared the long term educational and employment outcomes for both study abroad participants and non-participants in Florida. Posey found that study abroad participants were more likely to graduate from college, took slightly less time to complete a Bachelor's degree, had overall higher mean GPAs, and were more likely to obtain higher degrees. The academic and professional outcomes of study abroad are legitimate and are often used to market this opportunity to students who seek to gain an edge in today's competitive global job force (Burkart et al., 2000). In fact, Stroud (2010) argued that "students are studying abroad because potential learning outcomes, such as development of intercultural communication and global understanding have become an economic commodity with high value in the global marketplace" (p. 504).

In addition to the proposed academic and professional outcomes, study abroad offers a variety of personal benefits to participants. Researchers have found that study abroad experiences can provide students with higher levels of patience and independence (Dawson, 2000), greater flexibility and decisiveness (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012), perceived increases in communication self-efficacy (Milstein, 2005), and the desire for future international travel for personal enjoyment (White et al., 2011). Prior studies have suggested that international study can propel general personality maturation qualified by lower levels of neuroticism and higher levels of openness and agreeableness according to the Big 5 Personality Traits (Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013) and enhance overall personal development by learning about human nature and oneself (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Study abroad also has been shown to promote changes in

students' worldviews (White et al., 2011), "where a student's preconceived and established notions and beliefs are tested" (Perry et al., 2012, p. 682).

A growing area of study abroad research focuses on the changes students experience in their sense of identity, self-concept or self-esteem (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Several studies have found that study abroad allows for greater exploration of and insight into one's national identity (Dolby, 2004; Jewett, 2010; Savicki & Cooley, 2011). Specifically, in her study of American students studying in Australia, Dolby argued that "despite the rhetoric that focuses attention on students' encounter with 'the other' and the subsequent increase in cultural competency and understanding, in actuality student's primary encounter during the study abroad experience is with themselves as national and global actors" (2004, p. 154). Moreover, in their study of a group of Americans studying in Spain, Talburt and Stewart (1999) reported that students either tried to blend in with the host culture or placed an emphasis on creating closer relationships with fellow American participants. This body of research shows the potential for self-development during the education abroad process.

Studying abroad also garners positive relational outcomes for participants as they interact with people from different cultures. Studies have shown that students experience improved intercultural communication skills (Williams, 2005), stronger intercultural competence (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012), a greater acceptance of diversity (B. Y. Lee et al., 2013), and develop lifelong friendships (Dawson, 2000) by studying abroad. Intercultural sensitivity can be defined as "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" and intercultural competence is "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p. 422). As technology and travel expand the lines of communication between individuals across geographical and cultural boundaries, these intercultural communication skills

are becoming increasingly important. Additionally, in their study of the "disorienting experiences" of pre-service teachers, Trilokekar & Kukar (2011) suggested that international studies provide students with the opportunity to recognize instances of privilege and power relations both at home and abroad. This recognition of and reflection on power dynamics are viewed as the first steps for "transformative learning" (2011, p. 1149).

The special case of global citizenship and global competence

The discussion of study abroad outcomes would be incomplete without mentioning the well-cited objective of producing global citizens and/or fostering global citizenship. According to White et al. (2011), "many college educators believe that international exposure and experiences will add significant value to their graduates' abilities to become global citizens and leaders which is considered a desirable outcome" (p. 189). Despite the fact that researchers have suggested that global citizenship is a benefit of studying abroad (Dawson, 2000; Ogden, 2010; Picard, Bernardino, & Ehigiator, 2009; Stroud, 2010) and this rhetoric is common among international education professionals, the term "global citizen" is highly contested. Woolf (2010) argued that the idea of a "global citizen" posits a utopian view of education abroad and "may also signal the development of a new privileged and empowered class" (p. 51). He instead proposed that the development of global competence and cosmopolitanism are more realistic and relatable goals that should be used in study abroad discourse. Woolf suggested that cosmopolitanism is a process that can be learned, while global citizenship is an unattainable, idealized state of being. In short, he recommended that the ultimate goal of study abroad be "to create better educated citizens" where students learn and experience "something about another culture so they can be better citizens of their own" (Woolf, 2010, p. 50).

Stressful Outcomes of Studying Abroad: The Case of Culture Shock

While the general consensus is that studying abroad is a positive, rewarding, and enriching experience, some negative outcomes and potential risks do exist. Prior studies have reported that study abroad students tend to engage in more risk-taking behaviors, feel like cultural outsiders (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), and grapple with instances of racism and sexism (Talburt & Stewart, 1999). Ryan & Twibell's (2000) study of students' values and coping strategies while abroad suggested that students experience the greatest amount of stress concerning social relationships, academic achievement, communication skills, personal adjustment, health, and bureaucratic procedures during the study abroad process. Relatedly, Hunley (2010) examined how higher levels of psychological distress and loneliness experienced abroad related to lower levels of functioning. She theorized that study abroad students experience increased levels of loneliness given the absence of their usual social support systems combined with the detachment they may feel from their new local communities. Essentially, "travelling to a different part of the world, away from family and friends, away from a familiar language, culture, and way of life is stressful" (Hunley, 2010, p. 387).

The combination of stress, coping, and cultural adaptation study abroad students experience are elements of culture shock, which is defined as the overall adaptation to a new culture when old behaviors are rendered ineffective (Ryan & Twibell, 2000):

> Culture shock occurs in four phases: a. honeymoon phase, marked by excitement; b. disenchantment phase, where realization of the setting occurs; c. beginning resolution phase, where individuals seek new patterns of behavior; and d. effective functioning phase, where the individual becomes comfortable in the new culture. (p. 412).

It is paramount that students and international education professionals are aware of and honest about the likely benefits as well as the potential risks of studying abroad. Forthright discussions of the advantages and challenges of international study programs are fundamental to comprehensive preparation for the experience.

What really happens after studying abroad? Reverse Culture Shock and Re-entry support

While most travelers expect to experience elements of culture shock, few who return home anticipate instances of reverse culture shock- "the process of readjusting, reacculturating, and reassimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time" (Gaw, 2000, p. 84). Travel and study abroad returnees tend to underestimate how their home environments have changed during their absence and how they have in fact changed by their experiences abroad (Cox, 2004). Moreover, Szkudlarek (2010) suggested that "the unexpectedness of the difficulties [to be] encountered, a lack of preparation for reentry, and grief for the lost expat life" are additional factors that contribute to reverse culture shock (p. 3). While reverse culture shock is a growing area of international education research, few studies have examined the factors that influence the likelihood and intensity of reverse culture shock and the necessity of reentry support (Cox, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Szkudlarek, 2010). Even when international education professionals discuss "unpacking" students' study abroad experiences, it typically refers to the process of helping students to organize their experiences abroad into a narrative of transferable skills that are deemed marketable in today's workforce (Gardner, Gross, & Steglitz, 2008, 2009).

Rogers and Ward (1993) found a correlation between actual social difficulty and psychological adjustment, but no relationship between the expectation of social difficulty and the actual experience of it during reentry of a small group of secondary school students in New Zealand. Gaw's (2000) examination of American college students who completed high school

13

outside of the United States suggested that higher levels of reverse culture shock correlate to issues with personal adjustment and concerns with shyness. He found that levels of reverse culture shock did not correspond to willingness to seek on-campus resources, but had a negative effect on actual usage of these resources (Gaw, 2000). In his study of repatriation adjustment of American sojourners, Cox (2004) found that age, marital status, length of sojourn, debriefing, levels of closeness of relationships, and the use of communication and information technology (e.g. e-mail and internet) impacted repatriation adjustment. He also suggested that intercultural identities (home favored, host favored, integrated and disintegrated) influence reentry adjustment whereby "the healthiest pattern to adopt is one where expatriates acquire proficiency in the host culture while maintaining connection with home culture" (Cox, 2004, p. 216).

Moreover, in her concise, yet in-depth literature review article on reentry, Szkudlarek (2010) stated that prior studies primarily have focused on the process, people, and practices of reentry (p. 2). She cited studies that have shown the following factors to impact home culture readjustment: gender, age, personality traits, marital status, socioeconomic status, cultural differences between the host and home cultures, and level of contact with home-country individuals. Szkudlarek suggested that additional studies that employ diverse methods be conducted to close the gaps in reentry literature. Although few studies regarding reverse culture shock and reentry adjustment exist, these are two important issues for the education abroad field.

How to Study Abroad? The Study Abroad Process Model

"Whether one views study abroad as an opportunity for personal growth, a responsibility as a global citizen or a résumé builder… it is essential that we understand who studies abroad and who does not" (Stroud, 2010, p. 504). In order to address Stroud's request, there must be an evaluation of the study abroad process models proposed by researchers, as well as an analysis of the factors that encourage and inhibit students' participation in study abroad programs. Arguably,

14

the majority of international education research has focused on study abroad outcomes and the factors that influence student participation in the experience. In a review of the relevant literature, few studies have endorsed a specific model of the stages involved in the study abroad process (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2010; Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009; Simon, 2007). However, the existing study abroad process model offers a limited view of the stages involved in completing this endeavor.

The proposed model of the study abroad process derives from college choice models developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Perna (2006) (Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon, 2007). The three stage study abroad choice model (Simon, 2007) includes "the development of the predisposition or intent to study abroad, the search for an appropriate study abroad program, and the selection of and departure for a particular location and program" (Salisbury et al., p. 123). This model suggests that the stages overlap and the decision to study abroad involves intense planning, occurs over a period of time, and is based in part on institutional factors and the accumulation of various forms of capital (Salisbury et al., 2009; Simon, 2007). According to Salisbury and colleagues, "a wide range of factors involving socio-economic status, habitus, and capital are related to students' decisions to participate in study abroad opportunities" (p.124). Moreover, Salisbury et al. (2010) adapted the integrated model of student college choice developed by Perna (2006) to show the complex relationship between institution type (i.e. liberal arts colleges or research or regional universities), higher education contexts (college culture and learning environments), and the layers of students' financial, human, social, and cultural capital as they relate to the intent to study abroad.

The model developed by Simon (2007) and Salisbury and colleagues (2009, 2010) provides a general overview of the steps required to study abroad. Given the low rate of

participation, the multiplicity of outcomes, and the barriers students face, the accomplishment of study abroad indicates more involved and nuanced factors. This ultimately calls for an expanded model of the study abroad process that represents the complexity of pursuing this educational experience.

Factors that contribute to Study Abroad Participation

Many studies have explored the factors that impact the likelihood of study abroad participation (Dessoff, 2006; Goldstein & Kim, 2006; He & Chen, 2010; Penn & Tanner, 2008; Posey, 2003; M. Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010; Taylor & Rivera, 2011; Walker et al., 2011; Williams, 2005; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). These factors can be generally organized in terms of accumulation of capital, person-specific traits, one's international interests and experiences, and institutional influences. Salisbury et al. found that the accumulation of social (awareness of and access to resources and networks) and cultural (values, attitudes, and beliefs) capital before college and during the freshman year positively correlates to studying abroad:

> In the context of intent to study abroad, examples of social and cultural capital informing students' decisions might be the availability of information about study abroad, its perceived educational importance, social or family constraints, comfort in negotiating multicultural environments, awareness of and interest in international events and issues, previous travel abroad, and second language proficiency (2009, p. 124).

Additional pre-college factors that impact student's study abroad participation include high school GPA, ACT scores, parental income (Posey, 2003), family socioeconomic status, attitude toward literacy, and level of parental education (Salisbury et al., 2009).

Several studies have found that gender also influences one's intent to study abroad (Dessoff, 2006; Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010; Goldstein & Kim, 2006; He & Chen, 2006). Typically, women are significantly more likely to study abroad compared to men. Goldstein &

Kim suggested that this likelihood exists because "women scored significantly lower than men on ethnocentrism, had more positive expectations of study abroad, and greater foreign language interest" (p. 516). Moreover, Dessoff argued that more (white) women study abroad because the practice is rooted in tradition. He explained this by highlighting the history of finishing schools and stating that study abroad originated with romance language majors at women's colleges who spent their junior year abroad to master linguistic and cultural competencies.

Additional person-specific traits that correlate to study abroad participation include: identifying as Caucasian or non-minority (Goldstein & Kim, 2006), possessing higher levels of conscientiousness, openness, and extraversion (Zimmerman & Neyer, 2013), and scoring high on measures of personal autonomy, flexibility and openness (Williams, 2005). Studies have shown that academic major (Dessoff, 2006; Walker et al., 2011; Williams, 2005) also correlates to study abroad participation, in that social science, arts and humanities, and business majors are more likely to do so compared to pre-professional disciplines such as nursing and engineering. Prior travel (Penn & Tanner, 2009; Taylor & Rivera), the desire to improve intercultural understanding (Stroud, 2010), aspirations of future international careers (Walker et al., 2011), positive expectations of the study abroad experience and interest in learning a foreign language (Goldstein & Kim, 2006) also influence one's intent to study abroad.

Institutional factors also impact study abroad participation. Stroud (2010) found that the geographical distance between the university and a student's permanent home related to studying abroad, in that students who attended universities located 100 miles or more away were more likely to study in another country. Prior research has suggested that the type of higher education institution also correlates to study abroad participation (Dessoff, 2006; Salisbury et al., 2009). Students at liberal arts colleges are more likely to study abroad compared to regional or research

universities and community colleges. The presence of faculty support and encouragement (Penn & Tanner, 2009) and the promotion of study abroad by institution staff members and peers (He & Chen, 2010) also compel students to study abroad.

Barriers to Studying Abroad

The previous section discussed factors that contribute to study abroad participation. However, studies have revealed additional influences that serve as obstacles for students who may be interested in studying abroad (Burkart et al., 2000; Dawson, 2000; Dessoff, 2006; Goldstein & Kim, 2006; Shih, 2009; Stroud, 2010; Taylor & Rivera, 2011; Walker, Bukenya, & Thomas, 2011). Common rhetoric and prior studies have suggested that high program costs combined with limited (knowledge of) financial resources serve as the primary barrier to international study experiences (Dawson, 2000; Dessoff, 2006; Taylor & Rivera, 2011). Moreover, job and familial obligations (Dessoff, 2006) and negative family attitudes toward the value of study abroad (Burkart et al., 2000) make studying abroad less likely.

A variety of academic and institutional barriers also limit study abroad participation. These include: majoring in pre-professional degree programs such as engineering, nursing, or architecture (Dessoff, 2006; Stroud, 2010), being concerned with completing one's academic degree requirements on time (Goldstein & Kim, 2006), and having the goal to pursue graduate studies in the future (Stroud, 2010). Moreover, research has found that attending college for a longer period of time (Walker et al., 2011; Taylor & Rivera, 2011), living at home instead of on campus (Stroud, 2010), being a non-traditional student and attending a community college where there is a lack of institutional support in terms of study abroad staff (Dessoff, 2006), also negatively affect study abroad participation.

Lastly, students may have some personal barriers that limit their access to study abroad. Researchers have found that students who score high on measures of ethnocentrism and

prejudice (Goldstein & Kim, 2006), who place a low value on the experience of study abroad (Dessoff, 2006), and who lack awareness of and access to information about study abroad (Shih, 2009) are less likely to engage in this type of educational experience.

Who Studies Abroad? Participant Profile

Given the comprehensive list of external factors and personal qualities that correlate to study abroad intent and participation, researchers and international education professionals have created a profile of the "typical study abroad student." According to IIE (2013), the student who is most likely to study abroad is a White female, social science major who spends the summer (or a semester) studying in Europe during her junior year of college.

Where do Students Study Abroad? Popular Destinations

The average American study abroad participant studies in Europe (Shih, 2009; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). According to IIE's annual Open Doors report (2013), 11 of the top 25 study abroad locations were in Europe. In 2012, the top five study abroad destinations were the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, and China, respectively.

Why do the students of color stay home? Minority Students and Study Abroad

Of the 283,332 study abroad participants in 2012 represented in IIE's Open Doors report (2013), 5.3 percent identified as Black or African American- only 15, 017 students. While study abroad numbers have steadily increased over the past decade, the percentage of African American student participants has risen only 1.8 percent during this time frame (from 3.5 in 2001). This growth rate and percentage of participation are lower than Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5.8 in 2001 and 7.7 in 2012) and Latino (5.4 in 2001 to 7.6 in 2012) minority groups, but higher than Multiracial (2.0 in 2001 and 2.5 in 2012) and Native American groups (0.4 in 2001 and 0.5 in 2011) (IIE, 2013). Several studies have examined why minority students engage in this activity significantly less than their Caucasian counterparts (Brux & Fry,

2009; Burkart et al., 2000; Salisbury et al., 2010; Zambito, 2002), provided examples of minority experiences abroad (B. Y. Lee et al., 2013; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Zambito, 2002), and offered recommendations on how to improve minority participation in study abroad . Moreover, a review of the literature yield fewer studies that consider the international education experiences of African Americans in general (Acquaye & Crewe, 2012; Dawson, 2000; Day-Vines, Barker & Exum, 1998; Penn & Tanner, 2008; Walker et al., 2011; White et al., 2011) and African American women specifically (Chapman, 2007; Evans, 2009; Morgan, Mwegelo, & Turner, 2002; Talburt & Stewart, 1999).

Barriers specific to and intensified for minority students

Researchers and professionals have proposed that the primary obstacle for minority student participation in study abroad is financial constraints (Brux & Fry, 2009; Dessoff, 2006; Burkart et al., 2000; Zambito, 2002). Referring to early study abroad literature (Carter, 1991), Burkhart et al. suggested that minority students experience additional barriers, such as "…program structure; language requirements;…the length of study; admissions requirements; marketing; lack of faculty or departmental support for study abroad;…the campus culture; state legislature-mandated course requirements, and difficulty in transfer of credits" (p. 2). Dessoff also explained that there are certain cultural and psychological barriers minority students grapple with while considering study abroad as a feasible option. These often include having the perception that study abroad is a luxury and the fear of experiencing racism abroad. Zambito proposed that misconceptions of the experience, unappealing program locations, and a lack of specific marketing and outreach serve as additional hurdles for minority students who may desire to study abroad. Citing many of the previously mentioned factors, Brux & Fry declared that historical patterns, academic scheduling conflicts, family and work responsibilities, and safety concerns also serve as roadblocks for minority student participation in study abroad.

Lastly, in their extensive survey study, Salisbury et al. (2010) found that social capital factors can influence study abroad intent differently between white and minority students. Specifically, for African American students, higher ACT scores and co-curricular involvement decreased the likelihood of studying abroad. For Asian students, higher parental education and course-related diversity experiences in college decreased desire to study abroad. For Latino students, receiving loans and previous enrollment in experiential college courses decreased study abroad intent. This study suggests that since the factors that contribute to minority student participation in education abroad differ, perhaps the discourse in marketing this experience should differ accordingly to specific minority groups:

> Although study abroad is often marketed as if all students should be attracted to study abroad for the same reasons, these findings suggest that some of the most widely used arguments in favor of participation- that study abroad will provide opportunities for cross-cultural skill development and improve post-graduate career opportunities- appear to have no affect [*sic*] on increasing study abroad intent among most minority students (p. 144).

