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By

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**Comfortable Being Uncomfortable:**

**The Study Abroad Experiences of Black and Latino/a Students**

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**Comfortable Being Uncomfortable:**  
**The Study Abroad Experiences of Black and Latino/a Students**

by

**Dallawrence Edward Dean, B.S.; M.A.**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Louis Anthony Dean, my baby brother and best friend, who passed away at the age of 26, as a result of Lupus. Always know that I will forever be proud of the fact that you completed college when many people doubted you, that you conducted mission work in South America, despite having lupus, which often left you immobile and would eventually call you Home you to be with grandma. I would trade everything for one more opportunity to kick back and reminisce with you about our childhood, one more time to talk about our grandma and her old school ways, one more time to share our goals and dreams with one another, always vowing to stay true to each other, our sister, and our family. From here out my future accomplishments are just as much yours as they are mine. I love you, bro.

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I apologize if I missed anyone; charge it to my head and not my heart. I'm out y'all!

**Comfortable Being Uncomfortable:**  
**The Study Abroad Experiences of Black and Latino/a<sup>1</sup> Students**

by

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: Gregory J. Vincent

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**Abstract**

Research has found that study abroad experiences positively influence undergraduate baccalaureate degree attainment, career goals, and self-awareness (Gonyea, 2008). However, scholars agree there are still gaps in study abroad literature, specifically pertaining to students of color, alumni, and short-term study abroad programs (Chang, 2015; Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014; Norris & Gillepsie, 2009). Guided by Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, this study aimed to understand Black and Latinx students' perceptions of the benefits of their study abroad experiences.

This study adds to the current body of literature by employing a phenomenological approach to assess the study abroad experiences of seven undergraduate students and eight alumni, all of whom identified as Black or Latinx, and participated in a short-term study abroad experience sponsored by the Southwest University (SU). Participants described how their

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<sup>1</sup> While my original title does not reflect the term, Latinx (due to some internal constraints with the change of the title), I intentionally use Latinx throughout the dissertation. Please see the footnote with my rationale for using this term.

experience of “learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable” in a foreign country influenced their personal, social, and professional lives. The study’s findings were presented via five large themes: (1) individual awareness, (2) my friends, family, and community, (3) career development, (4) who you study abroad with matters, and (5) program design. Fifteen subthemes emerged from the larger themes: (1) Awakening of American identity, (2) ethnic identity empowerment, (3) self-assurance, (4) family change of perspective, (5) social responsibility, (6) career clarification, (7) career interview and application navigation, (8) making connections, (9) transferable skills, (10) comfortability, (11) intragroup diversity, (12) faculty/staff support, (13) study abroad preparation, (14) destination matters, and (15) experiential learning.



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## **Chapter One – Context of the Study**

### **Introduction**

Study abroad is not new to higher education. For centuries, scholars and students have traveled around the world seeking knowledge and opportunities to learn (Hudzik, 2011). However, events such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the growing concern over the lack of American engagement in international issues from government officials, national organizations, and college and universities, have led to increased efforts directed at increasing the number of students that participate in study abroad (Altbach, Reisburg, & Rumbley, 2009; Bollag, 2004; Haddad, 2006; Jessup-Anger, 2008; Lincoln, 2004; Ruby, 2009).

The attacks of September 11, 2001 heightened the United States Department of State's apprehension about how Middle Eastern and Islamic societies perceive the United States. Opinion from Middle Eastern and Islamic world societies indicated a general disdain about the United States culture and its way of life (de Lima Jr, 2007; Nye, 2004)—a sentiment which negatively affected diplomatic relations between them. Since then, public diplomacy has become a major priority for the U.S. Department of State, resulting in an increased development of international educational exchange programs and other cultural relation activities (de Lima Jr, 2007). Additional research has also found that U.S. citizens are relatively unaware and uninformed about international issues (Roper, 2002; Steinemann, Fiske, & Sackett, 2001). For instance, surveys conducted by the Asia Society and the National Geographic Society found that 25% of college-bound high school students could not name the ocean between California and Asia, and 80% of the respondents did not know that India was the world's largest democracy (Levine, 2005).

In addition, young American adults are next to last in their knowledge of geography and current affairs when compared to adults in other industrial countries; Mexico ranked lowest (Levine, 2005).

As a result, the United States government, national organizations, and institutions of higher education are encouraging students to develop global competencies through study abroad participation (Bollag, 2004; Jessup-Anger, 2008; Lincoln, 2004; NASULGC, 2004). For example, in November 2009, President Obama announced the 100,000 Strong China Initiative, a national effort designed to dramatically increase the number and diversify the composition of American students studying in China. In March 2011, he launched a second initiative, 100,000 Strong in the Americas to increase international study in Latin America and the Caribbean (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Despite such efforts to bring awareness and increase study abroad participation for collegians, study abroad participation remains disparagingly low, especially in regard to student of color participation.

In this chapter, I provide the context for the study, including the statement of the problem regarding Black and Latinx<sup>2</sup> students' participation in study abroad, the purpose of the study, and research questions. I also provide a brief overview of the methodology, conceptual framework, definitions of key terms used in the study, delimitations,

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Latinx" is a gender-neutral demographic category that includes any person of Latin American origin or descent. As Baez notes, "the gender bending in "x" aims to critically contrast the hegemonic protocol in the male construction of the universal subject. It is not the mere inclusion - politically correct- of they (him) (male) and they (her) (female) but a critique of the distributive and prescriptive sense of the male and the female in the hegemonic and habitual use of the Spanish Grammar in reference to the subjects. The uncomfortable feeling that the "x" creates in the reading and the pronunciation can be compared with the uncomfortable feeling of those who do not feel - partially or totally- represented neither like they (male) or they (female).

limitations, assumptions associated with the research, the significance of the study, and conclude with a summary of this chapter.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Institute for International Education reported that during the 2014-2015 academic year, 313,415 students participated in study abroad for college credit, a 2.9% increase from the 2013-2014 academic year. This number encompasses only 1.5% of the total national collegiate student population (i.e. students attending an accredited two- or four-year college or university) and about 10% of U.S. graduate students (Institute of International Education, 2016).

Study abroad programs also remain disproportionately White (Fry, 2011; Institute of International Education, 2016; NCES, 2007). In 2014, ethnic minorities accounted for 41.7% of all United States postsecondary enrollment, yet only 21.7% of ethnic minorities participated in study abroad that year. In contrast, White students made up 58.3% of all postsecondary enrollment in 2014, but accounted for 72.9% of students studying abroad that year (Institute of International Education, 2016; NCES, 2016). The figure below illustrates the racial/ethnic breakdown of all U.S. students enrolled in postsecondary education in 2014 – 2015 and the percentage of those students who studied abroad during the 2014 – 2015 academic year.

**Figure 1.1 Study Abroad Participation by Race/Ethnicity**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>U.S. Postsecondary Enrollment in 2014-2015</b>	<b>U.S. Students Abroad in 2014- 2015</b>
African American or Black	14.5%	5.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.8%	0.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.6%	8.1%
Caucasian	58.3%	72.9%
Hispanic/Latino American	16.5%	8.8%
Multiracial	3.3%	4.1%
Institute of International Education's <i>Open Doors (2016)</i> Report and the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.		

Thus, if national organizations and the federal government want to increase the number of students participating in study abroad, then increasing student of color study abroad participation must be a priority, especially since students of color accounted for nearly 41.7% of post-secondary enrollment in the 2014-2015 academic year.

Between 1995 and 2015, degree completion for Black students increased 6% and 7% for Latinx students. Furthermore, of all ethnic groups, Black and Latinx students are projected to see the highest increases in post-secondary enrollment over the next ten years (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). However, despite increased enrollment, Black and Latinx students are completing post-secondary degrees at a slower rate. In comparison, the degree completion rates for Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders increased 20% and 14% for Whites (NCES, 2016). In essence, Black and Latinx students are projected to enroll in postsecondary education at higher rates, yet will earn degrees and participate in study abroad at a lower rate than other ethnic groups. Thus, it is imperative to study the relationship between Black and Latinx students and study abroad, since study abroad has been shown to increase post-secondary retention and aid in degree completion.

Otherwise, post-secondary Black and Latinx students will continue to lag in study abroad

participation and global competency development. Therefore, the following study examined the study abroad experiences of Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students who participated in a short-term study abroad program sponsored by Southwest University.

Southwest University and Southwest University's International Office were selected as this study's sites for their strong commitment to diversity. In 2007, former SU president realigned the universities diversity and community engagement initiatives, forming the Office of Diversity Initiatives(ODI). The Office of Diversity Initiatives works to help the university meet its mission of service and create pathways for success for underserved students throughout the state of Texas. The International Office has been nationally recognized for its commitment to increasing the number of first-generation college students, as well as increasing the number of students of color that participate in study abroad each year (SU International Office, n.d.). To accomplish this objective, the SU International Office partnered with the Office of Diversity Initiatives in efforts to diversify the number of students that participate in study abroad (SU International Office, n.d.). The partnership resulted in the creation of two study abroad experiences. Lastly, research suggests there is limited literature focusing on the benefits of short-term travel (Stone & Petrick, 2013), thus the ability to recruit students that participated in either short-term study abroad experiences made SU the ideal site for this study. Furthermore, understanding how institutions prioritize the diversification of study abroad programs through partnerships can help reveal models for best practices in this area.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to capture SU Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students' perceptions of the benefits of their study abroad experiences.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study. Based on a transformative learning framework (Taylor & Cranton, 2012):

1. How do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive their study abroad experience to have benefited their lives?
2. How do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive their study abroad experience to have shaped their academic and/or career trajectory?
3. What study abroad program characteristics (recruitment, destination, staff, curriculum, service, etc.) do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive to have enriched their study abroad experience?