Recommendations to increase minority student participation in study abroad

While many studies have outlined the obstacles minority students face while pursuing the opportunity to study abroad, some studies provide recommendations on how to improve low participation rates within this population. In her brief web-based article, Shih (2009) discussed the importance of having awareness of the available scholarships and financial aid for study abroad, such as the Gilman Scholarship provided specifically for students who receive the Pell grant. Similarly, Mclellan (2007) advocated the "PEPP" process to improve minority student participation in study abroad- promote the value of international education, encourage involvement in international education, prepare students for international travel and interactions,

and provide relevant and cost-effective programs (p. 31). Moreover, Brux & Fry (2009) recommended that colleges locate education abroad as an institutional priority and philosophy by soliciting buy-in from all campus departments, providing information in a central location, creating special minority outreach programs, promoting awareness of financial resources, designing study abroad programs that appeal to minority students, showcasing past minority study abroad participants, creating alliances with other universities and institutions, and sharing best practices with other institutions (p. 523-4). Zambito (2002) argued that targeted promotion activities can lead to increased participation in study abroad by minority students, "through the use of testimonials from successful alumni and prominent business leaders, more students will recognize the benefits of the study abroad experience" (p. 98). Burkhart et al. (2000) proposed that for minority students, study experiences away from the United States can "produce profound and lasting changes in student' self-image, their academic and professional goals, and their attitudes about their roles in society" (p. 2). Lastly, in their case studies of two large universities, Picard and colleagues (2009) challenged other institutions to conduct comprehensive self-assessments on minority student participation in study abroad. These evaluations should "identify factors that deter minority students from studying abroad in greater numbers… challenges and impediments to increasing those numbers [and]… programmatic initiatives that can be targeted to minority students" (p.334). Perhaps by offering specific outreach programs that highlight testimonials of past minority students, potential minority participants may learn about more culturally-relevant outcomes garnered by the experience.

African American students and Study Abroad

Studies that have examined education abroad and African American students suggested that obstacles are exacerbated for them because of the lack of study abroad role models as peers or faculty mentors (Penn & Tanner, 2008) and their desire to travel to and study in Africa as

heritage seekers (Dawson, 2000; Day-Vines et al., 1998; Penn & Tanner, 2008). Penn & Tanner stated that while African Americans show interest in studying in non-traditional and popular locations, they have great misconceptions of the actual costs involved in spending a semester abroad. Moreover, Penn & Tanner also indicated that Black students hold "the belief that somehow the international experience will take away from their educational experience in college" (p. 277) and that "perhaps the major issue of contention concerning Black students and study abroad is the lack of academic and social connections to show how international education is a vital part of their college education" (p.278).

Several studies that highlight the African American experience in education abroad have promoted service learning and short-term study opportunities as a method to increase international education for Black students (Acquaye & Crewe, 2012; Penn & Tanner, 2008; White et al., 2011). These program models are more cost effective, provide real-world application and allow for the combination of education, action, and reflection. For example, Acquaye & Crewe (2012) presented a case-study of a successful short-term service learning program for social work students at Howard University in which the program was completely funded by the university, occurred during spring break and garnered increased participation numbers. Moreover, through extensive surveys and reflective personal essays, White et al. (2011) examined African American males' perceptions of their short-term study abroad experience in Africa and Europe and found that the program fostered an interest in additional international travel and an awareness of cultural diversity in the participants.

In addition to promoting service learning to attract Black students to education abroad, research has suggested heritage programs to Africa and within the diaspora as an effective method to recruit participants. In her study of African American students in a summer-study

program in Ghana, Dawson (2000) found that "the misconceptions and stereotypes associated with Africa" and Africans initially served as challenges during the program (p. 125), but students ultimately gained profound personal, cultural, and academic rewards by going to Africa. Moreover, Day-Vines et al. (1998) specifically examined the impact of diasporic travel on ethnic identity development for African American students who travelled to Africa. Day-Vines and colleagues stated that these experiences encouraged the dispelling of myths and negative stereotypes about Africa and Africans; provided inspirational and emotional experiences that link students to their ancestral past; presented an opportunity to examine American values within a contrasting context; promoted identity growth/changes and better intercultural sensitivity; and contributed to student academic achievement and motivation to succeed.

"You Go (Away), Girl!" African American Women and Study Abroad

In a review of the study abroad literature, three journal articles (Evans, 2009; Morgan et al., 2002; Talburt & Stewart, 1999), a single book (E. Lee, 1997), and one Master's thesis (Chapman, 2007) were found that specifically examined the experiences of African American women who have studied and travelled internationally. Talburt & Stewart (1999) illustrated the gendered, sexualized, and race-based experiences of the sole African American female participant in their study abroad program in Spain. The student grappled with "feeling vulnerable, verbally harassed, and singled out for intimidation by men on the basis of her race, gender, and foreign status" (p. 170). The authors advocated dialogue about race, gender, and culture throughout the study abroad experience and within the academic environment to foster social change. They argued that "a curriculum that overtly engages race and gender through their experiential meanings and through historical and contemporary study would benefit all students- not only those who are ostensibly affected by their marked positioning" (p. 172). While their study examined the experiences of participants from various ethnic groups, Trilokekar & Kukar

(2011) also detailed the difficulties with racism, ignorance, and discomfort that one African American woman experienced during their program in China.

To establish a legacy of Black women in international studies, Evans (2009) employed a historical analysis of the personal and academic life of past African American women scholars, specifically Dr. Anna Julia Cooper (an African American woman born into slavery who eventually earned her doctoral degree at the Sorbonne in Paris, France), to outline the international interests these women have brought to their research in order to "challenge racial and gendered disparities" in the field of (international) education. Evans' explicit goal in conducting this study was to show that learning the "history of Black women's study abroad can assist in removing barriers to educational opportunities that still exist for many Black and women students" (p. 94).

Similarly, in *Go Girl! The Black Woman's Book of Travel and Adventure*, E. Lee (1997) presented a series of personal travel narratives from influential Black women writers, academics, and activists. She organized these stories in terms of travel locations- Africa, the African Diaspora, and various international locales. While not a text that directly outlines the study abroad experiences of Black women, E. Lee provided an important source for African American women who seek inspiration for international travel. Moreover, in her introductory chapter she offered unique insight into the sense of empowerment and transformation she gained by travelling abroad and having the opportunity to experience an identity outside of the context of being a Black woman in America:

> The biggest surprise about traveling internationally was to discover that in many parts of the world it is an asset to be a black woman, unlike in North America, where it is often a liability. When I am abroad, I am usually afforded a level of respect and appreciation that

I do not get in my own country…It does wonders for my self-esteem and peace of mind, which, in turn, contributes to my overall well-being. Most of us are not fully aware of the stress involved in being an African American until it's absent… (p. 14).

E. Lee's (1997) sentiment is akin to the discussion of finding one's voice in intercultural contexts proposed by B. Y. Lee et al. (2013). In their journal article, B. Y. Lee and colleagues presented narrative vignettes of women from a variety of cultures who have studied abroad. They suggested that "finding one's individual voice in a different context can be difficult, especially when he/she is undergoing cross-cultural transitions and experiences a great number of life changes" (p.25). However, "diversity is an important part of discovering one's voice…because the act of acknowledging and honoring others' way of life facilitates an awareness of how people situate themselves in the world" (p. 26). These studies suggest that international travel for women of color is a profound experience that offers the opportunity to examine one's identity from a different context, ultimately opening space for positive transformation.

In line with research that purport African American student interest in heritage study programs in Africa, Morgan et al. (2002) offered a preliminary study in which narratives of one African woman from Tanzania and two African American women were presented. This study showed the importance of Black women building understanding of each other's experiences by studying and traveling in Africa and throughout the Diaspora. The authors stated that Black women should study abroad to promote sisterhood and liberation for other Black women by sharing their experiences and identifying sources of cultural continuity.

Lastly, in her Master's thesis, Chapman (2007) arguably offered the most comprehensive evaluation of Black women's experiences in the context of study abroad. Using a variety of qualitative methods (interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations at hair

salons), she examined how twenty self-identified Black women's beliefs about hair, beauty, and identity were shaped by studying abroad. While Chapman (2007) integrated study abroad narratives with an interesting and relevant topic for Black women, the primary focus of her study was Black women's racial identity and sense of beauty as it surrounds their hair, not study abroad itself- as a process and educational opportunity that has been historically limited for African American women. The current study differs from Chapman's (2007) in that I seek to investigate how African American women navigate studying abroad in all of its stages- developing the desire to do so, exploring program choices, completing the application process, researching and acquiring financial resources, adjusting to a different culture for a semester or longer, and readjusting to life at home. While the present study will not contextualize its findings in terms of beauty, hair and racial identity, these and other topics are expected to be revealed.

Summary

Prior research has purported the positive outcomes of education abroad; analyzed factors that influence study abroad interest and participation; noted the challenges in minority student enrollment, and provided a peak into the experiences of African American women who travel internationally, especially to Africa and within the diaspora. However, few studies were found that deeply explored the experiences of African American women who succeed at studying abroad and how they use this experience for personal growth and transformation. Specifically, there is a dearth of research that answers the how (the specific resources used to navigate the education abroad process and adjusting to the changes experienced abroad and after returning home) and why (the overall meaning given to the experience) of study abroad for Black women. The current study seeks to create a space where this discussion takes place.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

"Methodology refers to the broad principles of how to conduct research and how interpretive paradigms are to be applied" (Collins, 2009, p. 270). In the current study constructionism served as the epistemology that supported my beliefs on how knowledge is constituted. Within this epistemology, I used a womanist theoretical perspective to examine how African American women are empowered by studying abroad. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, a thematic approach to narrative inquiry was employed to analyze the data and answer the four research questions. In this chapter I detail my research design and describe how issues of ethics and quality were safeguarded in this study. In the following chapter I present my findings as individual vignettes of study abroad stories with an analysis of the common themes found across participants' stories.

Site of Research

Case Review of Study Abroad Participation at Sunbelt State University

Sunbelt State University (SSU), a pseudonym, is a major research university located in a large metropolitan city in the southeast region of the United States. SSU is recognized for its urban campus and the ethnic diversity of its student body. 40% of SSU students are White, 37% are Black, 13% are Asian, 8% are Hispanic, 4% are Multiracial, and 6% are Other/Not reported (SSU, 2013). Like many American colleges and universities, in 2011 SSU developed a 5-year Strategic Plan in which a central goal is to earn merit in globalizing the university. Increasing study abroad participation is a fundamental initiative to achieve this goal at SSU.

According to the SSU annual Study Abroad Fact Book (2012), slightly less than two percent of the student body participated in some type of study abroad program during the 2012-

13 school year. Seventy percent were female and most students participated in short-term summer programs. These numbers mirror the national data for students who studied abroad in the previous academic year. However, upon a closer look at the study abroad participation data at SSU, one finds a stark contrast to national study abroad participation trends, especially in terms of race. During the 2012-13 academic year, 47.89% of the students who studied abroad were White, 28.82% were Black, 9.47% were Asian, and 13.03% were unreported. While participation rates are generally low, at SSU African American students, and thus presumably African American female students, are studying abroad at a higher than national rate.

How SSU Ensures Minority Student Participation in Study Abroad

Sunbelt State University has employed a variety of initiatives to set study abroad as a central focus for the institution at large, thus, making the opportunity more widely available to minority students. First, SSU hosts two study abroad fairs each year. This allows students to learn about an array of programs at various points during the academic year. To promote the activity to the student body, campus-wide class presentations are conducted daily by a team of student assistants who have studied abroad in the past. In addition, the SSU study abroad staff collaborates with a variety of intercultural organizations to market activities and to organize joint programs. For example, a recent program launched within the last three years links potential study abroad students with international students from a country of interest who are studying at SSU. This particular program allows for mutual cross-cultural learning.

In terms of financial support, SSU funds study abroad scholarships by a portion of student fees. This provides a number of SSU students with scholarships ranging from $1,000 to entire program costs for those who have never traveled out of the country. Each scholarship recipient is required to fulfill a service commitment to share their experiences and promote study

abroad around campus. In addition to these institutional initiatives, the SSU study abroad office organizes panel discussions that highlight the experiences of minority students abroad each year during International Education week. Moreover, throughout the academic year, study abroad staff members coordinate a minority mentoring program where potential minority students are linked with a past participant who studied in the region or country of interest.

It is evident that SSU staff members put forth much hard work, creativity, and diligence to execute a variety of programs that market study abroad to minority students. However, I argue that while effective programs do exist, their execution should be reviewed regularly to evaluate how to better implement these initiatives.

Researcher Subjectivities

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher must be reflective and self-reflexive about who she is and how she influences her research. According to Johnson-Bailey (2004), "the qualitative research paradigm views subjectivity…as a propitious stance that allows the readers to know the lens through which the research is presented and to then make their own evaluations about the legitimacy and worth of the research" (p. 133). Similarly, Tracy (2005) stated that "one of the most celebrated practices of qualitative research is self-reflexivity…honesty and authenticity with one's self, one's research, and one's audience (p. 842).

My personal story guides my research interests, connects me to my participants in fundamental ways, and informs my interpretation of data. I, like the participants in my study, am a self-identified African American woman who studied abroad for a semester while enrolled at SSU. My experiences abroad changed me in profound ways, many of which continue to be uncovered years after having returned home. In short, by studying abroad I became more

independent and flexible. I also learned to enjoy a more balanced lifestyle and gained insight into my future career goals.

I had my first international travel experience the summer before I began high school. When one of my middle school teachers organized a 2-week tour of France, Germany, and Switzerland, I jumped at the opportunity to practice my French in a natural setting. After I returned home, I knew I wanted to travel more and return to Europe again. I continued to learn French throughout high school and college, and I made a personal goal to spend a full semester in France to experience the culture and improve my language skills.

While it was a goal I always wanted to accomplish, studying abroad often felt like a distant dream to me. I grappled with finding the funds to afford it, worried that my degree requirements may be delayed or unfulfilled, and received discouraging feedback from my family regarding the endeavor. I also questioned the value of the experience and lacked foresight on how studying abroad would affect me personally and professionally. Despite all of these challenges and through meticulous planning, I eventually made it happen and studied in France for a semester during my senior year of college. Although I experienced many of the barriers that other students face, I also possessed some advantages that possibly made studying abroad more likely for me. For example, I grew up in a nouveau middle class household with both parents and was a very successful student throughout my academic career. I also lived in culturally diverse environments all of my life, developed friendships with people of various backgrounds, and thus, had an interest in and a connection to multicultural and international issues.

At some point while living overseas I decided that I wanted to help others have their own international education experiences. After graduating, I returned to teach English in France for a year and then began an internship in the study abroad office at SSU. Now, in my current

international education career, I am often challenged to be accepting of social, racial, and cultural differences. In doing so, I must acknowledge and analyze ways in which I am both privileged and oppressed as a Black American woman. While racism and sexism are forms of oppression that taint my life at various times and in varying degrees, I also realize that I receive special privileges by having an American passport, being a native English speaker, identifying as heterosexual, and enjoying a relatively middle class lifestyle.

As I conducted research with other African American women who studied and traveled abroad, I understood that while we may have had many similarities, I could not take for granted the characteristics that made each woman and her personal story unique. Johnson-Bailey (2004) stated that "the experience of the researcher as an insider or an outsider cannot be a fixed one, because we are all at some point an insider and an outsider, given the setting" (p.129). Stating my positionalities and subjectivities provides an opportunity to analyze the power dynamics at play between myself as the researcher and the women who chose to participate in this study. Moreover, being transparent and reflective throughout the research process allows the readers to understand and critique how knowledge is both constructed and furthered within this study.

Epistemology

The epistemology that substantiated the current research was constructionism. According to this understanding of knowledge, "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). The two principle elements of constructionism include the belief that multiple truths exist instead of a single, ultimate Truth and meaning is created through the interaction between human consciousness and external reality. The constructionist epistemology

worked best for the current study because the concepts international, education, gender, race, and identity are all culturally-specific and socially constructed. According to Mead, "every person is a social construction…we come to be persons in and out of interaction with our society" (Crotty, 1998, p. 62). Therefore, each participant's narrative served as an interpretive story of who she *is* and a constructed recollection of her experiences abroad. Overall, constructionism provides credibility to multiple voices, truths, and the various routes used to find and interpret them.

The Womanist Theoretical Perspective

Definition and Roots of Womanism

The theoretical perspective that guided my research was womanism (distinct from, but sometimes mistakenly referred to as "Black feminism"). According to Phillips (2006), "womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women's and other women of color's everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people…."(p. xx). The term was coined by Alice Walker (1983) to name the unique social standing and life experiences of African American women. In her canonical book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker offered the following definition for "womanist":

> 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist…

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (1983, pp. xi- xii).

The womanist theoretical perspective espouses the idea that the lived experiences of Black women are distinct (from those of their Caucasian counterparts) and provide a special vantage point to analyze multiple sources of oppression and common forms of resistance. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), "womanists understand that oppression is an interlocking system, providing all people with varying degrees of penalty and privilege…they believe that individual empowerment combined with collective action is key to lasting social transformation….which seeks the liberation of all, not simply themselves" (p. 280).

Central tenets of Womanism

According to Phillips (2006), the five major components of womanism include: anti-oppression (desire to transform oppression of all types), vernacular (common, everyday experiences), non-ideological (lacks rigidity), communitarian (collective well-being), and spiritualized (respect for all life and the spiritual world) (p. xxiv). This perspective is grounded in the belief that Black women experience a unique combination of oppressive forces based on race, gender, and class. This idea has been termed intersectionality (Collins, 2001) or polyrhythmic reality (Sheared, 1994). Specifically, Sheared stated that "the relationship between

race, gender, class can best be illustrated with a triangle. Race, gender, and class are intersecting lines of reality, and the womanist perspective views these realities from within the triangle" (p. 271). Moreover, Collins (2009) has suggested that sexuality, culture, and nation are additional components of intersectional oppression (p. xii).

Womanist theorists also focus on the importance of individual women's lived experiences as a valid and important source of knowledge. Collins (2006) has suggested that the "personal is political" and "when it comes to Black women's political resistance, where you stand, what you can see from that vantage point, and what you stand for matter greatly" (p. 160). While there is a particular focus on issues affecting the African American female community, womanism also opens the door "for other marginalized or excluded groups and for the inclusion and institutional validation of their experiences and concerns" (Phillips and McCaskill, 1995, p. 1017). hooks (1984) suggested that "every woman can stand in political opposition to sexist, racist, heterosexist, and classist oppression….if she is firmly opposed to all forms of group oppression, this broad perspective will be manifest in all her work irrespective of its particularity" (pp. 61-62). Overall, "as an ethical system, womanism is always in the making- it is not a closed fixed system of ideas but one that continually evolves through its rejection of all forms of oppression and commitment to social justice" (Collins, 2001, p. 11).