### **Brief Overview of Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the interpretation of texts of life (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutic phenomenology does not emphasize a set of rules or methods. Instead, the focus is shifted to the interplay of six research activities: (1) identifying a phenomenon, (2) investigating the experiences as we live it rather than how they are conceptualized, and (3) reflecting on the essential themes that constitute the nature of the lived experiences. The researcher then (4) describes the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. Through this process, it is imperative the researcher is (5) *strongly*

oriented towards the phenomenon, and (6) is able to balance the research context by considering individual parts, as well as how all the findings fit together (Creswell, 2013).

Hermeneutic phenomenology was also selected as the method for this study because it does *not* ask the researcher to set aside personal experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). An important concept of qualitative research is subjectivity, which can be defined as the qualitative researcher's internal understanding of the phenomenon. Some qualitative researchers view subjectivity as a concept that allows them to become closer to their study. When researchers are closer to the study, they can understand the phenomenon more intimately (Hays & Singh, 2012). I agree with this perspective, and believe that interpretation of the data will be influenced by my life experiences and connection to the phenomena.

This study focused on the experiences of seven (7) undergraduate students and eight (8) college alumni. All participants identified as Black or Latinx and participated in a short-term (four to six weeks) study abroad experience sponsored by Southwest University. The study employed purposive sampling whereby the selection of participants is criterion based (Creswell, 2013). Given the objective, the participants met the following conditions: (1) had either graduated from Southwest University or identified as a junior or senior at the time of the study; (2) had participated in either one of the aforementioned short term study abroad experiences during their undergraduate time at SU.

To recruit students, I secured a list of potential participants from the Office of Diversity Initiatives and contacted them to introduce myself. I also described the purpose of my study, the criteria for participation (see Appendix A), and asked students to



respond if they were interested. Participants were contacted via email, face to face, and telephone. Selection of participants was conducted through a process that ensured that a diverse group of students were chosen. Factors taken into consideration included geographic location, socioeconomic status, major, and generational status. It was imperative to account for Black and Latinx intragroup diversity to ensure that different identities could be explored and discussed.

The data was collected in two phases. Phase I consisted of a pre-interview questionnaire to gather information about the participant's background, their study abroad experience (where, when, length), and perceptions about the overall study abroad experience. Phase II consisted of two interviews. The introductory interview focused on the participant's background and study abroad experience. The second interview explored the participant's career goals, experiences and interactions that occurred while abroad, and how they perceived themselves to have been positively affected by their overall study abroad experience. Both interviews lasted a maximum of 90 minutes and were semi-structured in nature (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Seidman, 2006). All interviews were facilitated either in-person, via Skype, or by telephone. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed via a third-party transcription service.

To examine the data, I used Creswell's (2013) recommended approach for phenomenological analysis. The analysis consisted of six focus areas: (1) data organization, (2) reading and memoing (the act of recording reflective notes about what the researcher is learning from the data), (3) describing the data into codes and themes, (4) classifying the data into codes and themes, (5) interpreting the data, and (6) representing and visualizing the data. Reading and memoing occurred immediately after

each interview. The remaining stages commenced after data from all interviews were collected. To establish trustworthiness, the researcher also used three techniques: (1) rich, thick description, (2) triangulation, and (3) member checking. Rich thick description allowed the researcher to describe the experiences of the study's participants in great detail, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the participants understood and perceived the world in which they live. Triangulation involved comparing evidence from interviews, artifacts, and documents to ensure the data was properly interpreted. I employed a type of internal member checking within the interviews by asking both follow-up and clarifying questions. I also employed member checking through the sharing of monographs to ensure the participants' experiences had been accurately documented.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Extant literature about study abroad has illustrated how students have moments of self-reflection, increased confidence, and clarity around their career goals and personal interests (Black & Duhon, 2006; Gmelch, 1997; Redden, 2012; NASFA, 2008). Given these outcomes, transformative learning was used as the guiding framework for this study. Transformative learning states that people interpret their own experiences in their own way, and how people see the world is a result of their frames of reference. Transformative learning is defined as learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Our frames of reference—the beliefs and ideas we use to make judgments about things—are influenced by a number of factors including our experiences and backgrounds. Transformative Learning occurs in one of four ways:

(1) elaborating existing meanings schemes, (2) learning new meaning schemes, (3) transforming meaning schemes, and (4) transforming perspectives. A learner is transformed when they are required to make an informed and reflective decision to act or not. A transformative learning experience occurs through a perspective transformation, which is initiated by a disorienting dilemma.

Perspective transformation consists of 10 phases: (1) experiencing a disorienting dilemma, (2) undergoing self-examination, (3) conducting a deep assessment of personal role assumptions and alienation created by new roles, (4) sharing and analyzing personal discontent and similar experiences with others, (5) exploring options for new ways of thinking, (6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles, (7) planning a course of action, (8) acquiring knowledge and skills for action, (9) trying new roles and assessing feedback, and (10) reintegrating into society with a new perspective (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011, pp. 716-717). All of these phases do not have to be experienced for a transformation to occur (Kitchenham, 2008).

**Figure 1.2 Ten Phases of Perspective Transformation**

Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma
Phase 2	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
Phase 4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Phase 6	Planning of a course of action
Phase 7	Acquisitions of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
Phase 8	Provisional trying of new roles
Phase 9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective
*As cited The Evolution of John Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Kitchenham, 2008)	

Transformative learning is a comprehensive theoretical framework and is described in greater detail in chapter two. Transformative learning theory was critical to understanding the study abroad experience of Black and Latinx students since participants were essentially asked to recall, describe, and discuss how their assumptions and beliefs were influenced as a result of study abroad. The participants recalled memories, experiences, events, and people that challenged them to reflect on their own biases, resulting in new assumptions and beliefs. These new assumptions and beliefs changed how they: understood their self-efficacy, interacted with their families, and considered their career and academic outlooks.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Below, I define the key terms and definitions used in the literature.

*Alumni:* a group of people that graduated from Southwest University

*Alumnus or Alumna:* a person that graduated from Southwest University

*Black student:* a participant that identifies as Black or African American

*Direct enrollment programs:* a study abroad program involving the direct placement of U.S. students into the host country's post-secondary educational system (Hanouille & Leuner, 2001)

*Globalization:* "the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, [and] ideas across borders" (Knight, 2004, p. 8)

*Globalization in the context of higher education:* the overall growth of higher education institutions outside of North America and Europe (Hudzik, 2011)

*Global Competence:* the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of international issues, an appreciation of and ability to learn and work with people from

diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, proficiency in a foreign language, and skills to function productively in an interdependent world community (Van Roekel, 2010)

*Hybrid program:* a study abroad program that allows for students to be simultaneously enrolled in courses taught at the host institution and courses taught by faculty from the home university (Hanouille & Leuner, 2001)

*International mobility:* the process of students and faculty traveling across borders for a select period to cultivate learning and discovery (Hudzik, 2011)

*Internationalization:* “a field of study that applies historical, philosophical, and social science theories and methods to international problems in education in order to foster an orientation in knowledge and attitudes, and among other initiatives, brings together students, teachers, and scholars from different nations to learn about and from each other” (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014, p. 8)

*Junior:* a student who has accumulated a minimum of sixty Southwest University semester credit hours (Southwest University, n.d.)

*Latinx Student:* a participant that identifies as Hispanic, Mexican American, Mexican, or Latinx

*Public diplomacy:* the ways in which non-government diplomats influence and improve relations with another nation or culture (Triana, 2015)

*Perspective transformation:* “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world” (Cranton, 1994, p. 22)

*Senior:* a student who has accumulated a minimum of ninety-one Southwest University semester credit hours (Southwest University, n.d.).

*Short-term study abroad program:* a study abroad program that lasts between four and six weeks (Engle and Engle, 2003)

*Study abroad:* See international mobility

*Students of Color:* students that identify, as African-American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic, Latinx or Multiracial

*SU:* Southwest University - a selective, large, four-year, doctoral granting, and research-intensive institution

### **Delimitations**

The study focused on Black and Latinx students that: (1) had either graduated from Southwest University or identified as a junior or senior at the time of the study; (2) had participated in one of two short-term study abroad experiences that resulted from the partnership between Southwest University's International Office and the Office of Diversity Initiatives.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are those that are inherent in qualitative research: reliability, small sample size, and unstandardized procedures (Hays & Singh, 2012). The qualitative method of inquiry was chosen under the assumption that this study cannot be generalized to other people, institutions, and contexts. Furthermore, because their participation was voluntary, the experiences that I present in the research only reflect the experiences of Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students that chose to participate in the study.

### **Assumptions**

I held several assumptions about this study. The first assumption was that study abroad would continue to remain a compelling interest to higher education, the federal government, and national organizations (de Lima Jr, 2007; Lincoln, 2004; Nye, 2004). Second, I assumed participants that were positively influenced by their study abroad embraced the native culture and interacted with local natives (Sutton & Rubin, 2004). Third, I assumed participants learned to manage their emotions as a result of experiencing culture shock (Black & Duhon, 2006). Fourth, I assumed that the participant's study abroad experience helped narrow their career interests (Carlson, et al 1990; Hadis, 2005). Fifth, I assumed that participants gained skills abroad that were transferable to their academic, personal, and professional lives (Norris & Gillepsie, 2009).

### **Significance of the Study**

Scholars agree that there are still gaps in study abroad literature, specifically pertaining to students of color, alumni, and short-term study abroad programs (Miller-Perrin & Thompson, 2014; Norris & Gillepsie, 2009). For example, Stone and Petrick (2013) investigated the educational benefits of international travel. They searched fourteen online databases, yielding 196 journal articles, papers, presentations, dissertations, and some nonacademic resources. From this study, the authors concluded that the majority of study abroad literature focused on life choices, knowledge and skills, language acquisition, and holistic development of participants that study abroad. They also concluded that additional research illustrating the educational benefits of short-term international travel was necessary (Stone & Petrick, 2013).

Norris and Gillespie (2009) investigated the relationship between a study abroad experience and its long-term impact on a participant's career trajectory. In their literature review, they found only one article that investigated the long-term impact of U.S. study abroad participation on alumni careers (Norris & Gillespie, 2008; Wallace, 1999). Similar to Stone and Petrick (2013), Norris and Gillespie (2009) concluded that there is a need for more research exploring study abroad alumni and how study abroad affects a participant's career trajectory. Lastly, there are few studies to date that focus on the study abroad experiences of students of color; and even those existing studies tend to highlight the barriers that hinder participation in study abroad for students of color (Chang, 2015; Lu, Reddick, Dean, & Pecero, 2015). Thus, this study contributes to the literature by examining the short-term study abroad experiences of alumni and undergraduate students of color.

Findings for this study illustrated how participants identified and developed skills that were transferable to their personal and professional lives. For example, participants described how they used their study abroad experience to navigate job interviews, scholarship applications, and build relationships with colleagues. Participants also described how their parents became more open to them traveling abroad, as well as relocating to new areas of the United States. Prior to the participants' study abroad experiences, some parents were reluctant to let them take advantage of new opportunities.

The findings also highlighted program characteristics participants found to have inspired or contributed to their study abroad experience. In sum, findings were presented via five large themes: (1) individual awareness, (2) my friends, family, and community, (3) career development, (4) who you study abroad with matters, and (5) program design.



Fifteen subthemes emerged from the larger themes: (1) Awakening of American identity, (2) ethnic identity empowerment, (3) self-assurance, (4) family change of perspective, (5) social responsibility, (6) career clarification, (7) career interviews and application navigation, (8) making connections, (9) transferable skills, (10) comfortability, (11) intragroup diversity, (12) faculty/staff support, (13) study abroad preparation, (14) destination matters, and (15) experiential learning. These findings are critical since study abroad is now being used as a criterion in college/university choice selection. For example, a public poll found that nearly 80% of respondents indicated that the presence of international programs on campus would positively influence the choice of their child's college or university (Lincoln, 2004).

### **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I provided the context for the study to document the experiences of Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students that participated in a short-term study abroad experiences sponsored by Southwest University. I employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to address the research questions. The conceptual framework for the study is based on the theoretical concepts of transformative learning. The data was collected in two phases. Phase I consisted of a pre-interview questionnaire to gather information about participants' backgrounds, their study abroad experiences (location, dates, length), perceptions of their study abroad experience, and career goals. Phase II consisted of two interviews: one introductory interview that focused on the participant's background and study abroad experience and a follow up interview that focused on the participants' career interests, how they leveraged their study abroad experience, and how they perceived themselves to have been influenced by study abroad. Both interviews

lasted a maximum of 90-minutes and were semi-structured in nature (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Seidman, 2006).

In chapter two, I review previous research related to this study. This literature review provides an overview of the globalization of higher education, a summary of outcomes associated with study abroad, and how research has answered questions pertaining to the experiences of students of color and study abroad. I provide additional information regarding the transformative learning conceptual framework.

## **Chapter Two – Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This study explored the experiences of Black and Latinx students who participated in a short-term study abroad experience sponsored by Southwest University. A short-term study abroad program lasts between four and six weeks. The purpose of this chapter is to review existing research to situate this topic within the relevant higher education literature. For the purpose of this study, international mobility and study abroad are used interchangeably. International mobility refers to the process of students and faculty traveling across borders for a select period to cultivate learning and discovery. Chapter two is comprised of five areas: (1) the globalization of higher education, (2) research on the history and benefits of international exchange, (3) a summary of study abroad outcomes, (4) underrepresented students in study abroad, and (5) a review of the transformative learning theoretical framework that guided this study. The chapter concludes with the significance of the proposed study.

### **Globalization of Higher Education**

The term “globalization” often confused with internationalization, is complex and varies by industry, sector, and institution. For this reason, it is important to define globalization and acknowledge its relationship to internalization, international education, and higher education. Globalization is defined as “the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, [and] ideas [...] across borders” (Knight, 2004, p. 8).

In the context of higher education, globalization refers to the overall growth of higher education institutions outside of North America and Europe. Globalization also refers to the growing global flow of students and faculty and the increase and creation of

inter-institutional collaborations and partnerships (Hudzik, 2011). Internationalization differs from globalization by centering on the relationships between and among nations and countries (Knight, 2004). For instance, an organization that seeks to design a product that meets the needs of individuals in many countries is an example of internationalization. In essence, internationalization is about adapting concepts, ideas, or people from one culture to a new culture, whereas, globalization refers to the movement or “flow” of those ideas, concepts, or people to new parts of the world. In the context of education, the term internationalization is defined as “a process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, function, or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003, p.2). However, how internationalization is incorporated and valued varies institutionally. Knight (2015) identified three generic models of international universities: the classic model, the satellite model, and the co-founded model.

The classic model emphasizes partnerships among international partner universities, research centers, and non-governmental and governmental agencies. These partnerships include various academic and management initiatives that center around, but are not limited to, academic/student mobility, collaborative research, and professional development (Knight, 2015). For instance, a classic model could consist of U.S. students studying abroad at a local university in a foreign country for a semester. The student would take classes under that foreign university’s curriculum to immerse themselves fully into the experience.

The satellite model affords an institution the ability to implement and develop a series of research, teaching, and management offices in targeted countries around the

world. This model also allows for alumni support, increased recruitment of students and professors, the development and monitoring of projects, and other related activities (Knight, 2015). Further, depending on the institution, these offices may function as an independent degree-conferring international branch campus as well. The satellite campus serves the population in the host country; however, the satellite campus functions under the U.S. institutional name. New York University Abu Dhabi, for example, is a satellite campus. The branch campus serves the individuals in the host country, but operates under the United States New York University brand.

The co-founded model design allows new independent universities to partner with one or more foreign institutions. Under the co-founded model, the new independent university is licensed by the host country and developed through international collaboration (Knight, 2015). Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) is an example of the co-founded model. Singapore University of Technology and Design was developed in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) which is located in the United States, and Zhejiang University, which is located in China. SUTD has three core programs that are vetted by an Engineering Accreditation Board in Singapore and a United States Engineering accreditation board. In the above section, I illustrated the various ways that higher education institutions may choose to practice and promote internationalization. In the next section, I discuss how and why institutions of higher education are promoting globalization.

## Higher Education

Threats to national security, overall lack of American citizen engagement in global issues, and a shift to a more global economy have challenged institutions of higher education to help students develop global competencies through international experiences (McPherson, 2005). For example, government leaders have vocalized their concerns about the lack of language skills and expertise in geographic areas that are imperative to United States security. In 2002, the Department of State, Department of Commerce, U.S. Army, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation all reported significant shortages of translators, interpreters, diplomats, and intelligence specialists with the foreign language skills and cultural awareness that were important to job performance (McPherson, 2005). Around that same time, NAFSA, the Association of International Educators organization,<sup>3</sup> and the Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange indicated that participation in international experiences is critical as it “begin(s) a process of inculcating awareness of international and intercultural issues...a process that promises to vastly increase American global literacy” (McPherson, 2005, p. 7).

The shift to a more global economy has also influenced higher education. As corporations, both large and small, expand and engage in business abroad, the needs for individuals with language skills and cross-cultural awareness have increased (Hudzik, 2011). Traditionally, globalization was largely determined and driven by a nation’s financial growth. Prior to 2007, the economy depended on manufactured products. However, since 2008, knowledge-intensive services have replaced manufactured products

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<sup>3</sup> The organizations name was changed from National Association for Foreign Student Affairs to NAFSA: Association of International Educators. The acronym was retained for the global name recognition (NAFSA, 2017).

as the primary global economy driver. Knowledge-intensive services rely on highly trained workers that are equipped to conduct research, engage in interactive problem solving, and possess the capacity to adapt to transformations in communication and technologies over time (Liu, 2013; Stambach 1997; Tierney & Lanford, 2014; Windrum & Tomlinson 1999). In other words, people need to possess global competencies and be able to perform their job duties in both national and international environments. Thus, many institutions of higher education have implemented strategies to promote internationalization. However, the process by which this objective is fulfilled varies from institution to institution. Further, the mission of the institution, student demographics, and type of institution (i.e., Predominantly White Institution, Historically Black College or University, Hispanic Serving Institution, Women's college, etc.) all determine how an institution prioritizes globalization (Hudzik, 2011). The institutions that are successful at prioritizing globalization fall into two categories: (a) campus internationalization and (b) international mobility.