Challenges in Naming this Theoretical Perspective

As previously stated, the womanist theoretical perspective is not black feminism. While there is overlap between these two ideologies, they are in fact distinct. According to Phillips (2006), Womanism and Black Feminism are "sisters….Womanism is what's left behind when feminism is lifted off Black feminism, it is the sound and feel of Black feminism, the politics of Black feminism, and the soul of Black feminism" (p. xxxv). Many womanist scholars who reject the term black feminist believe that because feminism began with white, middle class women,

there is no place for Black women to genuinely participate in that movement. Hudson-Weems (1993) stated that "….the fact remains that placing all women's history under White women's history, thereby giving the latter the definitive position, is problematic…it demonstrates the ultimate of racist arrogance and domination, suggesting that authentic activity of women resides with White women" (p.47) On the other hand, (black) feminist scholar, bell hooks (1989) believes that womanism does not provide an adequate context for political transformation:

> When I hear black women using the term womanist, it is in opposition to the term feminist; it is viewed as constituting something separate from feminist politics shaped by white women. For me, the term womanist is not sufficiently linked to a tradition of radical political commitment to struggle and change…I believe that women should think less in terms of feminism as an identity and more in terms of 'advocating feminism'…(pp. 181-182)

While the various forms of feminism (black included) are often perceived as a radical and political movement, womanism values how change occurs in common and everyday contexts. Phillips stated that "Womanist activism does not focus on the confrontation of institutional structures so much as on the shaping of thought processes and relationships" (xxx).

Some scholars use both terms interchangeably (Evans-Winter, 2011), and others further specify themselves as African Womanists (Ogunyemi, 1985) or Africana Womanists (Hudson-Weems, 1993). However some scholars, like Patricia Hill Collins (1996) believe that it is time to move past labeling this theoretical perspective and to simply do its work:

> No term currently exists that adequately represents the substance for what diverse groups of black women alternately call 'womanism' and 'black feminism.' Perhaps the time has come to go beyond naming by applying main ideas contributed by both womanists and

black feminists to the over-arching issues of analyzing the centrality of gender in shaping

a range of relationships within African American communities (p. 66).

Agency as Womanist Work

At the core of womanist philosophy is a focus on researching the ways in which Black

women exercise agency in their everyday lives. Many studies have examined African American

women's struggle, survival, strength, resistance, empowerment, and resiliency. All of which are

key components of agency- the belief "that there is always choice, and power to act, no matter

how bleak the situation may appear to be" (Collins, 2009, p. 309). For example, Evans-Winters

(2011) examined how Black girls develop resiliency in urban schools by utilizing family, school,

and community support systems. Moreover, in her ethnography of working class African

American women in a Southern hair salon, Battle-Walters (2004) coined the term *racial and*

gender victorization, "the ability to value one's racial and gender makeup, while not allowing

social stigmas, sanctions against, or stereotypes associated with one's makeup to inhibit,

diminish, or control one's self-perception, outlook, or the quality of one's everyday lived

experiences" (p. 106). Battle-Walters offered a new conceptual model to explain how this group

of women see themselves as victors and not victims in their everyday lives. Additional studies

have focused on resisting negative images of Black women in the media (Collins, 2006; Hall,

2011; Lindsey, 2012; Nicol, 2013); using Black Feminist Authoethnography to find one's voice

(Griffin, 2012); and portraying the agency of Sojourner Truth in children biographies

(VanderHaagen, 2012). Other studies have also examined the resiliency of Black single mothers

(Mendenhall, Bowman, & Zhang, 2012); how Black female college students cope with gendered

racial microaggressions (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne Huntt, 2012); how Black girls

resist sexual coercion and negative sexual scripts (French, 2012); how Black women demonstrate

subaltern agency as school voucher advocates (Pedroni, 2005); and the empowering benefits of

Afrocentricity and Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice (Pratt-Clarke, 2012).

Summary

Womanism is an important theoretical perspective that provides a platform to evaluate

the lives of African American women within their own everyday experiences. This philosophy

advocates a "for us, by us" approach to examine the challenges African American women face

and the resources they use to overcome them. Specifically, womanism offered a natural

framework to analyze how African American women navigate the study abroad process and how

that experience can promote empowerment and positive transformation in their lives.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry is the intricate process of gathering stories to understand a situation,

phenomenon, or set of experiences. A narrative can be a short topical story of an event or

character, a story of a significant aspect of one's life, or someone's life history (Chase, 2005, p.

652). However, narratives are more than just the stories we tell. This line of research

acknowledges the complexity involved in storytelling- to whom stories are told, why the

accounts are being shared, and how the audience affects the stories that are communicated.

Before stories are influenced by the audience, narratives are first constructed by their narrators.

Chase asserted that "narrative is retrospective meaning making- the shaping or ordering of past

experiences" (p.656). According to Riessman (2008), narratives have layered meanings:

> The term narrative in the human sciences can refer to texts at several levels that overlap:
>
> stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive
>
> accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a

story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the

participant's and investigator's narratives (p.6).

Johnson-Bailey (2004) stated that "we find and construct meaning in our lives by telling

our stories" and "the narrative as a style of telling and researching has been widely adopted by

feminist scholars when working with the words of other women" (p. 124). Accordingly, narrative

inquiry is well aligned with the womanist perspective and offers an appropriate methodology for

the current study. Specifically, I used narrative inquiry to examine the meaning African

American women create from their study abroad experiences. I also evaluated the transformative

potential of reflecting on those experiences, since "for some people, the act of narrating a

significant life event itself facilitates positive change" (Chase, 2005, p. 667).

Research Design

Participants and Selection Criteria

The participants selected for the current study were self-identified Black or African

American women who were current or former students at Sunbelt State University. Like Battle-

Walters (2004), "I use[d] the terms Black and African American intermittently to include those

who are Black but not originally American as well as those who can be identified as African

American but refer to themselves as Black" (p.3). Each participant completed a study abroad

program of one semester or longer within the last five years. This timeframe was chosen because

the education abroad literature suggests that the general outcomes gained from studying abroad

are solidified during stays of at least one semester abroad (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Taylor &

Rivera, 2011; Williams, 2005). Moreover, participants who studied abroad within the last five

years were targeted for this study for two additional reasons. First, it typically takes several

months to readjust to living in one's home country after having been abroad for an extended

period of time. Secondly, study abroad participants need ample time to reflect upon their

39

experiences in order to apply what they learned. Gaw (2008) cited prior research that suggested readjustment can persist "from a few months to a year or longer" after returning home (p. 84). Therefore, the limit was set at 5 years to allow ample time for mediation of the reentry process.

To recruit participants for the current study, I first contacted potential participants I knew personally via an e-mail that included information about the study, the criteria to participate, my contact information, and a response deadline. Participants were also recruited by an invitation sent by the Study Abroad Director at SSU on my behalf. This e-mail contained a short message from the Director along with the recruitment message (the same one used in the first recruitment method) attached to it.

All participants in this study were recruited from Sunbelt State University. This setting made it possible to conduct in person interviews in a public location mutually selected by each participant and me. These locations included my office, the participant's home, or a local coffee shop. If a participant was a former study abroad student at SSU, but no longer lived in the area, a video interview was conducted using *Skype* and e-mail correspondence.

After a potential participant contacted me, I replied to her message, thanked her for expressing interest in my study, and asked to schedule an interview within two weeks at a public place of her choosing. Once the interview meeting time and location were established, I asked the participant if she had any questions about the nature of the study. At the interview meeting, we discussed research consent and each participant signed the informed consent form.

Copies of the signed consent form and data sheet were e-mailed to each participant within two weeks after the interview took place.[4] Along with the consent form, I sent each participant a thank you message and a copy of her interview transcript. I continued this process until data

---

[4] See Informed Consent Form in Appendix

saturation was attained, whereby no new findings were revealed during the interviews. This occurred after conducting individual interviews with five participants.

Collection of Data

In the current study I conducted five semi-structured individual interviews. I recorded each interview using the *Audacity* recording software on my personal laptop. The duration of the interviews was between one hour and one hour and forty five minutes. While pre-determined questions were asked, the sequence of these questions changed slightly with each interview.[5] Depending on the participant's experience, additional topics unfolded and were also discussed during the interview.

I employed the phenomenological interviewing technique where "the interviewer must listen carefully, follow up on participant's responses without interrupting the story flow…[and] provide a supportive, non-therapeutic environment in which the participant feels comfortable to provide in-depth descriptions of the life experiences of interest to the researcher" (Roulston, 2010, pp. 17-18). Phenomenology refers to the study of human experiences. According to deMarrais (2007), "this form of inquiry attempts to discover the meaning people place on their lived experiences…[and] result in contextual, holistic, thematic descriptions of particular experiences" (p. 56). During phenomenological interviews, power is shared between the interviewer and the interviewee. The participant is the expert and shares detailed information about her lived experiences, while the researcher is the student who learns about the topic of interest (deMarrais, 2007; Roulston, 2010). By taking this approach in each interview, organic *conversations* took place, and I obtained in-depth information about each participant's study abroad experiences.

---

[5] See Interview Protocol in Appendix

Member-checking is a process that allows the participant to decide if her experiences were accurately portrayed and provides an opportunity to change or clarify any details of her experience that the researcher may have misrepresented or misinterpreted. To conduct member checking, I e-mailed a copy of the interview transcript to each participant within two weeks after the interview took place. An offer to change or clarify any portion of the interview transcript was presented. However, none of the participants requested adjustments to their transcript.

If I needed clarification on a specific topic or question, I asked a participant to answer follow up questions via e-mail. I also asked each participant to share what she gained by reflecting on her study abroad experiences and to offer any feedback regarding an ideal time to complete this activity. Three of the five participants responded to these follow up questions. Once the final transcripts were agreed upon, I analyzed the data and constructed a summarized version of each participant's study abroad story. I then e-mailed a copy of the completed manuscript to all of the women who participated in this study.

Analysis of Data

Thematic analysis is one of the many methods used in narrative inquiry to analyze narratives (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis of narratives relies on narrative content- what is said and the meaning behind what is spoken. By employing this method of data analysis, I primarily focused on *what* the participants revealed about their study abroad experiences during the interview. The interaction between the participant and me and *how* it affected the discussion was only of minimal importance. Referring to thematic analysis, Roulston (2010) stated that:

> This approach generally entails some form of *data reduction*, through applying codes to the data….in order to define conceptual categories; *categorization of data*, through sorting and classification of the codes or data into thematic groupings or clusters, and

then finally, *reorganization of the data into thematic representations* of findings through

a series of assertions and interpretations (pp. 150-151).

I reviewed each interview transcript multiple times and used inductive reasoning to discover,

code, and categorize central concepts found in the participants' stories. I carefully analyzed each

participant's story to uncover significant and recurring themes that specifically answered the four

research questions in this study. I then summarized the major highlights of each person's unique

narrative and constructed a new, condensed version of her original story (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Lastly, I analyzed the themes found to be both common and unique across multiple stories.

Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

While conducting qualitative research, one must adhere to the ethical code of conduct

established in social science research. In her article on ethics and vulnerability, Tisdale (2004)

stated that researchers should pay close attention to the following ethical issues in qualitative

research: "respect for persons, beneficence and justice" (p. 15) and "selecting participants,

making risk-benefit assessments, and obtaining informed consent (p. 23). To ensure that my

research was carried out in an ethical manner, I completed all necessary requirements to receive

approval from the Institutional Review Board at my home institution. Moreover, I followed the

established protocol to recruit participants for the study, ensuring that I obtained informed

consent from each participant before proceeding with research activities. Each participant was

aware of her rights to leave the study at any point, to refuse to answer any question, and to edit

her responses before the research was analyzed and written for final submission.

The most crucial ethical concern this study engendered was ensuring that the identity of

each participant remained confidential. I addressed this issue by utilizing pseudonyms in the final

manuscript and by safeguarding all research documents until the data was destroyed. Moreover,

only my thesis Advisor and I had access to the research data. Lastly, because the research topic

and interview questions were not of a sensitive nature, participants in this study were not expected to experience any more risks than they would in a normal day of life.

Ensuring Quality in Qualitative Research

According to Tracy (2005), "high quality qualitative methodological research is marked by a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence" (p. 839). I offer a quality Master's thesis by following the eight criteria Tracy prescribed. The investigation of how African American women succeed at studying abroad is both timely and relevant to the current landscape of American higher education. Moreover this topic is unique and fills an important gap in the present international education research. Tracy insinuated that a study shows sincerity when "the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research" (p. 841). I ensured sincerity and credibility in this study by openly stating my subjectivities and how who I am guided my construction of knowledge as a researcher throughout the final three chapters of this study.

I employed academic rigor by providing a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, clearly stating my theoretical perspective, and being transparent about my methodology and research design. Moreover, the sampling criteria in this study were specific and guided by the literature that supports a semester abroad as an ideal length of time to gain the purported outcomes of the experience. When interacting with my participants I made every attempt to "get the story right," by conducting member checks/reviews of the data after transcription and maintaining confidential relationships with each of my participants.

Lastly, resonance, significant contribution, and meaningful coherence all relate to achieving the goals set forth in the study while influencing target audiences. Tracy (2005) stated

that meaningfully coherent studies "(a) achieve their stated purpose; (b) accomplish what they espouse to be about; (c) use methods and representation practices that partner well with espoused theories and paradigms; and (d) attentively interconnect literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings" (p.848). These three factors are yet to be determined, and are somewhat out of my direct control. However, it is my goal to present a study that is deemed interesting, credible, and influential to the community of African American women who seek to study abroad, professionals who can assist them in doing so, and the academy at large who may view this study as advancing knowledge in education abroad research. This study will be represented in a traditional qualitative research structure and submitted to a peer-reviewed academic journal.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings from each participant's interview as an individual

vignette of her study abroad story. Each story follows a similar structure in which I rely on direct

quotes to answer the four major research questions of the study. In the final section of the chapter

I analyze the themes that are both common and different across all of the participants' stories.

Individual Study Abroad Stories

To the Motherland: Tia's Semester in South Africa

"It's not like I have more on my resume to apply for a job or a Masters or PhD. It's more about life and that I have more to add to my toolbox to educate other people" (Tia, personal communication, December 19, 2013).

Tia's Decision to Study Abroad

Tia is 24 years old and spent a semester in South Africa. She describes herself as Black

and/or African American and defines her SES as lower/working class. Unlike some students who

travel before studying abroad, Tia did not and that was her motivation to engage in this endeavor.

"Being a minority, I wanted to break the barrier that few minorities come from well-traveled

families." She thought of study abroad as an opportunity to show the world a different depiction

of Black womanhood. "I wanted to fight the stereotypes. In other cultures what they think of

Black women comes from the media. So I wanted the opportunity to speak as an individual."

While she had a desire to go abroad, Tia was unaware of the opportunities available to

her until she was a junior in college. Before transferring to SSU, Tia attended a community

college "where the focus was on finding a job right after you graduate versus traveling." After

changing schools and her academic major Tia realized study abroad was something she *could* do.

"When I took up Anthropology, that's when I realized that these resources were available to me. They would come to our classrooms to speak to us, and that's when I knew 'ok this is possible.'"

After meeting with her Academic Advisor, Tia chose a provider program to South Africa because it was the only option she found that offered courses for her major. Like many African American students who desire to study in Africa as heritage seekers (Dawson, 2000; Day-Vines et al., 1998; Penn & Tanner, 2008), Tia was excited to go South Africa to connect to a semblance of her ancestral roots. "When I think about it, every other race has a homeland they can return to. So for me as an African American woman, I guess I had this desire to find a sense of identity."

Challenges in the Planning Process

While preparing to study abroad, Tia faced various challenges. One of which was completing loads of paperwork to ensure that her academic credits would transfer properly. She said the process "was long, exhausting, and daunting. At one point, I thought I should just wrap it up and do something else." Like many students, Tia also struggled to find the finances to fund her program. "The resources were available, but there was competition between other students. Even with the scholarships, they didn't cover all of the expenses or come on time." In addition, Tia had a major mental roadblock. She viewed study abroad as something *other* students did, not an activity truly accessible to her:

> There's this perception that study abroad is only reserved for rich, white kids. So it
> always seemed like it was never an option to even put out there. You don't discuss study
> abroad or travelling to France or somewhere at the dinner table! So, I guess there's this
> perception that it's just not for you.

Challenges Abroad and Culture Shock in South Africa

When Tia first arrived to Cape Town, she was surprised to find few African American students. "The biggest culture shock was that I was expecting to see at least a handful of African

47

Americans. I was the only one from SSU. It was largely Caucasians from wealthy backgrounds."

Moreover, Tia found the racial polarization in South African society jolting. On one hand, she

lived with a white South African host family with which she had a great relationship. "They were

the friendliest people- whatever I needed they gave to me." On the other hand, Tia found it

disheartening that Black South Africans worked as domestics and received meager wages. "I

wasn't used to people picking up after me. They would come there to clean and make their

homes beautiful, and then walk so many miles to come back the next day for such low pay."

Still the greatest challenge Tia faced during her semester abroad was an identity crisis as

an African American woman who was not embraced as an insider by Black South Africans. "I

was looking for this end-all of 'this is who I am' now that I'm in my motherland. But in the end,

they didn't see me as African, but as American." When people first approached Tia they spoke

Xhosa to her. "So for those few moments before I opened my mouth, it felt like 'wow I belong

here.' For the first time, I'm not an outcast." Unfortunately this did not last once people realized

that Tia was not South African and did not speak the language. "Then, it was just cut off. I was

placed back into the American category, like 'she is one of them.' It was back to them vs. us."

Because Tia wanted to fit in and feel connected to her African roots, she decided to "go native:"

> I donated all of my clothes and had all of my clothes custom made like the local attire. I
>
> only wore sarongs and I wore my hair completely free. For the first time, I felt like I
>
> could just embrace my Blackness. It did not work though. They thought I was making a
>
> mockery or was trying to prove some type of fashion statement.

Tia also recounted a difficult and intense conversation with a professor who told her she could do

nothing to change that fact that she would always be American:

One of my professors was like 'you wear your hair out, but the texture of your hair is still

white; it is not completely pure.' He told me that I was no different than a white

American dressing up in tribal beads and a skirt. I thought I was trying to be me, like

'Look, this is who I am.' He just said 'you don't even know where you come from, how

could you say this is you?' So that was a jab and stab in the heart.

Sources of Support throughout the Study Abroad Process

Tia enacted a variety of personal resources to overcome the challenges she faced

throughout her study abroad experiences. Primarily, she relied on her belief in God and the

support of her mother. Tia's faith was her anchor throughout the process. "First and foremost it

was my relationship with Christ that really brought me through. For me, coming from an African

American home, religion is everything. When you have nothing else, God is who you have." Tia

also explained that her mother was a great source of support. "She always said 'don't be like me,

go to school and get an education. Don't follow my same footsteps.' My mom sacrificed and

used her entire 401K, so I could break this barrier in our community."

In light of the difficulties she faced preparing to study abroad, Tia praised the support she

received from the SSU study abroad staff. "The people here at SSU were awesome. They helped

me step by step the entire way." Lastly, Tia had an insight that studying abroad would be pivotal

for her. She believed by engaging in this endeavor she would change the arc of her future. "It

was like I was setting this legacy for my children's children- you don't have to live in a certain

area or come from a family with money and education to pursue what you want to do." These

elements bolstered Tia as she prepared to go abroad, faced culture shock, and grappled with an

identity crisis in South Africa.

Meaningful Experiences Abroad

Despite the fact that South Africans did not view Tia as a cultural insider, her Black American identity actually provided her greater and closer access to the South African lifestyle. As an African American woman, Tia received a certain set of privileges in South Africa:

> I could walk places where a Caucasian man or woman couldn't walk alone. I would shop in the local stores and markets where you would find no white South Africans, only the locals. It was like I could walk around barefoot and no eyes were staring at me. In a way as a Black woman, for the first time, I was making baby steps in finding who I am.