Campus internationalization is a form of internationalization that prioritizes alignment between internationalization issues and on-campus curricula, the adjustment of international students and scholars to a new campus environment, strategies for global connectivity, and institutional policies and services in support of internationalization (Hudzik, 2011). Staff and administrators are also able to leverage shared resources, conduct location-specific research, compare projects, and gain access to prestigious journals through institutional collaboration. For example, an analysis of 25 million research papers collected from the Thomson Reuters Web of Science database found that the increase in published scientific research from 1981 to 2012 was largely due to

international collaboration between Western European countries and the United States (Adams, 2013). This is just one illustration of how campus internalization benefits institutions of higher education through global partnerships and created knowledge (Brew, Boud, Lucas, & Crawford, 2013; Koehn, 2014; Oleksiyenko & Sà, 2010).

International mobility refers to the process of students and faculty traveling across borders for a select period to cultivate learning and discovery. The intended outcome for these types of experiences is to move learning off campus and into different cultures, value systems, epistemologies, and work and living spaces. Exchange and study abroad programs are examples of non-degree seeking international mobility experiences (Hudzik, 2011). It is important to note that not all institutions practice international mobility, however most two and four-year institutions do. In the next section, I discuss the evolution of international mobility often referred to as study abroad.

### **A Historical Overview of International Mobility**

Study abroad is inextricably connected with the evolution of higher education. Scholars and students crossing borders to learn, share, and discover concepts and ideologies dates back to the ancient world (Anderson, 2007). For example, between 531B.C. – 579 B.C., the University of Jundishapur operated as an intellectual center where Greek, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Persian scholars would gather to share ideas. Around 620, The T'asmg Dynasty would often invite scholars from around the world to learn and gain a better understanding of Buddhism (Brickman, 1964). The Medieval era saw heavy student teacher migration. Bologna, Paris, and Oxford developed a strong reputation for offering the highest quality of education available. As result, many German students migrated to Bologna, Paris, and Oxford to receive education training in law,



philosophy, and theology. Bologna was known for their canon and civil law offerings, which also attracted the most foreign students, whereas Paris and Oxford were known for their schools of theology (Anderson, 2007). Oxford and other European universities would influence the development of American colonial colleges in the United States. Around the mid-seventeenth century, Oxford's pedagogy for teaching and certification, coupled with Cambridge's buildings and living quarters influenced the design and function of American colonial colleges. Despite the evolution of higher education in the United States, study abroad would not become more prevalent until the nineteenth century.

The rise of research universities in the United States coupled with Germany's influence and emphasis on post-graduate education empowered more students to travel to Europe (Nelson, 1995). In 1879, David Starr Jordan, professor and future president of Stanford University, collaborated with a language professor to lead a series of summer "tramps" to Europe. The term "tramp" was used to describe these excursions of about twenty to thirty students. Students would study the natural history, language, and culture of Switzerland, Germany, Italy, France, and England for a select period of time, then return to the United States. The program attracted so much attention that it was featured in the academic catalogue (Indiana University, 2010). However, the program only lasted a decade; those who studied abroad were generally graduate students in search of scholarly or professional training in Europe (Singer, 2003).

The first official study abroad program in the United States was established in 1923 at the University of Delaware, where students in their junior year were provided the opportunity to travel to Paris (Goversees, 2012; Kochanek, 2008; Nelson, 1995). The

intention of the program was to make students more well-rounded, prepare teachers of foreign languages, and support students who were interested in pursuing international careers (Kochanek, 2008). However, the study abroad program was terminated in 1948 due to the University president not believing foreign studies to be a university priority, as well as post-World War II conditions in Europe (Kochanek, 2008).

The early nineteenth century also saw a rise in non-government organizations committed to international education. The Institute of International Education (IIE) was founded in 1919 by Murray Butler, president of Columbia University, Elihu Root, former secretary of state, and Steffan Duggan, professor of political science at the College of the City of New York. The founders emphasized the importance of international education and strongly believed that peace among nations could be achieved through international education (Mikhailova, 2003). Due to the ravaged condition of many European cities and negative perceptions from U.S. citizens towards foreigners, the United States government noticed a need for more foreign language speakers and additional cultural training. As a result, the government implemented The Fulbright Act of 1946. The Fulbright Act of 1946 was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and sought to fund international scholar exchanges in hopes of increasing knowledge, understanding, and social awareness of other countries (Anderson, 2007).

Following the Fulbright Act, other United States organizations, such as the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), then known as the Council on Student Travel, was created to assist U.S. students with study abroad travel (i.e. logistics, accommodations, program design, etc.) and with the coordination of international students to the U.S. through exchange programs (Bennett, 1965; CIEE, n.d). The CIEE

influenced the evolution of study abroad, shaping how institutions designed and developed their own programs. For example, CIEE established operations abroad and began sponsoring conferences on student travel for administrators, educators, and teachers (CIEE, n.d.).

### **Study Abroad Program Design**

Today's study abroad programs vary by intended purpose, length, and type. For this reason, scholars have sought to develop an easy classification system to assist with assessment and accountability. Two methods for study abroad classification have been proposed; the first method was introduced as a conceptual framework, and does not have a name. The framework was proposed by Engle and Engle, (2003) and was introduced in the article Study Abroad Levels: Toward a Classification of Program Types. Engle and Engle's framework is built on the seven characteristics of study abroad programs. For the purpose of this literature review, I refer to Engle and Engle's (2003) method as method 1. The second method was introduced in the Differences in Global-Mindedness between Short- Term and Semester Long Study Abroad Participants at Selected Private Universities journal article; this method is also nameless. The second method uses three models to categorize the various types of study abroad programs at post-secondary institutions. For the purpose of this literature review, I refer to this classification method as method 2.

Method 1 is based on what Engle and Engle (2003) define as the seven defining characteristics of overseas programs. The characteristics were created as starting point for the five-level classifications system. The characteristics are:

1. Length of student sojourn (i.e. length of study abroad program)

2. Entry target-language competence (i.e. language proficiency requirement)
3. Language used in coursework (i.e. the language the study abroad course is taught in)
4. Context of academic work
5. Types of student housing
6. Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning.
7. Guided reflection of cultural experience.

Engle and Engle (2003) state that the key to study abroad level classification is understanding how the characteristics work together. The five levels of study abroad classification are:

- Level One: Study Tour
- Level Two: Short-Term Study
- Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact Program
- Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program
- Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program

(Engle and Engle, 2003, p.11)

**Level one.** At this level, study tour programs consist of field trips, or tours and other site visits that occur over a limited period ranging from several days to a few weeks. Level one programs are referred to as study tours, since individuals are provided opportunities to tour the destination over a few days to a week in length. The structure of an art study tour, for example, consists of group hotel accommodations, morning lectures, museum visits, guided walks and excursions.

Study tours are taught in English by faculty who are affiliated with the same institution as the students participating in the study tour (Engle and Engle, 2003).

**Level two.** The second level, or short-term study abroad programs, offer entry or immediate target language instruction and subject matter course work in English. Level two programs are three to eight weeks in length and provide students the opportunity to interact with people in a cultural setting. In theory, level two programs may also serve as a stepping-stone into longer and more in-depth study abroad experiences (Engle and Engle, 2003).

**Level three.** This level refers to cross-cultural contact programs. Programs at this level allow students to benefit from deep cultural immersion through interactions with the local people and community events. Cross-cultural contact programs are a semester in length. Course work in these programs is organized and facilitated on-site or in classes with foreign students from the host country's university (Engle and Engle, 2003).

**Level four.** This level refers to cross-cultural encounter programs. Cross-cultural encounter programs focus on foreign language competence, limited use of the English language, and last for a period of a semester or academic year. Students take courses, through limited instruction in English, with other foreign students.

**Level five.** Level five refers to cross-cultural immersion programs. Level five programs require participants to complete work primarily in the host language, with the target language replacing English in curricular and extracurricular circumstances. Participants are also housed directly in the community.

International experiences that emphasize service learning, independent projects, or professional internships often fall into this category.

It is important to note that academic credits were not used as classification characteristic for study abroad since programs are composed of many variables (i.e. length, purpose, course content, etc.). Furthermore, using academic credit would require an objective rating system, considering that a student's academic record does not reflect the learning that occurs outside of the classroom (Engle and Engle, 2003).