When reminiscing about the meaningful experiences she had in South Africa, Tia discussed establishing intimate connections with the locals, enjoying a simpler way of life, and having positive male attention that was not based on her physicality.

One aspect Tia enjoyed most about studying in South Africa was the personal connections she made with the local residents. "They would call me Auntie instead of Ma'am or by my last name. It made a big difference; it was more personable being called sister or Auntie." Tia also made a deliberate effort to learn about the South African way of life. "Some days, I would walk to their homes and help the locals go to the grocery and help them make their traditional meals. I really enjoyed that the most- just listening to their stories." In learning about real South African culture, Tia realized that even when people do not have many material things, they can be happy and lead fulfilled lives. "It seemed like the less you had the less worried you were. Here, we are always on the go and so time conscious of everything. But while I was there, it was just peace, no time constraints."

Another set of meaningful experiences Tia had in South Africa revolved around the attention she received from men based on something besides her physical appearance. "African

men would say stuff like 'your conversation is beautiful.' It wasn't about what they saw, but your intellect. It was weird for men to be attracted to my brain, and not my body." Tia's self-image began to change by having these experiences. She found a new sense of freedom by not tying her self-worth as a woman to her looks. "For the first time, I felt like I could be accepted regardless of what I wore or what I had."

Lastly, by studying her major in Cape Town, Tia was able to compare the education systems of South African and the United States. She found that South African professors concentrated on teaching African history with a sense of pride, where American professors often gloss over the contributions of Black Americans:

> Here in the US, my perception of the way things were taught was very negative with a sense of oppression, depression, just misery- nothing good, besides MLK. Everything is crammed into a specific curriculum, like our Black history was being diluted. Whereas when I was in Cape Town, they taught it for an audience of *us*. They really went in depth to what happened. The African professors wanted to make it part of your DNA.

Tia 2.0: Transformations after Studying Abroad

When Tia first returned home from South Africa, she felt like a new person. "I had this passion and excitement about who I am, like I found Tia." Initially, this posed a readjustment challenge for Tia, as she wanted her family to change in the same ways that she had. "I was on this movement trying to get my whole family to change their wardrobe and wear their hair natural." However, her semester abroad allowed Tia to experience various positive changes in her identity, world view, and beliefs about education. First, studying abroad broadened her view of success and shaped her future career goals:

51

Study abroad really changed everything about the way I think. Prior to study abroad, the goal was to never be broke. It was like get your Bachelor's, Master's, and make sure you get a well-paying job. Without study abroad, I would have just graduated college, got a job, and helped my kids to do the same thing. But I think there is more to life now. It's not even about the finances, my passion is now to teach and give back.

In addition Tia became more vocal about the injustices she sees and more critical of the media:

Now when I hear things on the media or in school or in everyday conversations, I'm not just listening. Now I have an argument back, versus just agreeing. Now I take the time to study what people are saying, what they are telling me, and ask 'does it hold true?'

By experiencing the South African education system, Tia developed a stronger desire to learn about Black history and became more critical of how history is taught in American schools:

It was a wake-up call- you can't continue to allow other people to tell you who you are, where you come from, and what your history is. It gave me an awareness to study Black history, my real Black history versus what I see written in a textbook.

Tia also experienced changes in her personal identity as an African American woman. On one hand, after studying abroad, she felt more connected to and proud of her ancestral roots:

For me, being in South Africa was like one step closer to bridging that gap between just saying I am African American without any relation to it and having no definition to who I am. Now there's this sense of proudness of being an African American woman.

On the other hand, Tia has a broader view of what it means to be an African American woman:

Here as an African American woman, it's all about weaves and whatever you're wearing. So I guess my sense of sexuality really changed in that I don't have to be so revealing in

my body. If I am in a dress or a relaxed outfit, I still feel beautiful. I don't have to live up

to the standards of what it means to be an African American woman here in America.

Overall, Tia's experiences in South Africa are akin to Maya Angelou's time in Ghana,

where she stated "if the heart of Africa still remained allusive, my search for it had brought me

closer to understanding myself and other human beings" (1986, p.196). Arguably, the

overarching outcome of Tia's experiences abroad is that she feels more confident as a person and

has a greater sense of the opportunities that are available to her in the world:

> Now no one can tell me you can't. Now my confidence is so high that I believe I can go
>
> wherever I want to go and do whatever I want to do. That [studying abroad] just broke
>
> the fear. I just want to pursue everything in life.

Out-of-State to Out of Country: Simone's Semester in France

"I am more open-minded than I have ever been. I can now say with certainty that there is a much bigger world outside of America. I don't have to take anyone's word for it because I have lived it myself" (Simone, personal communication, January 30, 2014).

Simone's Decision to Study Abroad

Simone is 23 years old, identifies as Black, and describes her SES as middle class. She

completed a semester in France during her senior year. Simone's love of travel and other cultures

is deeply engrained. From a very young age, Simone knew that a world existed outside of her

immediate environment. "I have been traveling since the age of six, so the curiosity to

experience other cultures beyond vacation was always there. My parents made it their mission

that I experienced life outside of the United States." Simone directly attributed her desire to

study abroad to having travelled early in life. "Being able to see other cultures as a child made

me more open to wanting to study abroad. Perhaps if I didn't travel as much as I had previously,

I wouldn't have been so adamant about studying abroad."

53

Simone's choice to go to college out-of-state further propelled her desire to study abroad. "The distance between my hometown and SSU was the first step. Experiencing other countries and cultures through study abroad was the ultimate opportunity to open my world view." This supports research by Stroud (2010) who found that the geographical distance between the university and a student's permanent home positively correlates to studying abroad. Moreover, Simone's major in History facilitated her decision to study in France specifically:

My college major was History, with a concentration in American History from the turn of the 20th century to 1950. During this half a century, there were two major world wars, of which Europe was a major part. So choosing to study in Europe was easy.

Simone knew she wanted to study abroad the moment she began college. However, she was uncertain of which program to choose or how to fund it. "Study abroad had been an opportunity I wanted to take up since my freshman year of college. There were a lot of presentations about it; I was just unsure of how to pay for it all." However, after hearing about a program from a former participant during a class presentation, Simone knew that a semester in France was what she wanted to do. "A former student visited my International Relations class and pitched the program. I was sold immediately, especially since the spring semester was slightly longer than the fall. If I was going to study abroad, I wanted to commit 100%!"

Challenges during the Planning Process

While planning for her program, Simone was overwhelmed with the length of time and paperwork involved in the highly bureaucratic process of applying for a French visa:

The biggest barrier I faced during the planning process was obtaining my visa from the French consulate. The wait was lengthy, and they are very particular about the way the forms are filled out. I also worried that my visa would not come in time for my departure.

After completing the necessary paperwork to go abroad, Simone struggled with selecting the appropriate courses to meet her academic requirements. Because she really wanted to have this experience, Simone decided to change her academic minor in order to participate. "At first I tried to match classes to keep my minor in Music, but it just didn't work out. So I actually changed my minor from Music to Political Science, just so I could participate in the program." In addition, Simone found the course registration process particularly difficult in France. "Signing up for classes was also a tough task, matching the French classes to their American equivalents. In order to fulfill one American course, I had to take three French classes." Lastly, before arriving to France, Simone was told by people in her social network that the experience would be trying. So at some level she worried about going abroad as a young (Black) woman. However, her experiences in France were much easier to adjust to than expected:

> Of course, going overseas and being female you face a lot of adversities. People are more afraid for you because they don't think you can fend for yourself being in a new environment where you may not speak the language. Honestly, the experience was not as difficult as some made it seem. Then again, those who were telling me about the troubles I would have had not been outside of the continent to experience it for themselves.

Challenges Abroad and Culture Shock in France

Thinking back to when she first arrived to France, Simone mentioned that the language and currency were the first culture shocks she experienced. While Simone did not speak French, she is fluent in Spanish and knew how to navigate basic situations in French. However, she usually spoke English and thus was able to adjust to the language barrier:

> I knew basic things, such as greetings and numbers. I was able to order food and ask basic directions in case I was lost, but English was the major way I communicated. In

France, many people spoke English, as well as other languages. Even if we went back in

forth in our respective languages, it really wasn't a difficult barrier to overcome.

Simone also discussed her difficulty adjusting to French cuisine. "Grocery shopping for the first

time was interesting, to see what people eat in France. The main ingredient was bread. Adapting

to the difference in food was a challenge, particularly with the consumption of so many carbs."

Lastly, Simone had to acclimate to a slower pace of life in France. She eventually enjoyed the

siesta, but did not like the lack of accessibility at certain times. "From 12 pm to 2 pm, stores

closed, and restaurants opened. On Sundays, everything was closed, except hospitals, restaurants,

police stations, and churches. In France, it is just stressed that Sunday is a day of leisure."

Sources of Support throughout the Study Abroad Process

To overcome the challenges she faced in the study abroad process, Simone relied on a

variety of personal and institutional resources. The support of her family was important, as they

gave her a boost of confidence to move forward with her plans to study abroad. "My family was

very supportive of my decision. Growing up I was never limited or confined in anything I did."

Simone also discussed the special influence of her grandmother, who immigrated to the United

States from Jamaica and "strongly believes in expanding your experiences:"

My grandmother was most excited about me studying abroad because she wanted me to

experience other cultures on top of my college experience. She has traveled throughout

the islands and Europe, so seeing me studying in France was a treat for her.

While in France, Simone developed a strong social network with fellow SSU students

and the on-site staff members. One friend was especially important to her due to his French

language skills. "I traveled a lot with my friend, a fellow SSU student. His French is perfect, so I

guess you can say I used him as a crutch!" Although Simone had "no real contact with the study

abroad staff at SSU, only via email," she developed a close bond with the local staff. "My

experience with the study abroad staff in France was phenomenal. Not to sound cliché, but we spent so much time together, that we truly became close friends, even family."

Lastly, Simone's personal desire to be a *good* guest and dispel negative stereotypes of Americans helped her to adapt to the challenges she faced while living in France:

I could not live up to the stereotype of the arrogant, all-knowing American. I always had to remember that I was a guest in someone else's home. I just fell into the routine of saying good morning, good evening, please, and thank you in French to show respect.

Meaningful Experiences Abroad

Simone discussed several aspects of her time in France as being both meaningful and pleasant. Primarily, she enjoyed the French way of living. Europe is widely known for its affordable and efficient public transportation systems and flexible international borders. Simone appreciated the ease of international travel she was afforded by living in France. "France is a great place to stay and made traveling around easier. Plus, all of the countries I went to used the same currency, so I did not have to change my money multiple times." Simone also enjoyed the leisure pace of life in France. "I enjoyed siesta. Taking time out of a hectic day just to enjoy life is something we don't do very much here in America, unless it's a holiday."

In addition to enjoying French culture in general, Simone discussed the relevance of developing life-long friendships, analyzing the French education system, and experiencing the identity Europeans ascribed to her. She highlighted the special relationships that she developed by living and learning with a group of international students in France. "We became good friends, asking each other questions about growing up in America and growing up in Europe. We shared a lot of laughs, tears, and a lot of travel experiences that I wouldn't trade for anything."

By completing a semester in France, Simone was also able to conduct a comparative analysis of the French and American education systems:

I feel as though American classes have us regurgitate information, instead of truly learning it. The French university system is not a series of multiple choice questions, but creates a platform for students to explain how they interpret a situation. There is only one test, and it is the student's choice to show up to lectures every day or just on exam day.

Finally, Simone shared that seeing how open Europeans were to other cultures and their focus on her national, rather than racial identity was also meaningful to her:

In Europe, where I stayed, they were very open to people of different nationalities and ethnicities. I lived in a very diverse town, with a high population of Turkish immigrants, as well as North and West African. While in France, my race was never put before my nationality. People would acknowledge that I was American before anything else.

Simone 2.0: Transformations after Studying Abroad

Simone experienced several positive personal outcomes by studying abroad. First, she described herself as more independent as a result of the experience. "Coming back, I became more independent than I already had been. Traveling alone and being a whole continent away from my friends and family allowed me to truly stand on my own two feet." Also, by living with so many other students, Simone learned that patience really is a virtue. "More patience came with my study abroad experience. This was my first time sharing a home with other people… Waiting for things like the shower, clean dishes and the bathroom requires a lot of compromise." Moreover, after returning from France, Simone strived to maintain a connection to the lifestyle:

Although I swore I would never eat a croissant again (since we had a daily assortment for breakfast), I find myself eating them on almost a daily basis for breakfast. I also adopted the siesta for a while, but being back in America leaves little to no opportunity for that.

Lastly, by studying abroad, Simone feels a responsibility to help others to do the same:

> I found myself wondering why more minority students didn't study abroad. I asked a few
> friends, and they expressed a desire to, but did not have the financial means to do so. So I
> shared with them the scholarships I received for my trip, along with working and saving.

Overall, Simone's semester in France helped her to mature and gain a greater sense of independence, patience and open-mindedness. She stated that reflecting on her experiences abroad allows her to look back on how the experience helped her to grow as a woman:

> Talking about that time in my life allows me to look back on how much I've grown as a
> person. I believe my semester in France acted as a transitional period from an adolescent
> to an adult. I feel a sense of accomplishment, not just as a black person, but as a woman.

A Home away from Home: Michelle's Year in South Korea

"It's about getting to know the people, getting to know the culture and learning why they do what they do, and getting to know good decision making processes that may be different from your own" (Michelle, personal communication, December 21, 2013).

Michelle's Decision to Study Abroad

Michelle is 20 years old and spent her junior year in South Korea. She identifies as a Black woman and describes her SES as lower middle class. Michelle immigrated to the United States at a young age, and that experience fostered her interest in travel. "I guess I loved travel ever since I was young. I'm not originally from America, so my first time travelling was actually to the United States. So I guess it was something just instilled in me." Her love for and attraction to Korean culture began by chance in high school:

> One time I was watching a historical drama about the kingdom period in Korea and I just
> got hooked. I was like 'this is really interesting.' Korea has transitioned so much within
> the last few decades. So I really made it a priority to study abroad in Korea based on that.

By the time Michelle entered college, she knew she would study abroad. It was only a matter of finding the right program. Through in depth research and planning, Michelle decided to participate in a SSU-sponsored exchange program. "SSU exchange programs were the main choice for me because I figured it would be easier to have my credits transferred and things like that." After speaking with the Program Director, a professor in both the Political Science and Asian Studies departments, Michelle knew she had chosen the perfect program, since it allowed her to integrate the experience with her major. "I really wanted to show how this would relate to my major. I wanted to show how I would connect the experiences I would have in Korea and how I would be a good representative of SSU in Korea."

Challenges during the Planning Process

While preparing to study abroad, Michelle described writing her essays as challenging, but she embraced the process. "There were a lot of sleepless nights with those essays. I wouldn't say it was stressful; it just was a lot of paperwork. But in the end it was worth it." However the difficulties Michelle did face stemmed from her family and social network. She received little support from her parents and outright dissuasion from her group of Korean American friends. In regards to her family, Michelle stated:

My parents had a lot of reservations and hesitations to let me go. When I first brought up the idea, they were like 'you can just push this out of your mind. You don't even need to talk about this, because it is not going to happen. We are not going to let you do this.'

Because her desire to go to Korea was so strong, Michelle continued to prepare for her program, and her family somewhat relented their efforts to stop her. "When they saw that I was really serious and I was making the plans to go even without their approval, they had no choice."

While preparing to study abroad, Michelle connected to the Korean (American) population at SSU. "The way I decided to orient myself further into the culture was to make

more Korean friends. I wanted to practice the language before I went abroad." However, after

sharing her plans with this group of friends, they tried to deter Michelle from pursuing her goal:

> The biggest challenge I had was Korean students telling me not to study abroad in Korea.
>
> They said that especially me being African American, I would not have a good
>
> experience because Korea is very homogenous and close-minded. That was a big turn-off
>
> for me. I was like, 'if Korean students are saying this, is this really a good decision?'

The lack of support from her family and negative feedback from her Korean friends distressed

Michelle. So much so that she almost considered giving up on her dream to study in Korea.

However, her desire to have that experience was stronger and she continued with her plans:

> I started doubting myself. I almost said forget it. Then I was like I have wanted this for so
>
> long, and for someone else to tell me I can't do this because I won't have a good
>
> experience- I would rather go there, experience it myself and not have a good time and
>
> come back to talk about it personally. That was my biggest set-back, but I overcame that.

Challenges Abroad and Culture Shock in South Korea

When discussing her experiences with culture shock in South Korea, Michelle stated that

the in depth research she conducted prior to studying abroad actually attenuated her feelings of

culture shock. Essentially, because she was so well prepared and knowledgeable about Korean

culture, Michelle believed she experienced little to no culture shock during her year abroad. "To

be honest, I didn't really have culture shock. Because, I did so much research, I knew what to

expect. I just had it in my mind that I was going to be open to new things." However, Michelle

recalled four experiences she had that were challenging and/or different from the experiences she

would typically have in the United States. First, Michelle discussed the difficulties she had

communicating with her Japanese roommate, possibly because they both spoke Korean as a

second language and came from two distinct cultures:

There would be times when my roommate would open the window at night. I could ask her to please close the window, but I couldn't express to her how it was making me feel. That was the point where I wanted to go back home. 'If I can't communicate with her and express what I'm feeling, what am I doing here?'

Then there was the time when Michelle was denied entry at a venue because of her appearance:

One of the things that bothered me during my stay was when I was trying to get into a venue one day and I wasn't allowed inside. The guy at the door said in the most basic English 'your image is the wrong image.' So I don't know if it was because of my natural hair, my size- I don't know. I didn't take it to heart or anything. I just went about it like a lady and said we can go somewhere else.

Michelle also found the education system in Korea difficult to navigate:

The education system of Korea is very different. It's more like rote learning and very one-dimensional. A teacher lectured and the students received. I'm used to discussions and group projects and things that involve a lot of different perspectives, opinions, and diverse groups. So it was hard for me to just accept what all of my teachers were saying.

Lastly, Michelle found the Korean fascination with Black American and hip hop cultures both interesting and mildly frustrating. She recalled an incident when a Korean man tried to get her attention by screaming out "Hey, home-girl!" Michelle found this both rude and offensive. Moreover, because the media fails to highlight the nuances that exist in (Black) American culture, some Korean people were disappointed when they realized Michelle did not embody the stereotypes they see on TV:

They always thought everyone is interested in the same things just because of what they

watch on TV. But the reality is that we are very, very diverse in America. So it was very

shocking to them when I would say 'I don't know what or who you're talking about.'

Sources of Support throughout the Study Abroad Process

Throughout her study abroad journey, Michelle had few social resources that helped her

along the way. She mentioned the support she received from one friend and her church family:

I wouldn't say I had many sources of support, because a lot of people were against it. But

in the last few stages, one of my friends was very supportive. She even cried when I got

accepted, because she knew I wanted this for so long. She was genuinely happy for me.

In addition to her friend, Michelle relied on the encouragement and support of her local church:

My church family was very supportive because they wanted me to have as many life

experiences as I wanted to have. I immigrated to the US, so they were thinking of it in

terms of valuing the experience and grabbing all the opportunities that are available to

people. They even funded part of my trip, which was really nice.

Despite the limited social resources Michelle had throughout the study abroad process,

she relied on an internal source of strength and personal power to realize the experience. "I knew

no one was going to live my life for me. So I figured that this is what I want to do, and I am

going to do it." Michelle's internal locus of support is best exemplified by the in depth research

and planning she conducted to better acclimate herself to Korean culture before going there:

When I have a plan, I have a plan, especially when it came to do this. I researched the

country. I watched YouTube videos on how Black people are treated in Korea and expats

living in Korea. So I had a really good idea about what I was going to experience there.

Even when things did occur that I didn't particularly like, I knew how to go about it.

Meaningful Experiences Abroad

Michelle described her year in South Korea as wholly enjoyable. To her meaningfulness equated enjoyment. "I would have to say my experience was very, very awesome. I think my personality had a lot to do with it. I love trying new things, new foods, and meeting new people." She primarily found the creativity and open-mindedness of Korean youth interesting. "I enjoyed the creativity the most. The youth in Korea are very, very creative. To see their creativity come to life in terms of fashion and art was very enjoyable for me." Michelle also appreciated sharing American culture with Korean youth. "To see them embrace other cultures was very nice as well. Korea has a huge following of underground hip-hop. They are obsessed with American culture, like R&B and Neo-soul. They are very interested in those things." Also, by living and studying in Korea for a full year, Michelle was able to offer a well-balanced analysis on how the American and Korean education systems differ:

> The Korean work ethic is very strong and it isn't as much here. In Korea, your education literally determines the type of job you will have in the future. If you study at this school, this is the kind of job you can have. But in the US, if you have certain opportunities and experiences you could go from the bottom to the top. There is just more of a direct connection between education and career in Korea and in the US the line is more blurred.

Overall, Michelle described a unique sense of freedom she felt while studying in South Korea. "I enjoyed the freedom the most- the freedom not only from my parents, but freedom in terms of jumping the educational barriers."

Challenges at Home and Reverse Culture Shock

While Michelle had limited experience of culture shock in South Korea, she faced many difficulties readjusting to life in America once she returned. According to Cox (2004), people who identify more closely with their host culture or exhibit host-favored intercultural identity

patterns tend to have higher rates of readjustment challenges upon reentry (p. 214). In short, Michelle faced reverse culture shock:

> My experience back here was horrible. Coming back, I felt like I didn't fit in. It felt like staying in Korea for so long, the Korean culture became part of my identity. So when I came back, it was so awkward for me to adjust in terms of socializing.

Michelle discussed her longing for Korea during the first few months after she returned home:

> It's actually really sad, because I left statuses on Facebook about how I miss Korea every day. I missed the accessibility. I missed the food. When I first came back it was hard to eat American food, because my palate was so adjusted to Korean food.

For Michelle, thinking about her year abroad makes her both happy and sad. "Reflecting on my study abroad experiences is always bittersweet. To me Korea is like my second home. Every time I reflect on the time I spent there, I think about so many things at one time, I overwhelm myself." However, to minimize her longing for Korea and readjustment challenges, Michelle makes a concerted effort to maintain the friendships she formed there:

> I still keep in contact with the people I met in Korea. I try to stay in contact with the language as much as possible. So I Skype and video chat with my friends and they send me pictures of what they're doing. That's my little connection to Korea.

Michelle 2.0: Transformations after Studying Abroad

By finally realizing her dream to study in South Korea, Michelle reported that she has a greater sense of self-acceptance, a new passion to travel, and more clarity on her future career. By studying abroad, Michelle feels more self-confident than ever before. "I feel like my personality was more accepted in Korea. So I learned how to embrace who I am a lot more- just being me and finding people who can accept me for who I am." After living in South Korea,

Michelle now wants to travel to more places in the future. "It's like I want to go everywhere. I have the travel bug and want to spend my time in different countries and experience different cultures. I feel like study abroad has kind of put me on a world map." Lastly, by studying abroad, Michelle has a greater sense of direction for her future career. She knows that she wants a profession that has an international focus:

> Now, I kind of have a grasp of what I want to do in the future, because I know I want Korea to be in my future. If I can go back and teach English in Korea or do something like that with my major, that'll be really nice.

Overall, Michelle had a great year in South Korea and her time abroad helped her to better embrace who she is. "Study abroad has affected my life so much. The self-acceptance that I got while I was there and how I overcame those difficulties was so profound for me."

Around the World in 108 Days: Raquel's Semester Aboard

"It's like for 4 months you are doing and seeing something new every day. Every day it's exciting and new. It's just YOLO [you only live once] in the realest sense" (Raquel, personal communication, January 18, 2014).

Raquel's Decision to Study Abroad

Raquel is 29 years old, identifies as Black and/or African American, and describes her SES as middle class. She studied abroad twice, first completing a short-term, school-sponsored program in Spain and then a multi-location provider program. I primarily focus on Raquel's experiences during her Semester Aboard (a pseudonym) program. However, I include some aspects of her studies in Spain, to compare and contrast her experiences with both programs.

Raquel has had a longstanding interest in travel and other cultures, as her mother's profession fostered a desire to learn Spanish. "My mom's a travel agent, and over the years she has taken me to Mexico. So without really trying to she helped me to develop the desire to learn

66

Spanish." When Raquel first studied abroad, she chose a short-term summer program in Spain in order to improve her Spanish language skills.

After returning from her month in Spain and transferring to SSU, Raquel wanted to complete another program to immerse herself more fully into the Spanish language and culture. However Raquel's focus quickly changed after attending the annual SSU study abroad fair and seeing the Semester Aboard program. "I saw this table and just said 'wow that looks epic!' Initially, I wasn't going to do it because of the costs, but I needed to make it work out. I had to take the opportunity." This program was particularly appealing to Raquel, as it allowed her to visit many different locations in one semester. "They had multiple locations that they go to throughout each semester. I liked the itinerary, so I just went with it."

Challenges during the Planning Process

In regards to preparing for her Semester Aboard, Raquel discussed the program costs, course registration, and the visa and vaccination processes as obstacles she overcame:

> The money was the hardest part. I had to make sure I had the Financial Aid and that all of my classes would transfer. I also had to go through the process of getting visas and vaccinations for the different countries we were going to. So there was a lot of work to do, tons of leg-work on everything.

Raquel specifically highlighted the difficulty of obtaining over $20,000 in financial aid and scholarships to participate in this program. "For the cheapest economy cabin it was $22,000. Since I wanted to go, I had to get the money. But it was really tough getting the Financial Aid." Moreover, Raquel discussed the complex process of choosing the appropriate classes to take:

> You have to see what's on your evaluation and what you need to take to graduate. Then you have to see what they offer and what might coincide. I had to do a lot of work to see 'will this transfer over?' and 'will I get credit for this?'

The planning required to participate in Semester Aboard was much more involved than Raquel's first study abroad experience where "the Spanish professor who ran the program did it all- found the tickets, organized excursions, all of that. It was just a matter of giving her the money."

Challenges Abroad and Culture Shock

The first challenge Raquel experienced during her Semester Aboard was seeing few African American students at the departure site. She feared she would be the only one:

> When I first checked in, I looked around and saw no one who looked like me. I was like, 'Oh no, I'm the only one!' It would be really awkward to be the only Black student for 4 months. It would have been like 'she's our representative, our only one, our token.'

Ultimately, there were about fifteen Black students of the 600 total in the program. However, Raquel was also challenged by the fact that she was slightly older than the other students:

> Most of the students were like 'Yay, drinking in every country!' That really wasn't my goal. I think because I was older, I was a little more mature than them and didn't get too crazy. So they bonded a little more, and I didn't bond as much.

In general, Raquel highlighted that her experiences of culture shock in each country revolved around simply hearing the different languages and seeing the street signs, architecture, and local people. Moreover, she felt a sense of "shock" at actually visiting so many places of which she only imagined. "It was just like 'wow, I can't believe I'm here.' It just hit me."

Raquel stated specifically that in the various Asian countries she visited, she found it difficult to have people so intrigued by her as a Black American woman:

> In the Asian countries they really don't see people like us. I don't speak their language and they don't speak mine, but they were clearly indicating to me that they wanted to take a picture with me. I didn't know if I should feel like a freak or something, I just went with it, but I didn't know how to feel about it.

Sources of Support throughout the Study Abroad Process

During her program to Spain, Raquel primarily relied on support from her family and institutional resources at her former college. Because it was a school-sponsored program, the logistics were handled by the Program Director. In addition, Raquel's family helped pay for her program to Spain. "I have a relative who has a little money. I presented this particular person with the details of the program and asked if he would sponsor it, and he agreed to it."

On the other hand, Raquel drew upon a combination of institutional, social, and personal resources to complete her Semester Aboard program. She first called on her mother as a sounding board to support her decisions while planning for the program. "For example, when I was first trying to figure out my classes, I was like 'Hey Ma, what do you think of this?'" Raquel also found the Semester Aboard staff to be incredibly helpful when it came to finding the financial resources she needed to participate in the program:

> The lady really tried to work with me. She said, 'you could take out loans and that might
>
> be enough.' I said, 'that would not be enough to do anything except to just be on the
>
> ship.' So, one day we spoke and she said 'we're having a meeting tonight and you're
>
> going to be one of the topics…' She ended up getting me $7,000!

Lastly, Raquel enacted her own self-motivation and persistence to locate the financial resources she needed to pay for the Semester Aboard program:

> I actually was able to get all of the money, without spending a penny out of my pocket
>
> and nothing from my family. I initially called them and they told me look at the Financial
>
> Aid opportunities listed on their website. I applied for 3 things on the day they were due
>
> and patiently waited. Luckily, I won $15,000, but that was only half. So I called them and
>
> said, 'I'm honored, I can't believe I was selected, but I'm still unable to afford it.'

69

After making a series of phone calls, the Semester Aboard staff member offered Raquel the

additional $7, 000 of need-based financial aid. "So 15 plus 7 covered everything." In addition,

Raquel referred to the program guidebook for many of the questions and concerns she had.

"They had a Semester Aboard booklet that said what time things were offered. I went to that

book like a million times to make sure that I got the most out of this experience."

Meaningful Experiences Abroad

For Raquel, the Semester Aboard experience was meaningful in itself. While at sea,

students took classes on the ship and then completed field activities at each port. "For example,

we had to find out how to say 'Welcome to McDonald's' in every country we visited." Actually

seeing the places she had dreamt of visiting was meaningful to Raquel. "I mean, I'm a young

lady. I'm not from a rich family. I never thought I would see these places." She discussed the

gravity of viewing the Great Wall in China, the famous temples in Cambodia, the floating houses

and Vietcong tunnels in Vietnam, the beauty of a private island in Mauritius, and participating in

a video for the world cup in Brazil. She also recounted experiences in four different countries

that were particularly meaningful to her.

In Japan, Raquel met up with her Japanese friend from college. They both were thrilled to

see each other in her friend's hometown. "I always told her I'm going to see you again, never

really thinking it would be in Japan. So when she picked me up, she was like 'You are not in my

car!' and I was like, 'I know!'" Raquel then described the emotional experience of witnessing a

group of young boys share a bottle of water while visiting the Pink Fortress in India:

> These little boys came up and asked me for pens for school. They didn't even ask me for
>
> money or food. I said, 'I'm sorry I don't have any, but are you thirsty?' They shook their

heads yes and I gave them my big bottle of water. I got emotional watching these little boys share this bottle of water, because we just take stuff like that for granted here.

Raquel also discussed how visiting both South Africa and Ghana was especially meaningful to her as an African American woman. In South Africa, she spent a day in a township with a local student. She recalled that "South Africa was an eye-opener" for her:

To see how they lived was a little frustrating to me. I saw the Portuguese guys that we met- they had brick houses. But you got the Black people, their land, their country, their continent, living in a house that's smaller than my bedroom…I'd never been to Africa, so it was really great to see and experience the real South Africa.

She also found it interesting and slightly disheartening when the local student emphasized her American identity and disregarded her Black ethnicity. "It was funny because he said 'you're just as White as they are.' I guess that his impression of us is Americanized Africans. I was like, 'what? I'm Black! What are you talking about?'"

Lastly, Raquel's visit to Ghana was incredibly moving for her. She first described the sense of comfort she felt getting off the ship: "Everyone said 'Hey sister, welcome home.' We don't really know exactly where we come from, that was taken from us, but to at least be there and have them say 'welcome home' was amazing." While visiting the Elmina slave dungeons, she was struck by the intensity of the experience:

To still see blood on the floor, blood on the walls- it still smells…I held on pretty well until we got to the "door of no return." I wouldn't call it a door; it's more like a hole. I just stuck my head out and I could envision the boats bringing us here [to America].

She then detailed her frustration with the fact that the other students did not fully absorb the solemnity of the experience:

I felt like the White students in general didn't completely get it. They just didn't

understand, in the deepest sense, what it was like to be there and to see that. Their attitude

was like 'let's take pictures in front of the women's cell.' That wasn't a "we're in front of

the Great Wall- let's take pictures" type of experience. This is a "wow, soak in what

happened here" experience.

Raquel 2.0: Transformations after Studying Abroad

The first major change Raquel experienced by studying abroad was her increased interest

in travelling and visiting other places. She described travel as a "drug that there's no rehab or

cure for, only more travelling." She stated that for her, "there's this *need* to travel. Right now, I

feel stir-crazy. I have to go somewhere. I'm always thinking of where can I go to next? I want to

go everywhere." Moreover, Raquel has a desire to continue to improve her Spanish language

skills. "Prior to Semester Aboard, I had the Spain experience and I saw my Spanish improve a

lot. That encourages me to keep going and to work on my Spanish to make it better and better."

In addition to wanting to travel more and maintain her fluency in Spanish, Raquel also

discussed that her experiences abroad have made her more open-minded, more connected to her

ancestral heritage, and more critical of American education. In regards to being more open,

Raquel stated that "I've always been open to different cultures, but I'm even more open now. I'm

more into languages and cultures and open to different types of people." Her visits to South

Africa and Ghana allowed Raquel to feel more connected to where she comes from, her African

ancestry. "There's more of a sense of where I come from. Of course, we'll never know exactly

where, but I have more of a connection with what I feel is my homeland."

Lastly, by having so many first-hand learning opportunities, Raquel sees the value in

experiential education. "I have developed the mindset of having a more hands-on experience, not

just from the textbook. I mean taking Marine biology on the ocean- you don't beat that." In

addition, Raquel feels more critical of how history is portrayed in American schools:

> The history books don't really talk about the atrocities committed against Blacks. Why
>
> isn't that stuff in there? I remember my cousin was doing a history assignment, and the
>
> textbook said Columbus "discovered" America and made Spain rich. The book neglected
>
> to mention that he did this by killing Native Americans and taking their valuables.

Arguably the most profound and far-reaching outcome of Raquel's study abroad

experiences is that she now has an increased sense of self-efficacy, the belief in her ability to

make things happen in her own life:

> I told you how I got the money and how I made it happen. One thing I've learned is that
>
> if you really want something, no matter your background, color, economic status, any of
>
> that, if you really want it, you can make it happen. I learned that you can really make
>
> your dreams come true, if you put forth the effort.

The Art of Living: Aja's Semester in France

"Sometimes you have to be taken away from what you're comfortable with in order to get certain lessons. I received a lot of wisdom about people and life there that I don't think I would have been able to see here" (Aja, personal communication, January 2, 2014).

Aja's Decision to Study Abroad

Aja is a 25-year old self-identified African American woman who described her SES as

lower middle class. She studied in France for a semester during her junior year. Aja recalled

having an interest in French language and culture at a young age. "It was always a lifelong goal

of mine to study abroad in France. Even as a kid, my only dream was to go to France." Her

grandmother spoke Creole and this had a significant impact on Aja's desire to learn French:

My grandmother spoke Creole when she didn't want us to hear her gossip. I remember

thinking 'this is so interesting about her.' I told myself that if I ever had the opportunity

to learn French, I would, because I always wanted to have that conversation with her.

Aja began her studies of French in high school and ultimately chose it as her college

major. Her main focus was to retain the ability to speak French throughout her lifetime. "My

mother took French throughout high school and she lost it. I guess my goal was never to lose it."

Before attending SSU, Aja went to another college and discussed the boredom she felt in

the French classes there. "I just remember in my French classes, I knew all of it already. It got to

the point where I got bored in class and I just wanted to go and *really* learn French." Eventually,

Aja transferred to SSU and chose a SSU-sponsored exchange program because it was the most

affordable option she found. While studying at SSU, Aja also attained employment with a major

international airline, which ensured study abroad as a viable option for her. "As soon as I found

out I got that job, I thought 'Yes, I can finally go to France.'"

Challenges during the Planning Process

Because Aja participated in a SSU-sponsored program, most of the logistics were stream-

lined by the Program Director and Study Abroad staff. "The online website made it very helpful,

because it was in one place. You pay your tuition like you're going to SSU. So you didn't have

to worry if the other school received this or that." However, the major challenges Aja faced

while preparing to study in France included securing funding to participate and finding housing

in France. Aja knew she had to pay for the program on her own:

I couldn't really go to my parents, because they couldn't afford it. So I really had to use

the resources that I had personally. I had to do a lot of saving and a lot of working. I had

to really budget. That was probably the most stressful.

In addition, Aja highlighted the fact that because she didn't ask SSU for help in locating a place to stay in France, she struggled to do so on her own:

> One of my biggest obstacles was finding the housing. I really didn't ask about the housing assistance the university provided, which I wish I would have done. It worked out because my co-worker had a sister in France who agreed to let me stay with her. So I was able to speak French outside of school, watch TV, and really understand how the family aspects are in another country.

Challenges Abroad and Culture Shock in France

Aja explained that she faced many difficulties adjusting to life in France. First, because she did not attend the orientation session, Aja felt lost and unaware of "how the French grade and how French classes work." She was also surprised by the level of independence required to navigate the French transportation system. "I stayed in the suburbs. So I had to take three trains to get to school. It took an hour and it was super complicated." When there were strikes in France, trains were less frequent, making Aja's commute to and from school even more difficult. Aja was also challenged by the communication barrier with her Congolese host mother:

> It was hard to understand what she was saying because she had such a thick African accent. It was hard for her to understand what I was saying because I could hardly speak the language. So I felt like we were always lost in translation.

Aja specifically mentioned that the focus on fashion and the Muslim influence in France were two major elements of culture shock for her. She felt that French people discriminated against others based upon their physical appearance and style of dress:

They only really respect you if you look like you are rich. That wasn't something I was

accustomed to. In America you could walk into a restaurant with jeans and a casual shirt

and have service that would be equivalent to someone who walked in with a mink coat.

Aja also had to adjust to interacting with the large Muslim population found in France. "The city

I stayed in was predominantly Muslim. I, as an American, was apprehensive about that because

of my impression of the Middle East from what I see on TV." In fact, Aja recalled that she had

an introduction to racism in France by someone from the Middle East:

My roommate and I were going out and all of sudden this guy was like "Fatima, Fatima."

My friend got mad and cursed at him, because they call any black girl in Paris, Fatima.