**Figure 2.1 Study Abroad Program Components**

	Level One: Study Tour	Level Two: Short-Term Study	Level Three: Cross Cultural Contact Program	Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program	Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program
Duration	Several days to a few weeks	3 to 8 weeks, summer programs	Semester	Semester, academic year	Semester to academic year
Entry target- language	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Elementary to intermediate	Pre-advanced to advanced	Advanced
Language used in coursework	English	English and target- language	English and target- language	Predominantly target-language	Target-language in all curricular and extracurricular activities
Academic work context	Home institution faculty	In-house or institute for foreign students	Student group or with other international students	In house student group	Local norms, partial or complete direct enrollment
Housing	Collective	Collective and/or home stay	Collective, home stay visit, home stay rental	Home stay rental or integration home stay	Individual integration home stay
Provisions for cultural interaction, experiential learning	None	None	None or limited	Optional participation in occasional integration activities	Required regular participation in cultural integration program, extensive direct cultural contact via service learning, work internship
Guided reflection	None	Orientation program	Orientation program	Orientation program, initial and ongoing	Orientation program, mentoring, on-going orientation or course in cross-cultural perspectives, reflective writing research
*As cited in Study abroad Levels: Toward a Classification of Program Types (Engle and Engle, 2003)					

Method 2 uses a participant's enrollment status as a criterion for classifying study abroad program types. The three program types are: (1) direct enrollment, (2) hybrid programs, and (3) island programs (Kehl & Morris, 2008).

Direct enrollment programs directly place U.S. students into the host country's post-secondary educational system. The faculty involved in this type of program are from the host institution. The students are also housed independently or room with students from the host institution (Kehl & Morris, 2008).

Hybrid programs allow for students to be simultaneously enrolled in courses taught at the host institution and courses taught by faculty from the home university. In regard to housing, students have the option of staying in housing leased by the host university, hostels, and homestays (Kehl & Morris, 2008).

Island programs allow students to take courses with students from the U.S. institution in the foreign country. For example, a short-term study abroad program, that occurs over a 3- to 8-week period, is the equivalent of an island program. This short-term program is composed of faculty and students from the same institution. The faculty may be contracted locally or employed by the home institution. The curriculum is often taught in English, with the exception of foreign language courses (Kehl & Morris, 2008).

It is important to note that direct enrollment, hybrid, and island study abroad programs may allow students to receive credit towards their degree (Kehl & Morris, 2008). This is significant since many students choose not to participate in study abroad experiences for fear of academic credit not counting towards their academic degree



(Anderson, 2007; Chieffo, 2000; Cloughly 1999). In the next section, I discuss these findings, as well as other study abroad outcomes.

### **Self-development and Personal Growth**

Study abroad research pertaining to participant self-development and personal growth concludes that a study abroad experience enhances a participant's cultural global awareness (the understanding and appreciation of one's self in the world and of world issues), civic engagement (active engagements with local, regional, national, and global community issues), and social responsibility (concern for others, society, and environment) (Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014). For example, Gmelch's (1997) qualitative study analyzed the journals of 51 students who studied abroad and then followed up with a 22-item questionnaire. Gmelch (1997) found participants became more confident, self-reliant, and adaptable as a result of their travel. Black and Duhon (2006) found that students who study abroad have significantly higher levels of tolerance of different cultures and increased self-confidence upon returning. While these two studies contributed to the literature surrounding self-development and personal growth, the racial and ethnic background of the participants was not disclosed. Therefore, it was unclear if students of color were surveyed and if these outcomes were associated with students of color.

The Study Abroad for Global Engagement study (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009; SAGE, year) utilized a mixed methods research design that contained a sample size of 6,391 respondents who had studied abroad. Paige et al. (2009) concluded that students who had studied abroad were more socially responsible and philanthropic. Sutton and Rubin (2004) collected data from more than 4,000 students comparing

outcomes between study abroad participants and non-participants. They discovered that students who studied abroad had increased functional knowledge, greater understanding of culture, and an increased knowledge of world geography when compared to their peers. These studies have contributed to the limited available study abroad research; however, one issue with these studies is the emphasis on short-term impact (Franklin, 2010; Murphy, Sahakan, & Magnan, 2014). Much of the available study abroad research occurs immediately after participants return from abroad or shortly after graduation. More research is needed to explore how study abroad affects students in the long-term. My study helps to fill this gap by interviewing participants several years after their study abroad experience.

### **Academic Success and Career Enhancement**

Scholars have also documented the relationship between study abroad and academic performance. For example, a quantitative study at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) found students studying abroad with a 2.0 grade point average were 30% more likely to graduate in four years than nonparticipants. These same students were also 45% more likely to graduate in five years (Redden, 2012). The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus found that 64.5% of students who study abroad graduate in four years, compared to 41% of students who do not study abroad (Redden, 2012). Like the UT study, they concluded that 90% of study abroad participants were more likely to graduate in five-years compared to 58.6% for non-study abroad participants (Redden, 2012). Finally, the University of California at San Diego recorded a five-year graduation rate of 92% for study abroad participants and 78% for non-participants. The University of California at San Diego also found higher graduation rates for students who studied

abroad and identified as first-generation or low-income (Redden, 2012; NASFA, 2008). These studies demonstrate how a study abroad experience is positively connected to a student's time to degree completion. However, these studies are primarily quantitative and do not document how the students were affected from a qualitative methodological research perspective (Posey, 2003; Redden, 2012).

Researchers have also documented how a study abroad experience positively affects a student's career trajectory. Carlson, Burn, Useem, and Yachimowicz (1990) conducted a longitudinal study, with 71 participants, finding that study abroad programs empower students to consider overseas employment. Hadis (2005) distributed an online questionnaire seeking to explore the experiences of study abroad participants while abroad and upon return. Hadis similarly concluded that a study abroad experience clarifies participants career plans and interest in graduate school. The outcomes associated with these studies provide empirical evidence showing the connection between study abroad and both career development and academic success. However, the research methodologies used were primarily quantitative. The use of quantitative methods does not allow for the lived experiences of participants to be fully examined. For example, these studies fail to capture and thoroughly examine the skills participants believed they developed while abroad, an objective my study met.

### **Underrepresented Students, Participation, and Barriers**

Many scholars have contributed to the literature surrounding participation in study abroad as an attempt to increase interest and alleviate racial, gender, economic, academic major, and program design barriers. For instance, Clougly (1999) conducted a quantitative study of 319 respondents examining factors that influenced students'

decisions to go abroad. Cloughly (1999) identified 18 possible reasons students did not go abroad; some of these reasons included: expenses associated with study abroad, conflicts about academic involvement and majors, negative attitudes and beliefs, and no interest. Similarly, Chieffo (2000) surveyed 1,060 respondents finding that four factors influenced the decision to participate in a study abroad experience: (1) information about study abroad opportunities on their campus, (2) influence from their peers, family, and faculty, (3) the cost associated with a study abroad program, and (4) degree major. Other scholars have come to similar conclusions, indicating that interest in language, low levels of ethnocentrism, and fear of intercultural communication influence a student to pursue study abroad (Goldstein & Kim, 2006; Klahr & Ratti 2000; Peterson, 2003; Schroth & McCormack 2000).

Study abroad programs also remain disproportionately White (Fry, 2011; Institute of International Education, 2016; NCES, 2007). In 2014, ethnic minorities accounted for 41.7% of all United States postsecondary enrollment, yet only 21.7% of ethnic minorities participated in study abroad that year. In contrast, White students comprised 58.3% of all postsecondary enrollment in 2014, but accounted for 72.9% of students studying abroad that year (Institute of International Education, 2016; NCES, 2016). The figure below illustrates the racial/ethnic breakdown of all U.S. students enrolled in postsecondary education in 2014 – 2015 and the percentage of those students who studied abroad during the 2014 – 2015 academic year.

**Figure 2.2 Study Abroad Participation by Race/Ethnicity**

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>U.S. Postsecondary Enrollment in 2014-2015</b>	<b>U.S. Students Abroad in 2014- 2015</b>
African American or Black	14.5%	5.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.8%	0.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.6%	8.1%
Caucasian	58.3%	72.9%
Hispanic/Latino American	16.5%	8.8%
Multiracial	3.3%	4.1%
Institute of International Education's <i>Open Doors (2016)</i> Report and the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.		

Scholars have explored why student of color study abroad participation is low, finding that lack of clarity about course requirements, confusion about length of program, lack of community support, fear of the unknown, unsupportive family, unsupportive faculty, and anxiety about racism in a foreign country are factors that deter students of color from studying abroad (Brux & Fry, 2009). Scholars also claim there is a need for additional research highlighting why students of color participate in study abroad experiences, as well as research that highlights strategies and methods that increase student of color participation (Lu et al., 2015). For example, Lu et al. (2015) identified strategies to increase study of color participation; however, only Black students were sampled, leaving a need for research that explores the experience of Latinx students. Additionally, Lu et al. focused exclusively on the experience of Black students abroad while they were in the foreign country, leaving a need for research that examines the study abroad experiences of students of color years after the experience has occurred. By highlighting the experiences of Black and Latinx students, this study adds to the available literature pertaining to the experiences of students of color who study abroad.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Study abroad literature has illustrated how students have moments of self-reflection, increased confidence, and clarity about their career goals and personal interests (Black & Duhon, 2006; Redden, 2012). Given these outcomes, transformative learning was used as the guiding framework for this study. In this section, I provide a comprehensive overview of transformative learning by detailing its history and core elements and by providing examples of how transformative learning has been used to address other issues pertaining to study abroad.