They just assume that we're all from West Africa. I was like wow, there's racism here.

Finally, Aja discussed that she felt rather invisible as an African American woman living in

France and this posed a great challenge for her during her semester abroad:

When you are stepping outside of your home country for the first time, especially as a

Black woman, there are just certain things you can only talk to another Black woman

about. So at that time, I just felt a bit invisible, because I didn't see anybody like myself.

Sources of Support throughout the Study Abroad Process

While preparing to study abroad, Aja relied on her Program Director as an important

resource to navigate the process, but wishes she was more forthcoming about certain issues:

I came to her about a lot of stuff. Although she was really helpful, I wish she would have

been more vocal about scholarships. But having the Program Director to keep you on

track, like 'this is what you need next' was good.

Aja also viewed past study abroad participants as valuable resources. "I think listening to other

people as well, who talked about their experiences helped me to see where I was going and what

I was going to do." Moreover, Aja depended on herself while preparing to study abroad. "Other

than my Program Director, there really weren't too many other resources to use. I had to do a lot of my own personal research in regards to the city, how they live, and studying the language." Aja's reliance on herself is best illustrated by her budgeting skills:

I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if I didn't budget my money right, I would be starving. Once I got there and got into a rhythm it was not as stressful. But it taught me a lot about myself. I was really proud of myself for that.

Lastly, Aja's Congolese host mother, "a very strong woman who was strict in her teachings," provided her with tough, but necessary lessons about French culture and decorum:

She taught me things I wasn't taught before- like where the plate and fork go [on the table]. She said 'I am going to show you, because this is what you need once you step outside these walls, if you really want to adapt to French culture.' She helped me to adapt so others wouldn't look down on me. I really appreciated her for that.

Meaningful Experiences Abroad

While in France, Aja had a variety of meaningful experiences which revolved around inhabiting the French lifestyle and gaining a new perspective on being an African American woman based on the identity others ascribed to her. Aja found the simple pleasures of French living eye-opening and interesting. A simple train ride was an adventure that provided her a glimpse into the lives of others. "Everybody rides the train, so you almost get to see how others live by how they dress, how they walk, how they talk. It taught me to dress better, to put into consideration how you present yourself to others." Aja also found dining out in France to be a decadent experience- a stark contrast to how food is sometimes consumed in America where "we go in a car, don't even leave the car, pick up the burger, and drive off:"

In France if you're going out to eat it's a special occasion….Each course was brought out so beautifully, and the food was so pretty. So for me, I really understood that aspect of

the art of living. I never looked at food as art until it was given to me like that. I think

when you experience that, you feel like you are worthy to receive the art.

Aja discussed at length the struggles she faced with her identity as an African American

woman living in France. In short, she was not perceived as American by people she encountered:

I wasn't seen as American, especially by other people who had the same skin color as me.

I was seen as someone from Africa. True we look the same and kind of talk the same, but

we don't have the same experiences. That was something I had to get adjusted to.

By being questioned about her ethnicity, Aja began to analyze her own identity:

It's like you're living in a bubble and you're ignorant to something you've never really

questioned. I think that made me take a look back and think 'who am I really?' It makes

you realize there's always a piece of you as an African American that's missing. You

don't really realize what was taken from you due to slavery until you're faced with it. So

it kind of makes you define, or redefine what it is to be an American.

As an African American woman in France, Aja was also regarded as an expert on American

history by her professors. However, she resisted this role as she was already critical of the US

education system. She described a conversation she wanted to have with one of her teachers:

As a minority I could never take that kind of history seriously, because it had no

pertinence to me….I really had the urge to take her aside and say 'Look, I'm American,

but I'm African American and there are parts of US history that I could care less about-

due to how my ancestors were treated. So don't ask me [to represent the whole country].'

Aja also witnessed the ubiquity of education in France and how it relates to French cynicism:

They love knowledge. It's promoted everywhere. I think education in France is not

something you just get in school or that would necessarily get you a better pay check. It's

something that's good to know to be more aware of what's going on…At the same time, they are very pessimistic, and I think it has to do with them knowing so much.

Lastly, Aja relished the time she had in France to simply self-reflect and introspect:

I always had a yearning to step outside of my natural environment and go somewhere where no one knows me- to not redefine myself, but to know who I truly am. It [study abroad] gives you a lot of free time to think about your life and develop who you are.

Challenges at Home and Reverse Culture Shock

Aja expressed that she experienced some difficulties readjusting to life after she returned home. First, Aja talked about missing the various aesthetic stimuli she found in France. "What I miss most was the beauty- of going to the Eiffel Tower or the Chateau of Versailles, the beauty of watching a documentary just on champagne. I miss the train rides and seeing the art in people's outfits." Aja also had to adapt to speaking English again and realizing that other people could not fully relate to the experiences she had in France:

I remember I would say certain French expressions and had to remember 'Oh, they don't get it.' You don't want to keep talking on and on like 'France was like this or I did this in France' if no one understands. I just wanted to have somebody to share it with.

Lastly, Aja mentioned the challenge she had readjusting to her romantic relationship after being abroad for an extended period of time. "When you study abroad, you don't come back the same, whether you know it or not. So when you have someone who didn't experience that, you feel like there's a lot you can't really talk about or experience together."

Aja 2.0: Transformations after Studying Abroad

Frantz Fanon (1967) once wrote "the black man who has lived in France for a length of time returns home radically changed" (p. 19). Surely the same rings true for the African

79

American woman. Aja's story is a testament to the transformations that are possible by studying abroad. She stated that she has changed in the following ways:

> I take my fashion a lot more seriously. I try to bring the art in the mundane. I try to speak more French…Because I stayed with an African family, I was able to study two cultures and I think that made me more of a well-rounded person.

By studying and living in France for a semester, Aja has also become more open-minded in general and more aware of the career opportunities available to her:

> I feel like I did a very brave thing. I feel much more confident going into situations that I have no clue about. I think that has made me a lot more flexible and open to explore other things...It inspires me to not think that opportunities in America are my only options. I have global options and that this whole world is available to me.

In addition, her experiences in France helped Aja to develop a greater sense of pride in her identity as an African American woman:

> It made me realize that there's a part of my identity that is missing. But at the same time, I think it makes the identity that I do know a bit more unique and special. I think oftentimes, we devalue ourselves as African American women. But when you step outside of America, you think 'No, I should embrace who I am and where I come from, because it really is unique.' It kind of reminds you of your worth.

In sum, the most profound outcome Aja received by studying abroad in France is a heightened awareness of her power to make things happen in her own life:

> It made me realize that I can do what I set my mind to do…I developed a discipline that I never even knew I had. Just to see all of it unfold so beautifully, I was like 'wow, I did this.' For me, that is the #1 example of how if it's something you really want and you go

after it, it'll pan out. To me it's beyond a study abroad program, that's a life lesson.

That's something you can tell your children, your grandchildren, just people in general.

Aggregate Analysis of Findings

Desire to Study Abroad

The five women who participated in this study represent a unique combination of ages, academic disciplines, and social backgrounds, which influenced their desire to study abroad. Initially, I assumed that African American women who study abroad come from middle and upper class backgrounds. However, the participants in this study held a variety of self-described socioeconomic statuses ranging from middle to lower middle and working class. This finding suggests that while economic background is an important influence for study abroad participation, many other factors are at play in solidifying the decision to pursue this endeavor. These additional factors include awareness of the resources available to study abroad (all of the women), desire to improve foreign language skills (Michelle, Raquel, and Aja), interest in travel and experiencing other cultures (Simone, Michelle and Raquel), family and social support throughout the process (Tia, Simone, and Raquel), and resistance of negative stereotypes (Tia).

Prior research has shown that students with social science majors are most likely to study abroad (IIE, 2013). The women in this study support this finding, since four of them earned social science degrees, including Anthropology, History, Political Science, and French. Research has also acknowledged the importance of accumulating pre-college capital for study abroad participation (Salisbury et al., 2009, 2010). Simone, Michelle, Aja, and Raquel's stories support this research, as they had exposure to international travel and/or foreign languages at various points in their lives before attending SSU. While fostering the intent to study abroad and ultimately planning to do so involve time and preparation, many of the women discussed

choosing their programs as a sudden decision. Simone and Raquel discovered their programs by hearing a class presentation and attending the SSU study abroad fair, and Michelle's interest in South Korea was sparked by watching a documentary.

Challenges during the Planning Process

These five stories support the literature that specify money as a central obstacle for minority student participation in study abroad (Brux & Fry, 2009; Burkart et al., 2000; Dawson, 2000; Dessoff, 2006; Taylor & Rivera, 2011; Zambito, 2002). All of the women discussed their fear of finding affordable program options and their struggles with obtaining adequate funding. In addition, they described the paperwork involved in preparing to study abroad (i.e. visas, applications, scholarship essays, and course registration) as another significant roadblock.

While funding and paperwork were revealed as two central challenges in this study, some of the participants discussed nuanced obstacles they specifically faced. Michelle highlighted the lack of support she received from her social network. Aja struggled to find housing abroad, and Tia held the perception that study abroad was not a viable option for her to pursue.

Challenges Abroad and Culture Shock

Although culture shock is a widely used term, its meaning can seem nebulous at times. There was variance in how each of the participants defined culture shock- it simply *meant* different things to each woman. For example, Simone focused on simple lifestyle differences in France such as the food, daily siesta times, and store closures on Sundays as sources of culture shock. Aja's experiences of culture shock in France revolved around long train rides, interacting with a larger Muslim population, and the necessity to self-present "well" in public. Tia discussed the racial polarity and inequality she saw in South Africa as culture shock, while Raquel highlighted her disbelief of actually visiting such interesting and exotic places.

Although each of the women had different experiences of culture shock in their respective host countries, there were similarities found across several of the stories. All of the women related culture shock to language or communication barriers and adjusting to the education systems abroad. Moreover, Tia, Aja and Raquel discussed not seeing other Black American women abroad as a difficulty they had to overcome in their respective host countries. These three women also faced intense identity crises based on how others perceived them and the primacy given to either their American nationality (Tia, Raquel, and to a lesser extent Simone) or African heritage (Aja). I argue that each woman's primary in-country social network played a role in this. For example, Aja lived with a Congolese family and befriended many West African immigrants; her African ancestry was more salient to this group in order to establish a sense of commonality. On the other hand, while Tia and Raquel interacted with black South Africans, they were perceived as American. This may be related to the fact that Tia lived with a white host family while studying in South Africa and that Raquel only spent one day in a South African township while participating in a program with a majority Caucasian population.

Perhaps the most interesting finding related to culture shock was Michelle's rejection that she experienced the phenomenon during her year in South Korea. Her fascination with the culture, her astute preparation to live there, and the length of time she spent in Korea were contributing factors to the ease and comfort she felt adjusting to the culture, and possibly the challenges she faced upon her return home.

Sources of Support throughout the Study Abroad Process

Each woman in this study relied on a variety of social, institutional, and personal resources to successfully navigate the study abroad process and to overcome the obstacles she faced during her experiences abroad. Michelle relied on one friend for support. Aja found past

study abroad participants to be helpful during the planning phase. Both Tia and Michelle were sustained by their religion and/or church communities throughout the process. Four of the women relied heavily on their families as resources to accomplish their goal of studying abroad.

While each participant's reliance on social support networks differed, all of the women enacted a combination of institutional and personal resources to accomplish this endeavor. Each woman described how her study abroad experiences were influenced by her Program Director, the SSU Study Abroad staff, or the in-country and program provider staff. Both Raquel and Aja gathered information about study abroad from their first colleges before enrolling at SSU. Tia, Simone, and Raquel discovered study abroad opportunities from class presentations and the SSU study abroad fair. Lastly, Aja and Michelle found the affordability and stream-lined process of SSU exchange programs well-matched to their study abroad goals.

Arguably, the greatest resource upon which each woman relied was herself. All of the participants discussed at length the personal factors they used throughout the study abroad process, to not only make it happen, but also to create meaning from the experience. These competencies included, but were not limited to dedication, self-motivation, resistance, flexibility, and patience. In fact, I propose that these women used agency- "people's ability to act upon the social world to change it" to successfully navigate the study abroad process (Welch, 2013, p. 38).

Meaningful Experiences Abroad

Similar to the differing accounts of culture shock, each woman's discussion of her meaningful experiences abroad garnered very nuanced and subjective data. Some women focused on the positive and enjoyable aspects of being abroad, while others narrated the challenges that catalyzed learning, personal development and growth. Simone highlighted the ease of travel, leisure lifestyle, and the friendships she formed in France as meaningful to her.

84

Michelle described witnessing and participating in the creativity and openness of Korean youth as both pleasant and significant. On the other hand, Tia depicted her time engaging with the locals, the positive male attention she received, and African history education in South Africa as encouraging personal growth. Both Raquel and Aja recounted a combination of both enjoyable and frustrating experiences abroad as poignant to them. For Raquel, seeing so many iconic places, visiting her Japanese friend from college, and questioning her identity after going to South Africa and Ghana were impactful experiences. Lastly, Aja discussed the decadence of dining out in France, the adventure of daily train rides, and her struggles with her African American female identity as meaningful. These findings suggest that study abroad participants find value in the experience based on a variety of factors, some of which may not be directly tied to the proposed outcomes of study abroad.

Challenges at Home and Reverse Culture Shock

All of the women faced challenges with reentry to some degree. However, the extent to which each woman had reverse culture shock varied from significant (Michelle) to very mild or moderate. Tia came back more interested in Black culture and wanted her family to join her mission. Simone provided little information about her reentry process, except for her difficulty integrating aspects of her life in France to her life at home. Raquel longed for the daily novelty and excitement of living on a ship and visiting multiple cities. Aja missed the leisure and aesthetically stimulating lifestyle she had in France. She also struggled with sharing her experiences abroad with others, especially her boyfriend.

Michelle, however, spent a full year abroad, instead of one semester like the other participants. In addition to having felt more accepted and comfortable in South Korea, the lack of social support Michelle received from her family and friends before going abroad and their

85

possible limited interest after she returned contributed to her readjustment difficulties. This suggests that length of time, level of enjoyment abroad, and social support in addition to intercultural identity patterns (Cox, 2004) contribute to the intensity of reverse culture shock.

Transformations after Studying Abroad

Given the unique combination of challenges, enjoyments, and achievements each woman experienced during her study abroad journey, she was changed by engaging in this endeavor. Several of the women discussed how study abroad has impacted their future career goals, whereby they hold a broadened perspective of the opportunities available to them or a clearer idea of their professional passions. The three women (Michelle, Raquel, and Aja,) who went abroad with the goal of improving their foreign language skills now have a desire to maintain a working knowledge of Korean, Spanish, and French, respectively. All of the women in this study stated that by studying abroad, they developed a profound yearning to continue to travel in the future. This finding supports previous research that proposed desire for future travel as a likely outcome of study abroad participation (White et al., 2011).

By studying in another country for an extended period of time, all of the women were able to analyze the educational systems of the United States and their respective host countries. This comparative analysis thus changed their beliefs about education in the broadest sense. Tia, Raquel, and Aja critiqued the ways in which American and Black American history are taught. Raquel upheld the value of experiential learning. Simone respected the level of student independence she witnessed in France. Michelle appreciated the multi-dimensional aspects of American education, but questioned students' work ethic.

The last area in which the participants praised the transformative benefits of studying abroad included the changes they saw in their identity as African American women and their

overall personal development. Tia, Raquel, and Aja felt a stronger connection to and sense of

pride in their African heritage based on their experiences in Africa or in the case of Aja, having

close relationships with African immigrants in France. The salience of their identity as African

American women may result from the ways in which they have been socialized as black women

in America. On the other hand, Michelle and Simone's respective first and third-generation

immigrant status may have mitigated their experience of identity changes based on their specific

ethnic backgrounds. Overall, all of the women highlighted the positive personal development

they received by studying abroad. This included greater self-acceptance and confidence for

Michelle; more independence, patience, and maturity for Simone; more open-mindedness for

Tia, Raquel and Aja; and a general sense of pride in achieving this accomplishment for all of the

women. These findings support prior research that suggested personal development and insight

into one's identity as probable study abroad outcomes (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Dawson, 2000;

Dolby, 2004; Jewett, 2010; Milstein, 2005; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Savicki & Cooley, 2011;

Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013).

Participant Suggestions to Study Abroad Staff and Black Women Seeking to Study Abroad

At the end of our interview, I asked each participant if she had any advice to offer study

abroad professionals and African American women on how to improve study abroad

participation within this population. All of the women responded to this question and I have

included the major insights from each participant. Tia shared that she was relieved that I too was

an African American woman and insinuated the importance of having staff members of various

backgrounds represented in study abroad offices. "Sometimes as minorities we want to hear from

other minorities on what to expect and how to prepare for it…I think it would be a big deal to

have more African American staff in the office to talk to students." Tia also suggested that

87

African American women interested in study abroad should think about its long-term implications and ask themselves "What do you have to lose if you don't? What's stopping you? What if *there* doesn't feel like *there* when you've reached your success?"

Simone promoted the importance of discussing financial resources and having student-to-student advising sessions: "Be upfront with all of the financial options that are available….Have potential study abroad students contact those who have done it in order to share their experiences with them, both good and bad." Michelle discussed the necessity of proper planning and setting long-term goals for one's study abroad experience. "Determine beforehand what your goals are at the end of the study abroad experience and have a clear vision about it…This can steer you in the right direction and help you make decisions." Raquel mentioned the importance of study abroad staff meeting students where they are and supporting them throughout the process. Lastly, Aja highlighted the importance of Black women believing in themselves, asking for help when needed, and not missing out on this opportunity because of fear or lack of awareness. "There are an infinite amount of resources, just don't stop looking. If there's something you don't know it's really okay to ask for help. 30% will come from help and the other 70% comes from you."

Value of Critically Reflecting on One's Study Abroad Experiences

During my follow-up correspondence with the participants I also asked them to share their feelings about conducting our interview and what time frame would have been most beneficial to do this type of activity. Three of the women (excluding Tia and Simone) replied to my e-mail and stated that reflecting on their time abroad was a generally positive activity. Michelle described reflecting on her time in South Korea as "bittersweet," but suggested that 6 months after returning from study abroad would have been an ideal time to critically reflect upon her experiences, as "it took me about that long to go back to living my daily life the way it was

before I went abroad." Raquel found it refreshing to discuss her time abroad with someone who was truly interested, because a typical conversation about her study abroad program is short and superficial: "Oh where did you go? I bet that was great..." She suggested that an ideal time to discuss her program to Spain would have been "right after I returned home" and for Semester Abroad within "one year because I would have remembered more." Lastly, Aja believed that it would be most helpful to "talk to students the next semester or 2 months to give them time to readjust and be able to fully reflect on their experience." She also reported that talking about her time abroad was very special to her:

> Words cannot explain how grateful I am that we were able to do the interview together.
> You brought back a lot of lessons that I truly forgot about until I actually spoke about my experience in France. For that I'm forever grateful that you helped [me] to see that again.

Summary

In this chapter I have showcased the unique stories of five African American women who studied abroad and found value and meaning in the experience. Their stories are evidence that study abroad is an endeavor filled with challenges and triumphs at each phase of the process. The women discussed how they developed a desire to study abroad, how they prepared for their specific programs, and highlighted the difficulties and joys they encountered during each stage. The participants also emphasized the life lessons they learned from their experiences and how this knowledge has impacted their lives today.