Transformative learning states that people interpret their own experiences in their own way, and how people see the world is a result of their frames of reference. Transformative learning is defined as learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change (Taylor & Associates, 2009; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Our frames of reference—the beliefs and ideas we use to make judgments about things—are influenced by a number of factors including our experiences and backgrounds. Scholars indicate that an individual's frame of reference is challenged or affirmed through three types of learning: (1) instrumental learning, (2) communicative learning, and (3) emancipatory learning. Instrumental learning can be defined as learning that occurs through conditioned behavior modification. For instance, providing incentives to employees to increase work performance is an example of instrumental learning. Communicative Learning is learning that occurs through discourse or dialogue. Communicative learning involves critically reflecting on one's assumptions and beliefs. Emancipatory learning occurs through reflection, which allows an individual to challenge distorted frames of reference.

An individual can experience a transformation in learning through one of four ways: (1) by elaborating existing meanings schemes, (2) learning new meaning schemes, (3) transforming meaning schemes, and (4) transforming perspectives. A learner can be transformed through making an informed and reflective decision to act or not. The first learning process consists of an individual seeking out evidence to support their own initial bias on their point of view. A person obtaining evidence to reinforce their initial bias about the host country is an example of this process. The second learning process entails developing new points of view. A person who encounters a new culture either might have a negative experience, and from that point on, have a negative meaning scheme of the destination. It is also possible for the students to have a positive experience and as a result have a positive outlook of the destination. The third learned process consists of transforming meaning schemes, which is the process of changing one's previously held viewpoints. A participant in a new culture may reflect on their assumptions, stereotypes, and misconceptions, and if the new culture affirms or challenges previously held beliefs, the student's viewpoint may change or be transformed. As a result, the student may have a better understanding or accommodating attitude based on the experience in the new culture. The fourth process of transforming meaning structures is the process of transforming habits of the mind. A change occurs when a person becomes aware of and reflects upon a prior perspective, transforms the perspective, and incorporates the new thought process in the interpretation of experiences. The third process of transforming the meaning scheme reflects a change in point of view. For example, when people encounter a new culture, we may reflect on the views and stereotypes we have about a culture, and emphatically change our viewpoint

after reflecting on our previous assumptions. The fourth process of meaning structures reflects a change in the thought process of arriving at a new point of view. For instance, a person may become critically aware of a prior perspective, change the perspective, but also incorporate the new thought process in the interpretation of experiences. The thought process by which individuals construct new perspectives is the fourth meaning scheme.

Transformative learning was introduced in the late 1970's by Jack Mezirow. Mezirow, who conducted a study exploring the experiences of women either returning to the workforce or resuming post-secondary education. Mezirow found that participants developed new beliefs and assumptions after experiencing a perspective transformation. The perspective transformation process is initiated by experiencing a disorienting dilemma and consists of 10 phases: (1) experiencing a disorienting dilemma, (2) undergoing self-examination, (3) conducting a deep assessment of personal role assumptions and alienation created by new roles, (4) sharing and analyzing personal discontent and similar experiences with others, (5) exploring options for new ways of thinking, (6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles, (7) planning a course of action, (8) acquiring knowledge and skills for action, (9) trying new roles and assessing feedback, and (10) reintegrating into society with a new perspective (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011, pp. 716-717). Not all of these phases have to be experienced for a transformation to occur (Kitchenham, 2008).



**Figure 2.3 Ten Phases of Perspective Transformation**

Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma
Phase 2	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
Phase 4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Phase 6	Planning of a course of action
Phase 7	Acquisitions of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
Phase 8	Provisional trying of new roles
Phase 9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective
*As cited The Evolution of John Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Kitchenham, 2008)	

Problem solving and reflection are critical to perspective transformation and all four forms of learning (Hoff, 2005). For a change to occur, an individual must experience something that does not make sense to their current frames of reference (i.e. a disorienting dilemma) (Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Taylor & Associates, 2009).

Three types of reflection are pertinent to transformative learning: content, process, and premise reflection (Mezirow, 1991). Content reflection relates to what a person thinks, feels, or acts upon. Content reflection involves an individual deciding to complete a specific action. Process reflection involves an individual using reflection to decide on how they intend to carry out a specific action or process. Premise reflection refers to how a person feels or thinks after completing a specific action. Transformations can involve major changes, be task oriented, or self-reflective reframing. Points of view and frames of reference are changed when a person has become critically reflective of the content of a problem and then redefines it. For example, the viewpoint of a male student, who assumes women are athletically inferior, may change after watching a woman set a world record in a particular sporting event, or observing a woman defeating a male in a

competitive sport. The sporting event serves as a major impetus for change, which creates a disorienting dilemma; such disorientation challenges the male to identify what has challenged his assumption (the problem) and then redefines it by now believing that women are just as competitive in sports as men.

Scholars indicate that participants who study abroad are initially naïve about cultural values and practices of the host community, and therefore, resist challenges to their cultural beliefs. In fact, participants often regard cultural perspectives that differ from their own as problematic or invalid. However, after more interaction with the host country's locals, events, and peers, participants begin to gain comfort with uncertainty (King & Magolda, 2005). Thus, this theory was critical to understanding the study abroad experience of Black and Latinx students, since participants were essentially asked to recall, describe, and discuss how their assumptions and beliefs were influenced by study abroad. The participants recalled memories, experiences, events, and people that challenged them to reflect on their own biases, resulting in new assumptions and beliefs. These new assumptions and beliefs positively changed how participants understood their self-efficacy, their interaction with their families, and their career and academic outlooks.

### **Transformative Learning and Study Abroad**

Transformative learning is a comprehensive theoretical framework that has been used to address various issues relating to the study abroad phenomenon. For example, Bell, Gibson, Tarrant, Perry and Stoner used transformative learning theory to examine the study abroad experiences of 150 U.S. university students who participated in three short-term study abroad programs that focused on sustainability in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji. Findings indicated that participants developed a new sociocultural

awareness for the host country, a stronger connection to the natural world, and an understanding of how economic factors influence lifestyles. These findings were based on quantitative data and therefore did not allow the participants' personal experiences to be documented (Bell, Gibson, Tarrant, Perry, & Stoner, 2016).

A longitudinal case study was conducted examining how 57 students, over a period of nine years, experienced transformative learning during and after their participation in a service-learning program in Nicaragua (Kiely, 2005). The findings from Kiely's study (2005) indicated that participants experienced transformative learning through personal, structural, historical, and programmatic elements of their service-learning program. Kiely's study was also longitudinal, quantitative and did not parse out participants' racial identifications. In essence, the study illustrated how transformative learning was used to examine the relationship between service learning and participants.

Scholars Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) examined the study abroad experiences of nine pre-service teacher candidates using transformative learning theory. Trilokekar and Kukar found that participants experienced racial dynamics, outsider status, engaged in risk-taking with new identities, and recognized privilege and global power relations. Trilokekar and Kukar's study sought to fulfill two objectives: (1) to identify and analyze discomfoting experiences the pre-services teachers identified as salient to their study abroad experiences, and (2) to examine opportunities for reflection that had been made available to the pre-service teachers. However, the study focused on the experiences of the participants while abroad, whereas my study will focus on the participant experiences post study abroad.

## **Conclusion**

The body of existing literature on the effects of study abroad can be clustered into three categories: (1) self-development and personal growth, (2) academic success and career enhancement, and (3) participation and barriers. While these categories of research have contributed to the long-standing literature on study abroad, there is still a need for additional research exploring the experiences of students of color. Since the financial crisis of 2007–2008, many industries have begun to expect postsecondary education to train individuals to operate in a global environment (Liu, 2013; Stambach 1997; Tierney & Lanford, 2014; Windrum & Tomlinson 1999). This has resulted in many institutions of higher education implementing strategies to promote internationalization such as study abroad. Furthermore, for some incoming students, study abroad is now being used as a criterion in college/university choice selection. For example, a public poll was conducted finding that nearly 80% of respondents indicated that the presence of international programs on campus would positively influence the choice of their child's college or university (Lincoln, 2004). Thus, this study has implications for study abroad practice, program design, recruitment, and engagement.

## **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I presented a review of literature related to the completed study, which focused on the experiences of Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students that participated in a short-term study abroad experience, sponsored by Southwest University, a predominantly white public four-year university. The literature review was comprised of five areas: (1) the globalization of higher education, (2) research on the history and benefits of international exchange, (3) a summary of study abroad outcomes,

(4) underrepresented students in study abroad, and (5) a review of the transformative learning theory, which guided this study. The chapter culminated with the significance of the completed study. In chapter three, I present the design and methodology used in exploring this phenomenon. This includes an overview of the analytical paradigm, qualitative research approach, description of the population and sample, the data collection instruments and procedure, and phenomenological data analysis.

## Chapter Three — Design and Methodology

### Introduction

In chapter three, I present the qualitative methodological design used to study SU Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students' perceptions of the benefits of their study abroad experiences. I present the study's methodological plan, including the overall qualitative research design, interview methods, and sampling strategies, followed by data collection instruments, data analysis procedures, and qualitative coding methods. By examining the experiences of Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students that participated in a short-term study abroad program, this study filled three gaps in study abroad research. Extant research illustrates that few studies examine study abroad alumni (first gap), the study abroad experiences of students of color (second gap), and the outcomes associated with *short* study abroad programs (third gap). To fulfill these objectives, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive their study abroad experience to have benefited their lives?
2. How do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive their study abroad experience to have shaped their academic and/or career trajectory?
3. What study abroad program characteristics (recruitment, destination, staff, curriculum, service, etc.) do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive to have enriched their study abroad experience?