Moreover, the act of reflecting on their experiences and telling their stories revealed yet another layer of meaning for the women. These findings demonstrate the necessity of praxis, critical reflection and action (Freire, 1970), in education abroad. As students reflect upon their time abroad, they continue to learn from those experiences and discover ways to transfer this

knowledge to various life circumstances they encounter (Perry et al., 2012, Trilokekar & Kukar,

2011). Overall, by constructing and sharing their stories, the women in this study demonstrated

their power to realize an achievement and to transform themselves in the process:

> The act of telling one's personal story and choosing what elements to share and to omit is
>
> a courageous and emancipatory act. By telling her story, a woman begins to shed the
>
> baggage that she has carried, and she begins to understand the multilayered meanings of
>
> her experiences and how they influence her adult life" (Russell, 2009, p.112).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction:

In this final chapter, using data from the participants, study abroad literature, and programmatic highlights from SSU, I offer recommendations to education abroad professionals who work with minority students on how to better serve this population. With guidance from the womanist theoretical perspective and the participants' demonstration of personal agency, I also provide recommendations to African American women who desire to study abroad, but remain unsure on how or where to begin the process. I also propose an updated and expanded version of the study abroad process model as it pertains to African American women. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of the current study and implications for future research.

Recommendations to Education Abroad Professionals

This study supports prior research that suggested minority student participation in study abroad is improved when education abroad is an institutional priority (Brux & Fry, 2009) and when comprehensive assessments of international education initiatives are conducted (Picard et al., 2009). Because African American women face a variety of nuanced challenges throughout the study abroad process and rely heavily on institutional supports, study abroad professionals must take seriously their roles as invaluable resources to this population. Moreover, professionals must be considerate of the cultural backgrounds of underserved populations and knowledgeable about the nature of their host-country experiences. As the accumulation of pre-college capital is important in study abroad participation (Salisbury et al., 2009, 2010), information should be presented to minority students prior to college attendance (i.e. college fairs, campus visits, and Admissions brochures) and during the freshman year to initiate the process. The data from this study upholds the finding that costs are a central obstacle for Black American women to

participate in study abroad. Therefore providing cost-effective programs (Mclellan, 2007) and discussing the availability of scholarships and financial aid (Shih, 2009) is paramount to supporting African American women who seek to study abroad.

In general, it was found that there is a need for more comprehensive pre-departure orientation to assist African American women with the challenges they encounter while preparing to study abroad. These pre-departure workshops primarily should focus on the necessary paperwork, course registration process, and the host-country school systems and lifestyle. Moreover, the findings from this study advocate a welcoming system that includes diverse staff members in an international education office who can communicate with students in ways that are comfortable, culturally-relevant, and encouraging. This system should also feature special group meetings, programs, and targeted promotional activities (Zambito, 2002) that allow minority students who have studied abroad to share their experiences with future study abroad participants (He & Chen, 2010).

This study has shown that once African American women arrive to their study abroad destinations, they face additional challenges adjusting to their host environments. To reduce in-country stressors and promote positive and meaningful experiences abroad, universities should establish communication protocols between local staff and the study abroad staff at the home institution, as in-country professionals serve as cultural mediators and gate-keepers of information. In addition, a variety of material resources should be readily available to students before they leave to go abroad. This should include information about the local lifestyle, race relations, and the education system in order to facilitate adjusting to the host-country.

Lastly, this study recommends more thorough reentry activities. When study abroad returnees participate in reflective exercises, service activities, and student-led programs, the

personal, academic, and professional transformations garnered by studying abroad are nurtured and reified. In addition, by combining pre-departure orientation and re-entry support workshops, the challenges students face while preparing to study abroad and after returning from studying abroad can be diminished through reflective dialogue between both groups.

Overall, the data from this study suggest that faculty program directors and study abroad staff conduct more comprehensive pre-orientation support for students, as many students who participate in long-term exchange programs are not adequately prepared for the level of independence that is required while living and studying abroad. In addition, this study has shown the value of in-depth reflection on one's study abroad experiences as a key component of re-entry support. Institutions should conduct comprehensive returnee workshops that allow past participants to talk to each other as well as study abroad and counseling professionals. These workshops should foster discussions about the study abroad process, meaningful experiences abroad, as well as sources for personal, academic and professional development. Moreover, these seminars should occur between two months and one year after students return from their programs. Finally, all educators are encouraged to incorporate international topics and multicultural voices throughout their curricula, because any exposure to those issues ultimately contributes to a student's interest in study abroad.

Recommendations to African American Women Seeking to Study Abroad

In this study it was found that African American women who studied abroad confronted a variety of challenges while preparing to go abroad, while living abroad, and while readjusting to life after returning home. However, the data suggested that through rigorous planning and research, self-motivation, and a combination of social and institutional support, African American women actually overcome these obstacles to make this unique opportunity an

important personal accomplishment. Specifically, by putting forth effort to raise money, seeking help when necessary, and learning about the study abroad experiences of other students (He & Chen, 2010), African American women are well-equipped with the tools necessary to study abroad. Moreover, proper preparation for and awareness of the lifestyle, education system, and race relations in the host country ensures higher adjustment and the likelihood of deeply meaningful experiences while abroad. Lastly, a reliance on one's personal agency as a primary resource throughout the process can facilitate readjustment and positive transformations after returning home from study abroad. This should include establishing a clear set of goals to be met and having an open mind regarding the possibilities involved in study abroad.

In sum, this study indicates that study abroad is a worthwhile experience that African American women can do in spite of the challenges they confront. The data suggests that any African American woman seeking to study abroad should begin her research early, before starting college if possible, but at least one to two years before going abroad. This supports the study abroad process models developed by Salisbury et al. (2009) and Simon (2007) whereby the decision to study abroad involves intense planning, occurs over a period of time, and relies on accumulation of pre-college capital. In addition it is important to gather information about various program options, meet regularly with Academic Advisors to discuss degree requirements, and learn about the experiences of other people who have studied abroad. It is also recommended that African American women build a social network of people who can provide support along the way. This team should ideally include a combination of family, friends, professionals, and past study abroad participants. In general, prior planning combined with a proactive approach to the process relates to the expectation of a positive study abroad experience (Goldstein & Kim, 2006), which ultimately influences the likelihood of having a meaningful and

transformative experience abroad. Overall, the act of studying abroad is an example of womanist work for African American women, whereby they are liberated from their social standing in America and experience empowerment by gaining a new perspective of themselves abroad.

An Expanded Study Abroad Process Model for African American Women

The data from this study has revealed that study abroad is a complex process that involves various stages, much preparation, and many different sources of support for African American women. Therefore, relying on the model developed by Simon (2007), Salisbury and colleagues (2009, 2010), I propose an updated and expanded study abroad process model pertaining to African American women. This model includes six phases: the desire and predisposition to study abroad, the research and program selection phase, the planning and preparation phase, challenging and meaningful encounters abroad, re-entry adjustment and negotiating new identities at home, and transformative womanist praxis.

Similar to Simon (2007) and Salisbury and colleagues (2009), this model suggests that the predisposition to study abroad occurs over a period of time and involves acquiring pre-college capital. The existing three-phase model organizes the final two stages as the search for an appropriate study abroad program and the selection of and departure for a particular program. I argue that the program research and selection phase are one in the same, while planning and preparing to go abroad is a separate stage in the process. Both of these stages involve reliance on personal motivation and in depth research combined with institutional and social support to overcome the challenges African American women face while preparing to study abroad.

The fourth phase includes a variety of both challenging and meaningful experiences abroad which may include evaluation of one's identity, beliefs system, and adjustment to the host culture. The fifth phase involves re-adjusting to life at home, negotiating one's new identity, and

maintaining a connection to the host culture while at home. During this phase reliance on various institutional and social resources is important to attenuate reverse culture shock. These sources of support include family, friends, past study abroad participants, and study abroad professionals.

Lastly, transformative womanist praxis, the sixth and final stage of this expanded study abroad process model represents a long-term post-study abroad outcome that allows the lessons learned, changes formed, and competencies acquired abroad to persists long after returning home from study abroad. During this stage, critical reflection of one's experiences abroad is advised along with extending the transformative benefits of study abroad to other people. This can be accomplished by sharing one's experiences and lessons with others, encouraging and supporting intercultural learning, or simply being an example of someone who overcomes challenges to realize the goals she sets out to achieve.

Limitations of the Study

A central aim of qualitative research is to understand phenomena, not necessarily to generalize findings to a large population. Therefore, given the specific context of this study and its unique research site, the findings are contextualized to a diverse university in the southern region of the United States with higher than national rates of African American female study abroad participants. Moreover, while the specific methodology used in this study garnered rich and in depth information on the individual study abroad experiences of five African American women, this study is further limited in scope based upon the nature of narrative inquiry. Different qualitative methods, such as focus-group discussions, group interviews, or a more mixed-methods approach may have yielded additional data that extend to a wider audience.

Lastly, I specified the participation criteria to African American women who studied abroad for at least one semester. This allowed me to gather information about the various phases

of the study abroad process, such as culture shock, meaningful experiences abroad, and re-entry adjustment. However, both nationally and at SSU, a greater number of students in general and thus presumably African American women, currently study abroad for short-term summer programs. Therefore, this study left out the voices of the Black American women who participate in study abroad programs for shorter durations of time. These women may have had equally meaningful and transformative experiences abroad and/or stories that are qualitatively different from those of Black American women who study abroad for longer periods of time.

Implications for Future Research

This study began a necessary conversation in education abroad research where the experiences of African American women are highlighted in a positive light that focuses on how they succeed in studying abroad, instead of the barriers that exist for them to engage in this endeavor. Following a similar methodology, it is important to conduct additional research that examines the experiences of African American women who study abroad for varying lengths of time to compare their self-identified outcomes. This line of inquiry should also evaluate how the study abroad experiences of Black women are affected by age, physicality, and the nuances of racial identity. The current study advocates additional research that examines the experiences of African American men and other minority groups who study abroad. Moreover, future studies should explore the unique experiences of minority international students who study in America, to investigate their adjustment processes and the meaning they find from having that experience.

Future research should also examine the attrition process for minority students who are interested in study abroad and seek ways to participate in the opportunity, but ultimately fail to do so. Essentially, at which points do students drop-out of the study abroad process and why? In addition, since more students are engaging in various types of international learning

opportunities, such as service-learning projects abroad and volunteer or work positions abroad, future research should investigate the outcomes that are garnered from these experiences.

Lastly, this thesis suggests that study abroad can be a powerful learning tool for future educators. Prior research has examined the benefits of student teaching abroad (Cushner, 2009). However, this study revealed that by being a student in another country for an extended period of time, participants were able to critique, compare, and contrast the American education system to those of their host-countries. Therefore, additional research should be conducted to analyze the effects of study abroad in teacher education programs as well as on teacher retention and success.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that study abroad is a valuable endeavor in which African American women can, do, and should participate. It adds important information to the existing education abroad literature by showing how African American women succeed in studying abroad, the unique nature of their encounters abroad, and the meaning they create from their overall experiences through critical reflection. This study also supports existing research on the personal, relational, and professional outcomes that are likely attained by engaging in this endeavor, while providing evidence of the nuanced experiences of African American women. Like travel, study abroad "is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living" (Miriam Beard). Overall, for the participants in this thesis, study abroad was a unique experience that allowed them to experience positive transformations in their lives- by losing, finding, and redefining who they are in order to become more globally-competent, confident, and self-possessed women.

References

Acquaye, L. A., & Crewe, S. E. (2012). International Programs: Advancing Human Rights and Social Justice for African American Students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *48*(4), 763–783.

Angelou, M. (1986). *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Battle-Walters, K. (2004). *Sheila's shop: working-class African American women talk about life, love, race, and hair*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Behrnd, V., & Porzelt, S. (2012). Intercultural competence and training outcomes of students with experiences abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *36*(2), 213–223.

Brux, M. J., & Fry, B. (2009). Multicultural Students in Study Abroad: Their Interests, Their Issues, and Their Constraints. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *14*(5), 508–527.

Burkart, B., Hexter, H., & Thompson, D. (2000). Why TRIO Students Need To Study Abroad! *Higher Education*. Retrieved from https://pellinstitute.org/downloads/trio_clearinghouse-opportunity_outlookC.pdf

Chapman, Y. M. (2007). " I am Not my Hair! Or am I?": Black Women's Transformative Experience in their Self Perceptions of Abroad and at Home. *Anthropology Theses*, 23.

Cox, J. B. (2004). The role of communication, technology, and cultural identity in repatriation adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *28*(3-4), 201–219.

Cushner, K. (2009). The Role of Study Abroad in Preparing Globally Responsible Teachers. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship* (pp. 151–169). New York, NY: Routledge.

Dawson, N. J. (2000). Study Abroad and African American College Students at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. *African Issues*, *28*(1/2), 124–129.

deMarrais, K. (2007). Qualitative Interview Studies: Learning Through Experience. In K. deMarrais & S. P. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Dolby, N. (2004). Encountering an American Self: Study Abroad and National Identity. *Comparative Education Review*, *48*(2), 150–173.

Evans, S. Y. (2009). African American Women Scholars and International Research: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper's Legacy of Study Abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *18*, 77–100.

Evans-Winters, V. E. (2011). *Teaching Black Girls (Counterpoints: Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education)* (Revised edition.). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Fanon, F. (1967). Black skin, white masks [trans. Charles Lam Markmann]. New York: Grove Press, pp. 17-21.

French, B. H. (2012). More than Jezebels and Freaks: Exploring How Black Girls Navigate Sexual Coercion and Sexual Scripts. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(1), 35–50.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Gardner, P., Gross, L., & Steglitz, I. (2008). Unpacking Your Study Abroad Experience: Critical Reflection for Workplace Competencies. *Collegiate Employment Research Institute*, *1*(1), 1–10.

Gardner, P., Gross, L., & Steglitz, I. (2009). Translating Study Abroad Experiences for

    Workplace Competencies. *Peer Review, Association of American Colleges and*

    Universities, *1*(1), 19–22.

Gaw, K. F. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International*

    Journal of Intercultural Relations, *24*(1), 83–104.

Goldstein, S. B., & Kim, R. I. (2006). Predictors of US college students' participation in study

    abroad programs: A longitudinal study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*,

    30(4), 507–521.

Griffin, R. A. (2012). I AM an Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice,

    and Resistance. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *35*(2), 138–157.

Hall, T. (2011). Designing from Their Own Social Worlds: The Digital Story of Three African

    American Young Women. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *10*(1), 7–20.

Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The

    intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*,

    27(4), 421–443.

Hill Collins, P. (2009). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of*

    empowerment. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hill Collins, P. (2006). *From Black power to hip hop: racism, nationalism, and feminism.*

    Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

hooks, b. (1989). *Talking back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: from margin to center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Hunley, H. A. (2010). Students' functioning while studying abroad: The impact of psychological

    distress and loneliness. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *34*(4), 386–392.

Jewett, S. (2010). "We're Sort of Imposters": Negotiating Identity at Home and Abroad. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *40*(5), 635–656.

Lee, B. Y., Kozak, M. S., Nancoo, C. P., Chen, H.-M., Middendorf, K., & Gale, J. (2013). Exploring Dominant Discourses: Creative Spaces to Find Voice and Cultural Identity. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, *20*(1), 21–29.

Lee, E. (Ed.). (1997). *Go girl!:The black woman's book of travel and adventure*. Portland, OR: Eighth Mountain Press.

Lewis, J. A., Mendenhall, R., Harwood, S. A., & Browne Huntt, M. (2012). Coping with Gendered Racial Microaggressions among Black Women College Students. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(1), 51–73.

Lindsey, T. B. (2012). "One Time for My Girls": African-American Girlhood, Empowerment, and Popular Visual Culture. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(1), 22–34.

Mendenhall, R., Bowman, P. J., & Zhang, L. (2012). Single Black Mothers' Role Strain and Adaptation across the Life Course. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(1), 74–98.

Milstein, T. (2005). Transformation abroad: Sojourning and the perceived enhancement of self-efficacy. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *29*(2), 217–238.

Morgan, R. M., Mwegelo, D. T., & Turner, L. N. (2002). Black women in the African diaspora seeking their cultural heritage through studying abroad. *NASPA JOURNAL*, *39*(4), 333–353.

Nicol, D. J. (2013). Teaching Analysis and Agency Using Racist and Sexist Imagery: Implications for Cultural Studies in the College Classroom. *Feminist Teacher*, *22*(2), 89–107.

Ogden, A. C. (2010). *Education abroad and the making of global citizens: Assessing learning outcomes of course-embedded, faculty-led international programming*. The Pennsylvania State University. Retrieved from https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/paper/10524/6225

Pedroni, T. C. (2005). Market Movements and the Dispossessed: Race, Identity, and Subaltern Agency among Black Women Voucher Advocates. *The Urban Review*, *37*(2), 83–106.

Penn, E. B., & Tanner, J. (2008). Black Students and International Education: An Assessment. *Journal of Black Studies*, *40*(2), 266–282.

Perry, L., Stoner, L., & Tarrant, M. (2012). More Than a Vacation: Short-Term Study Abroad as a Critically Reflective, Transformative Learning Experience. *Creative Education*, *03*(05), 679–683.

Phillips, L. (Ed.). (2006). *The Womanist reader / edited by Layli Phillips*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Picard, E., Bernardino, F., & Ehigiator, K. (2009). Global Citizenship for All: Low Minority Student Participation in Study Abroad- Seeking Strategies for Success. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher education and the quest for global citizenship* (pp. 321–345). New York, NY: Routledge.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 5-23.

Posey, J. (2003). Study Abroad: Educational and Employment Outcomes of Participants Versus Non Participants. *Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations*. Retrieved from http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/etd/469

Pratt-Clarke, M. (2012). A Radical Reconstruction of Resistance Strategies: Black Girls and

    Black Women Reclaiming Our Power Using Transdisciplinary Applied Social Justice©,

    Ma'at, and Rites of Passage. *Journal of African American Studies*, *17*(1), 99–114.

Riessman, C. K. (2007). *Narrative methods for the social sciences*. London: SAGE.

Rogers, J., & Ward, C. (1993). Expectation-experience discrepancies and psychological

    adjustment during cross-cultural reentry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*,

    17(2), 185–196.

Roulston, K. (2010). Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*,

    10(2), 199–228.

Russell, T. (2009). "Survival is not an Academic Skill": Exploring How African American

    Female Graduates of a Private Boarding School Craft an Identity. Educational Policy

    Studies Dissertations. Paper 43.

Ryan, M. E., & Twibell, R. S. (2000). Concerns, values, stress, coping, health and educational

    outcomes of college students who studied abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural

    Relations*, *24*(4), 409–435.

Salisbury, M. H., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2010). Why do All the Study Abroad

    Students Look Alike? Applying an Integrated Student Choice Model to Explore

    Differences in the Factors that Influence White and Minority Students' Intent to Study

    Abroad. *Research in Higher Education*, *52*(2), 123–150.