In the next section of this chapter, I provide concise details about the research method and design.

## **Research Method and Design**

This study used an interpretivist epistemological paradigm to explore how we, as individuals, learn about the world around us. Interpretivism, sometimes referred to as antipositivism, claims that there is no objective knowledge, that reality is socially constructed, and no universal truth exists (Glesne, 2011). Given that this study is focused on an individual's social construction of the world, a qualitative approach was most appropriate for three reasons. First, qualitative research allows for flexibility and adaptability, which is significant. Flexibility and adaptability allow a researcher to use multiple forms of data sources (documents, stories, artifacts, observations, etc.) and vantage points to draw inferences and best inform the research questions at hand. Second, qualitative methodologies allow the researcher to understand the “essence” of human experiences. This is achieved through extensively studying a small number of subjects to identify and develop patterns of meaning. The researcher can also ask clarifying questions to ensure the participants voice is accurately documented (Creswell, 2007). Last, qualitative methods have been used in various studies across the social, nursing, health sciences, psychology and education fields (Creswell, 2013).

Despite the strengths of qualitative research (i.e. flexibility, adaptability, relatively easy to conduct, etc.), qualitative research does have limitations including: the amount of time needed to gather data, how findings are not easily generalizable to the larger population, and concerns of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). However, given the objective, a qualitative methodology was still most appropriate to answer the research questions posed in this study. In the next section, I provide my rationale for using a qualitative phenomenological approach.

## **Phenomenological Approach**

Phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of individuals in an attempt to explain or understand a phenomenon. More specifically, phenomenology places emphasis on understanding how people perceive, describe, feel, judge, remember, make sense of, and talk about a particular experience. In essence, this approach validates participants' perceptions and their interpretations of the world (Hays & Singh, 2012). Since this study encouraged Black and Latinx students to reflect upon and make sense of situations and experiences they encountered while participating in a short-term study abroad program, a phenomenological approach was used. Phenomenology also allowed for adaptability from both the researcher and the participants, while still accounting for a grounded theoretical framework (Hays & Singh, 2012). For example, a researcher can adjust interview questions and ask follow-up questions based on a participant's body language and non-verbal cues. The participant can also ask the researcher to clarify questions, or inquire about their background.

According to Creswell (2013), there are two approaches to phenomenology: (1) transcendental phenomenology and (2) hermeneutic phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology focuses less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants. A key component of transcendental phenomenology is epoch, or bracketing, which is the process of investigators setting aside their experiences to take a fresh perspective toward the studied phenomenon. Transcendental phenomenology consists of the following procedures: (1) identify the phenomenon, (2) bracket out one's experiences, (3) collect data from an individual(s) who have experienced the phenomenon, and (4) analyze and reduce data to significant



statements and quotations. The researcher then (5) develops a textural description of the experiences of the person(s) being examined, followed by (6) a structural description of their experiences, and (7) then concludes with a combination of elements pulled from both the created textural and structural descriptions. Proponents of transcendental phenomenology argue that personal opinion or subjectivity should not interfere with data analysis, and that only one reality exists. An important concept of qualitative research is subjectivity, which can be defined as the qualitative researcher's internal understanding of the phenomenon. Studies that seek to minimize subjectivity tend to draw inferences from *only* the interview data that has been transcribed to text (Hays & Singh, 2012). For this reason, inferences from data are constructed from literal meanings of word or text; things are not left open to interpretation. Personal biases and multiple realities are also excluded for fear of lack of clarity and doubt (Creswell, 2013).

Hermeneutic phenomenology differs from transcendental phenomenology because it does not aim to find a sole literal meaning through data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutic phenomenology states that experiences are subjective and open to interpretation through six research activities. The researcher: (1) identifies the phenomenon, (2) investigates the experiences as we live it rather than how it is conceptualized, (3) then reflects on the essential themes that constitute the nature of this lived experience, (4) and describes the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. Through this process, the researcher is (5) *strongly* oriented towards the phenomenon (biases and all) and (6) is able to balance the research context by considering individual parts as well as the findings as a whole. Hermeneutic

phenomenology does *not* ask a researcher to set aside personal experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012)

Both phenomenological approaches were appropriate for this study; however, only hermeneutic phenomenology was used. I believe my background (international travel experience, job, background, education, family life, etc.) influenced how I interpreted and analyzed the data. A researcher can understand a phenomenon more intimately when personal biases are not excluded (Hays & Singh, 2012). I agree with this perspective and believe that interpretation of the data will be influenced by my life experiences and connection to the phenomena.

## **Participants**

This study examined the study abroad experiences of seven undergraduate students and eight alumni. I chose 15 participants as my target number because this number was commensurate with other phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013). Fifteen participants were both large enough and small enough to capture the phenomenon and keep the integrity of the study, in terms of depth. All of the participants identified as Black or Latinx. To recruit participants, I employed purposive sampling whereby the selection of participants is criterion based (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Given the objective, the participants met the following conditions: (1) identified as Black or Latinx; (2) had either graduated from Southwest University or identified as a junior or senior at the time of the study; (3) had participated in one of two short-term study abroad experiences that were the result of a partnership between Southwest University's International Office and the Office of Diversity Initiatives. There

were no established criteria for how long ago the study abroad experience must have taken place.

The Office of Diversity Initiatives works to help the university meet its mission of service and creates pathways for success for underserved students throughout the state of Texas. The ODI includes more than fifty units, programs, projects, and initiatives and works in four strategic areas: campus culture, community engagement, pre-K-16 education pipeline, and research (ODI, 2017).

I secured a list of potential participants that met my criteria, then emailed them to introduce myself and provide the purpose of the study (see Appendix A). Interested students were instructed to reply to the email. Participants were selected by a process to ensure that a diverse group of students was chosen. I considered the following characteristics when selecting participants: parent's highest level of degree, major, parent's income, previous travel experience, family structure (i.e. siblings, household size, etc.) college involvement, career aspirations, destination, and gender. It was imperative to account for Black and Latinx intragroup diversity to ensure that different identities could be explored and discussed. In addition to the interviews with study participants, I also conducted one interview and three focus groups with the staff and administrators who helped with the planning and implementation of the two study abroad program initiatives. The interviews and three focus groups were used for data triangulation.

## **Overview of Data Collection Instruments**

To answer the proposed questions of inquiry, I requested that all participants complete a questionnaire, provide an artifact or picture from the experience (if applicable), and a resume. I also requested two face-to-face, Skype, or telephone interviews. All interviews lasted a maximum of 90 minutes. The resume was used to develop open-ended interview questions; I reviewed participant's resumes for leadership, volunteer, and employment experiences that could possibly be attributed to study abroad.

### **Questionnaire**

I adopted Holland's (1980), My Vocational Situation Scale (MVS), to inquire about the participants' career trajectories. The My Vocational Situation is a questionnaire that measures a participant's vocational identity, perception of occupational information, and barriers to career information (University of Maryland, 2016). I also added 15 questions inquiring about the participant's academic major, grade point average, gender, age, race/ethnicity, income, length of study abroad program, skills gained abroad, perceived outcomes of study abroad, and interest in participating in a follow-up interview. Data from the MVS was collected for use in a future study (see appendix for questionnaire).

### **Interview Protocol**

The purpose of the interview was to understand the study abroad experiences of Black and Latinx students. To meet this objective, I adopted and modified Seidman's (2006) interview protocol to fit the needs of this study. Seidman proposed an interview protocol that consists of three 90-minute interviews. The first interview explores the life and history of a participant, including the participant's early experiences with family,

school, friends, their neighborhood, and work. The second interview examines the details of the participant's experience (the concept being researched). Participants are asked to reconstruct details pertaining to the activities (internship, tourist sites, interactions with locals, etc.) in which they engaged, relationships they developed, and any key events that transpired. The third interview inquiries about the intellectual and emotional connections between the participant's work and life. However, I elected to combine interviews two and three of Sideman's interview protocol to reduce and cap participant time commitment of this study at three hours maximum (up to 90 minutes per interview). I believed asking participants to commit up to four and half hours (three interviews at 90 minutes' maximum) of their time, as Seidman proposed, would deter students from participating in the study.

The first interview introduced the goals of the study to the participant as well as built rapport. This first interview also focused on the life history of the participant, early experiences in their families, school, with friends, work, and in college. The second interview inquired about how the participants perceived their study abroad experience to have benefited them personally, social, and career wise. The two interviews were spaced out a minimum of three days to four weeks apart. The spacing of each interview was determined by the participants' availability. It is important to note that restructuring or altering Seidman's three-interview structure and the duration and spacing of interviews is acceptable, as long as the used structure allows participants time to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives. Thus, combining interviews two and three was appropriate. Not implementing parameters surrounding the amount of time/space that can occur between the interviews was also appropriate (Seidman, 2006).