Salisbury, M., Umbach, P., Paulsen, M., & Pascarella, E. (2009). Going Global: Understanding

    the Choice Process of the Intent to Study Abroad. *Research in Higher Education*, *50*(2),

    119–143.

Savicki, V., & Cooley, E. (2011). American Identity in Study Abroad Students: Contrasts,

    Changes, Correlates. *Journal of College Student Development*, *52*(3), 339–349.

    doi:10.1353/csd.2011.0035

Simon, J. R. (2007). "It's Not Just What You Have, But How You Use It:" The Impact of Race

    and Class on the Usage and Activation of Cultural and Social capital in the Study Abroad

    process. Retrieved from http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/sociology_theses/17/

Stroud, A. H. (2010). Who Plans (Not) to Study Abroad? An Examination of U.S. Student Intent.

    Journal of Studies in International Education, *14*(5), 491–507.

Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Reentry- A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural*

    Relations, *34*(1), 1–21.

Talburt, S., & Stewart, M. A. (1999). What's the subject of Study Abroad?: Race, Gender, and

    "Living Culture." *The Modern Language Journal*, *83*, 163–175.

Taylor, M., & Rivera, J. (2011). Understanding Student Interest and Barriers to Study Abroad:

    An Exploratory Study. *Consortium Journal of Hospitality & Tourism*, *15*(2), 56-72.

Trilokekar, R. D., & Kukar, P. (2011). Disorienting experiences during study abroad: Reflections

    of pre-service teacher candidates. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *27*(7), 1141–1150.

VanderHaagen, S. (2012). Practical Truths: Black Feminist Agency and Public Memory in

    Biographies for Children. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *35*(1), 18–41.

Walker, S., Bukenya, J. O., & Thomas, T. (2011). Examining Students'perceptions Of

    Globalization And Study Abroad Programs. *US-China Education Review*, *B*(1), 77–88.

Welch, A. (2013). Technocracy, Uncertainty, and Ethics: Comparative Education in an Era of

    Postmodernity and Globalization. In Arnove, R.F., Torres, C. A, & Franz, S (Eds.),

C*omparative Education: The dialectic of the global and the local*. Plymouth, (pp. 27-54), UK: Rowman & Littlefiled Publishers, Inc.

White, B. J., Hollingsworth, K. B., Allen, C. L., & Murdock-Sistrunk, T. (2011). An International Spring Tour Experience: African-American Male Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of the Impact. *Journal of International Business Education*, *6*, 175–194.

Williams, T. R. (2005). Exploring the Impact of Study Abroad on Students' Intercultural Communication Skills: Adaptability and Sensitivity. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *9*(4), 356–371.

Woolf, M. (2010). Another Mishegas: Global C t zensh p. *Frontiers Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.frontiersjournal.com/documents/MWoolf-Frontiers_XIX_Fall_2010.pdf

Zambito, J. (2002). Students of color in study abroad programs. *Journal of Student Affairs*, *11*, 93-99. Retrieved from http://digitool.library.colostate.edu/exlibris/dtl/d3_1/apache_media/L2V4bGlicmlzL2R0b C9kM18xL2FwYWNoZV9tZWRpYS8zMTc4MQ==.pdf

Zimmermann, J., & Neyer, F. J. (2013). Do we become a different person when hitting the road? Personality development of sojourners. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *105*(3).

Appendix A

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Informed Consent

Title: "Finding Ourselves Abroad: How African American Women Successfully Navigate the Study Abroad Process"

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jodi Kaufmann
Student Principal Investigator: Sonya Henry

I.   Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate how African American women go through the study abroad process. We also want to examine the effect these experiences have had on their lives. You are invited to participate because you are an African American woman, and you studied abroad for at least one semester within the last five years. A total of 10-15 participants will be recruited for this study.

II.   Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete one personal interview with the student investigator. The interview will last one to two hours. The interview will take place at a time and public location agreed upon by you and the student investigator. If additional information is needed, you may be asked to complete a shorter second interview. If you agree, this follow-up interview will simply clarify your answers from the first interview. The researcher will contact you within two weeks of your first interview, if a follow-up interview is requested. In addition, you may be asked to review the transcript and written interpretation of your interview. The maximum total time you are asked to participate in this study is 3.5 hours. Interviews will be audio recorded. If you do not want your personal interview recorded, please check the box at the bottom of this form.

   A. Compensation:

   During the interview, the researcher will offer basic snacks to each participant. These may include chips/cookies and water/tea/coffee/soda. No monetary reward will be provided for participation in this study.

   B. Costs:

   Some costs may be necessary depending on the chosen location of the interview. You may need to pay for your own transportation/parking and optional food/drink. The student investigator will not reimburse participants for any costs acquired during the study.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. If any negative emotions do develop from participating in this study, the researcher will suggest that you visit the GSU Counseling Center. The researcher will give you the contact information for this resource.

IV. Benefits:

Participating in this study may benefit you personally. You will have the chance to think about the successes and challenges of your study abroad experience. You may also learn how studying abroad changed parts of your personal identity, lifestyle, and relationships. Overall, we hope to learn about the resources African American women use to make study abroad a reality. A possible benefit of this study is an increase in the number of African American women who study abroad. This research may help professionals develop programs and marketing strategies for minority women. African American female students may also learn about the benefits of this opportunity.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only Dr. Jodi Kaufmann and Sonya Henry will have access to the information you provide. However, information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly. These offices are the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use your chosen pseudonym, or false name, instead of your actual name on study records and published results. All identifying information (data form, recorded interview, and transcript) will be stored in separate locked cabinets in the researcher's home office. The data will also be stored on a firewall and password protected computer. A researcher key code will be used to identify research participants. This key code will be stored separately from the data to protect privacy. The key code, data forms, and audio recordings will be destroyed approximately four months after the research is conducted.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Jodi Kaufmann at jkaufmann@gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You may also contact Sonya Henry at shenry15@student.gsu.edu or 404-413-2544. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. If you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team, call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu. You can talk about questions, concerns,

offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII.   Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

☐   Please check this box if you would like to volunteer for this study and agree to have your interview audio recorded.

☐   Please check this box if you would like to volunteer for this study and do NOT want your interview audio recorded.

Please sign below, if you have read the terms of this study and agree to participate.

_____   _____
Participant   Date

_____   _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

"Finding Ourselves Abroad: How African American Women Successfully Navigate the Study Abroad Process"

<u>Participant Data Sheet</u>

Name: _____

Age: _____

E-mail address: _____

Phone number: _____

Study Abroad program location(s):

_____

_____

Length (months/semesters) and term (i.e. Fall 2008) abroad:

_____

Self-selected racial and ethnic identity:

☐Black ☐African American ☐Either/Both ☐Other: _____

How do you define your socioeconomic status? _____

Locations of international travel:

_____

_____

Desired Pseudonym (This is to ensure privacy for each participant):

_____

Interview Date and Time:

_____

Appendix C

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about your decision to study abroad.
    a. Why did you want to have that experience?
    b. How and why did you choose that location/program?

2. What was the study abroad planning process like for you?
    a. Please describe any challenges or barriers you faced.
    b. What/who were your sources of support?

3. Thinking back to when you first arrived to _____, what were your experiences of culture shock?
    a. How did you adapt to your new environment?
    b. What did you enjoy about that new culture?

4. What was your experience as a self-identified African American woman in _____?

5. What was it like for you when you returned to the US?
    a. What did you miss about _____?
    b. In what ways did you feel your relationships and/or home environment changed?
    c. In what ways do you think you changed?

6. Can you give any examples of ways that you've maintained a connection to your life in _____ since you've returned to the US?

7. How has studying abroad affected how you see yourself as an African American woman?

8. How has studying abroad affected your perception about education?

9. Overall what do your experiences in _____ mean to you?

10. What would you tell another African American woman who wants to study abroad, but doubts she can make it happen?

11. What would you tell study abroad staff who work with African American female students?

12. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss about your study abroad experience(s)?

13. How did reflecting on and talking about your experiences abroad make you feel?

14. What time frame would have been most beneficial to do this activity (i.e. right after returning from studying abroad, 1 year later, now, etc.)?

Figure 1.1

PROFILE OF U.S. STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS, 2001/02 - 2011/12											
PERCENT OF U.S. STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS											
Characteristic	**2001/02**	**2002/03**	**2003/04**	**2004/05**	**2005/06**	**2006/07**	**2007/08**	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**	**2011/12**
Academic level											
Junior	40.7	38.0	34.7	35.8	34.2	36.6	35.9	36.8	35.8	35.8	36.0
Senior	20.4	20.2	19.3	19.6	19.8	21.3	21.3	21.6	21.8	23.4	24.4
Sophomore	13.6	11.8	12.0	12.2	12.8	12.9	13.1	13.9	13.2	12.6	13.0
Bachelor's, Unspecified	11.0	15.3	16.3	15.2	14.9	12.5	13.4	11.3	11.0	10.3	8.4
Master's Students	4.7	4.8	4.1	3.4	4.8	5.9	6.3	6.6	8.1	8.5	8.3
Freshman	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.7	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.3
Graduate, Professional*	-	-	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.6
Graduate, Unspecified	3.3	3.4	2.4	3.4	3.0	2.6	2.0	2.6	2.5	2.1	1.9
Associate's Students	1.5	2.1	1.6	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.2	1.1	0.1	0.2	1.1
Doctoral Students	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.7
Other Academic Level	0.8	0.7	4.2	2.5	1.9	0.0	0.1	0.0	1.0	0.9	0.3
Sex											
Female	64.9	64.7	65.6	65.5	65.5	65.1	65.1	64.2	63.5	64.4	64.8
Male	35.1	35.3	34.4	34.5	34.5	34.9	34.9	35.8	36.5	35.6	35.2
Race/Ethnicity											
White	82.9	83.2	83.7	83.0	83.0	81.9	81.8	80.5	78.7	77.8	76.4
Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	5.8	6.0	6.1	6.3	6.3	6.7	6.6	7.3	7.9	7.9	7.7
Hispanic or Latino(a)	5.4	5.1	5.0	5.6	5.4	6.0	5.9	6.0	6.4	6.9	7.6
Black or African-American	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.8	4.0	4.2	4.7	4.8	5.3
Multiracial	2.0	1.8	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.6	1.9	2.1	2.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
TOTAL	160,920	174,629	191,231	205,983	223,534	241,791	262,416	260,327	270,604	273,996	283,332

* Reported for the first time in 2003/04.

Retrieved From: Institute of International Education. (2013). "Profile of U.S. Study Abroad Students, 2001/02-2011/12." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/opendoors

Figure 1.2

Higher Education Enrollment & Study Abroad Participation Rates
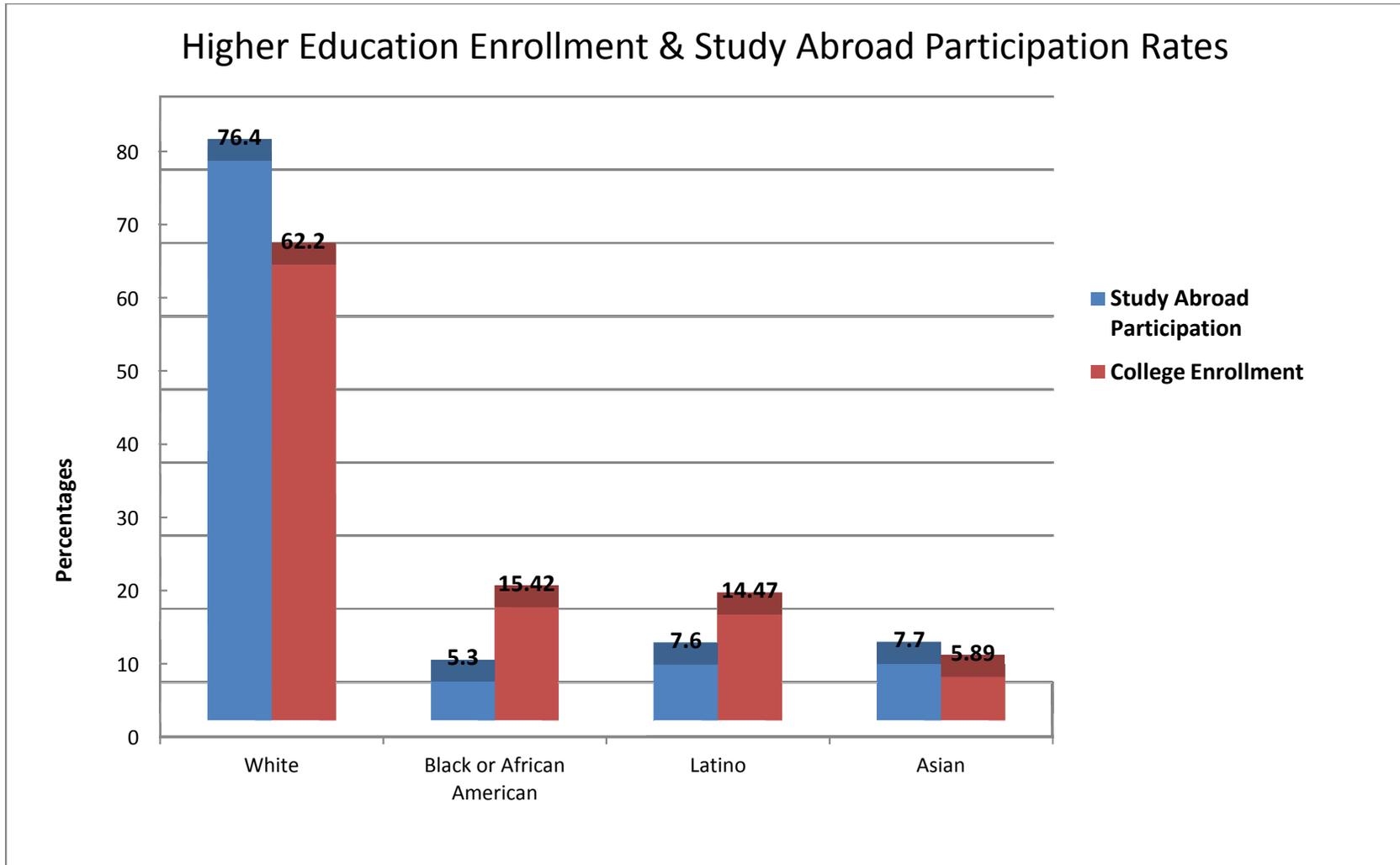
Sources: Institute of International Education. (2013). Profile of U.S. Study Abroad Students, 2001/02-2011/12. Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange. Retrieved from http://www.iie.org/opendoors
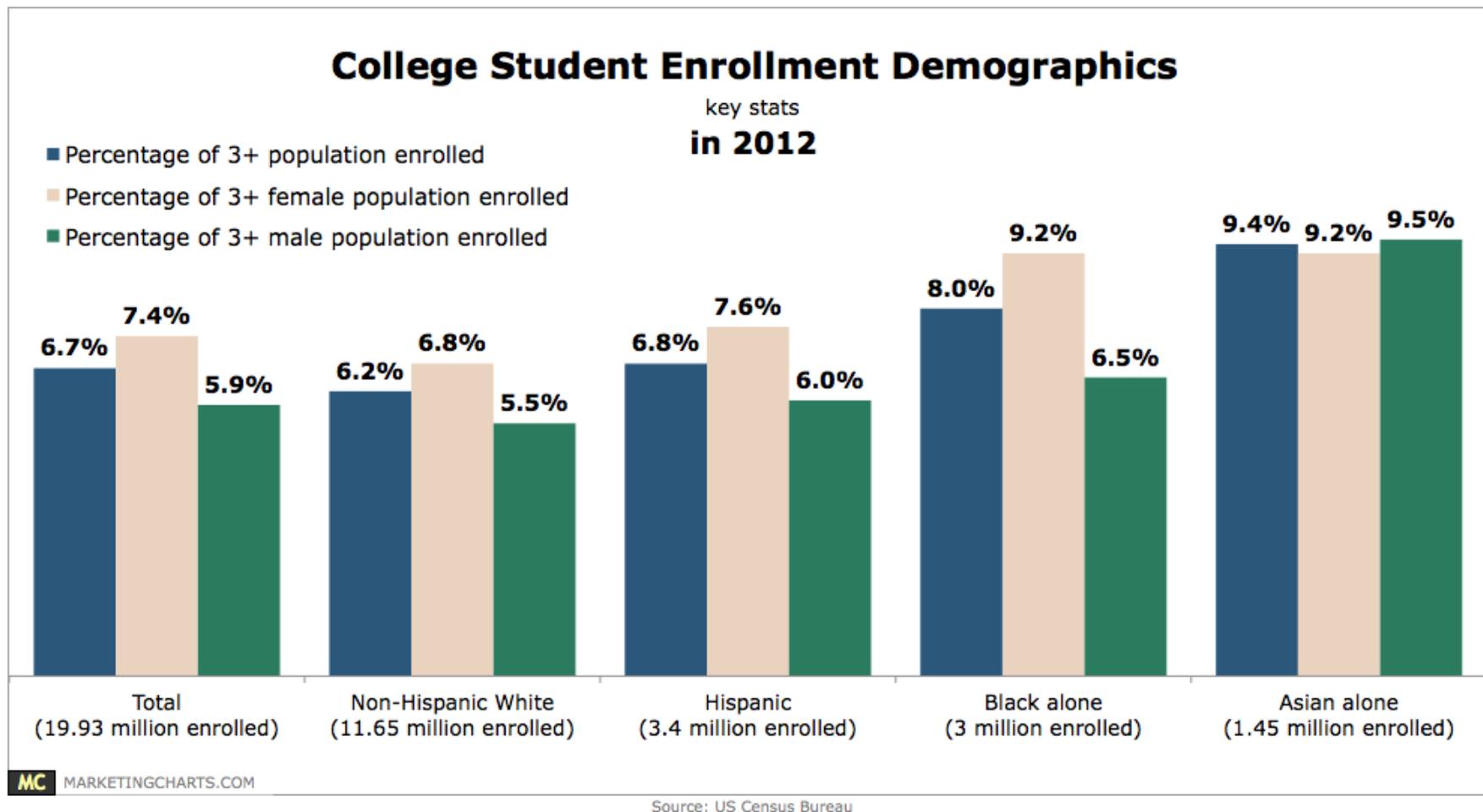
Davis, J. & Bauman, K. (2013). School Enrollment Report for 2011. U.S. Census Bureau, p1-14. Retried from http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-571.pdf

Figure 1.3

College Student Enrollment Demographics
key stats in 2012

- Percentage of 3+ population enrolled
- Percentage of 3+ female population enrolled
- Percentage of 3+ male population enrolled

	Total (19.93 million enrolled)	Non-Hispanic White (11.65 million enrolled)	Hispanic (3.4 million enrolled)	Black alone (3 million enrolled)	Asian alone (1.45 million enrolled)
Percentage of 3+ population enrolled	6.7%	6.2%	6.8%	8.0%	9.4%
Percentage of 3+ female population enrolled	7.4%	6.8%	7.6%	9.2%	9.2%
Percentage of 3+ male population enrolled	5.9%	5.5%	6.0%	6.5%	9.5%

MARKETINGCHARTS.COM

Source: US Census Bureau

Retrieved from: http://www.marketingcharts.com/wp/topics/demographics/us-college-student-demographics-in-2012-36555/