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. A semi-structured interview uses open-ended questions that are developed before data collection to gather specific information and conduct comparisons across cases. The interviewers are open and flexible and may probe individual participant's stories in detail (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

The open-ended questions used for the interviews were developed through analyzing resumes, class documents, and questionnaires (see appendix for sample questions). I also modified and used interview questions from two pilot studies, in which I served as a participant on the research teams. The first pilot study examined the experiences of Black undergraduate students who studied abroad in China. The data from this study was published in the *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* under the title *Coloring Up Study Abroad: Exploring Black Students' Decision to Study in China* (Lu et al., 2015). The second study explored the experiences of Black undergraduate students who studied abroad in South Africa; this study is still in development. The interview questions were tested on colleagues in the College of Education, the Office of Diversity Initiatives, and the International Office at Southwest University to ensure the interview questions aligned with the research questions, objective of the study, and the theoretical framework.

### **Resumes and Artifacts**

I obtained resumes to develop specific questions pertaining to the participant's background and their perspective on study abroad as it related to their professional experiences. I also examined pictures, collectibles, jewelry, and souvenirs to learn more about the participants' time abroad.

## **Technology**

A variety of technological devices, platforms, and tools were used in this study. The questionnaire was housed and distributed through the Qualtrics online survey platform. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, Skype, and smartphone device. The digital recorder had the capability of converting audio files into MP3 files. I used third-party freeware to record the Skype and telephone interviews. The freeware gave me the ability to save the Skype and telephone files into MP3 format. ATLAS.ti, data analysis software, was used on a desktop computer to review notes and transcripts. Participant interviews were transcribed by a third-party transcription service. Participant interviews and research notes were transcribed and stored on SU box, a cloud storage software.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

An application to commence the study and establish contact with potential participants was submitted to Southwest University's Institutional Review Board for approval of human subject research.

**Phase I.** The data was collected in two phases. Phase I consisted of a pre-interview questionnaire to gather information about participants' background, perceptions about the trip, and career trajectory. The questionnaire was housed in Qualtrics, a secure SU survey and data collection tool, and distributed as part of an invitation. I drafted an invitation containing pertinent information about the study and emailed that invitation to students who participated in one of the two study abroad programs. The study abroad experiences were the result of a partnerships between an academic center housed in the Office of Diversity Initiatives and SU International Office.

**Phase II.** Once participants consented to taking part in the study, I initiated Phase II. Phase II consisted of two 90-minute maximum interviews. In the first interview, I inquired about the participants' study abroad experience, such as events attended, volunteer opportunities, class interactions, social interactions with local foreigners, and memorable events. I also asked participants to describe and share their friends' and families' reactions to their decision to study abroad.

In the second interview of phase II, I asked participants to describe how they leveraged their study abroad experience personally, professionally, and academically. I also asked participants to describe and share how their friends and families now view them since they have studied abroad. All interviews were facilitated in-person, Skype, or telephone. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed via a third-party transcription service. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant's anonymity.

I wrote analytic memos to reflect on each participant's interview. I then created a separate, larger analytic memo to identify the recurring themes throughout the interviews. I stopped data collection after interviewing fifteen participants (thirty interviews), as data saturation occurred at this point. Data saturation is achieved when the interviewer is no longer hearing anything new from participants (Seidman, 2006). Data collected (website analysis, transcripts, vitas/resumes, codes, etc.) was stored on SU's Box cloud storage, which is secure. Once data were transcribed via the third-party service, all audio recordings were destroyed.



## **Phenomenological Data Analysis**

I used a five-step process to analyze and organize the data. The steps occurred in the following order: (1) organizing the data, (2) reading and re-reading interview transcripts while documenting and taking note of any quotations that stand out, (3) describing and developing codes, (4) categorizing the codes into themes, and (5) coding by theoretical framework to interpret the data. I describe this process in more detail below. Data analysis began by organizing the data; participant interview transcripts, resumes, documents, and photos were uploaded, organized, and separated into folders on SU box. I then organized the results from the demographic questionnaire into a Microsoft Excel Software to generate descriptive statistics of the study abroad research participants. The descriptive statistics were used to construct a detailed view of the participants' backgrounds (i.e. gender, age, race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and study abroad program participated in). The gathered background information was also used to organize information about the participants.

At the completion of conducting the interviews, the digital audio files were professionally transcribed by a third-party transcription service. The transcripts were then uploaded to ATLAS.ti for analysis of the qualitative data. ATLAS.ti is a computer program that is often used in qualitative data analysis. I read through the transcripts for accuracy and took notes pertaining to specific quotations. I also reviewed the memos that had been documented during and after each participant's interview.

I then initiated the coding phase. Coding consisted of verbatim coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Verbatim coding is the process of reading through interview texts, identifying wording, phrasing, context, consistent, frequency,

extensiveness and specificity of comments (Saldana, 2015). Focused coding occurred after the verbatim coding phase; focused coding searches for the most frequent codes to develop sub categories or themes (Saldana, 2015). I read each transcript line by line and then re-read for emerging codes and patterns. I then reviewed and grouped the initial open-codes to create and organize themes. After grouping and theming the codes, I reviewed and selected codes and themes for comparison, contrast, and linkage to the research questions of the study. Additional themes were created through reading and re-reading interview transcription texts for readily identifiable codes and patterns that pertained to the transformative theoretical framework. Themes were generated regarding perceptions to how study abroad positively affected the participants' personal, professional, and familial lives.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to rigor. To ensure the trustworthiness of a study, Guba and Lincoln (1985) proposed four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To ensure credibility, all interview data was triangulated with other research data, including the staff focus groups, interviews, and documents. Triangulation is the process of examining the consistency of different data sources. I also conducted member checks. Member checking is the process of confirming conclusions and interpretations with the group from whom the data was collected. Member checking occurred during and after interviews by asking follow-up and clarifying questions.

Transferability is the process of showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Transferability was ensured through rich thick description. Thick description refers to the researched experiences (interviews) in which the researcher identifies explicit patterns and places them in context. The purpose of thick description is to detail, explain, and provide context of the phenomenon to the reader. Thick description was achieved through asking participants follow up and clarifying questions to illustrate their experiences.

Dependability shows that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To achieve dependability, I described any changes that occurred in the setting and how those changes affected the way I approached the study. Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To ensure confirmability, I documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

### **Positionality and Research Bias**

I inevitably incorporated my own biases, values, and experiences into conducting this study. To help reduce such biases, it was necessary to acknowledge my own positionality within the context of this study (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2009). I identify as a first-generation Black and Mexican college student that chose not to study abroad as an undergraduate student. I viewed study abroad as an opportunity that would delay graduation, cost a significant amount of money, and as something that people of color did not do. I became interested in this topic as a master's student after I completed a practicum in the study abroad office. As a practicum student, I was tasked with the

responsibility of identifying strategies to increase the participation of students of color in study abroad programs. I conducted focus groups, research, and evaluated marketing materials that targeted students of color, learning that students of color participate in study abroad at a lower rate than white students. I also learned that marketing materials should also reflect students of color.

My interest in this topic carried over to my doctoral program. As a doctoral student, I served as a teacher assistant for two study abroad programs, one to Cape Town, South Africa in 2014 and the other to Beijing, China in 2015. Through these experiences, I observed how the personal and professional lives of college students were positively affected. Although I cannot completely understand what it is like to study abroad as an undergraduate student, my experience and background working with college students provides additional insight into understanding what college students value from the time they enter into college to the time they graduate.

As a former student affairs administrator, I observed how participating in a study abroad experience inspired students to pursue additional international experiences and employment opportunities. Lastly, I have published on why students of color decide to go abroad and presented at various conferences on this topic as it relates to first-generation college students, students of color, gender, and the overall benefits of a study abroad experience. Thus, given my experiences with study abroad, it was important for me to be reflective in this research process to prevent myself from projecting my issues and beliefs onto the study participants.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the methodology and design of the study. I employed a qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic perspective to address the proposed research questions. This study focused on the experiences of seven undergraduate students and eight college alumni who identified as Black or Latinx, and participated in a study abroad experience sponsored by Southwest University. The study employed purposive sampling whereby the selection of participants is criterion based (Creswell, 2013). Given the objective, the participants met the following conditions: (1) had either graduated from Southwest University or identified as a junior or senior at the time of the study; (2) had participated in either one of two short-term study abroad experiences that resulted from a partnership between Southwest University's International Office and the Office of Diversity Initiatives. I also discussed positionality, the interview protocol, and data analysis.

## **Chapter Four – Data Analysis and Findings**

### **Introduction**

In chapter four, I present the data analysis and findings from this research study. Chapter four is composed of three sections. In section one, I provide a summary of the descriptive statistics regarding the participants, including participant profiles and profiles of the Beijing and Cape Town study abroad programs. In the second section, I present the themes and subthemes by research questions. The third section of the chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

As mentioned in chapter one, the growing concern over the lack of American engagement in international issues from government officials, national organizations, and institutions of post-secondary education, have led to efforts directed at increasing the number of students that participate in study abroad (Altbach, Reisburg, & Rumbley, 2009; Bollag, 2004; Haddad, 2006; Jessup-Anger, 2008; Lincoln, 2004; Ruby, 2009). Despite these efforts, study abroad program participants remain disproportionately white (Fry, 2011; Institute of International Education, 2016; NCES, 2007). In 2014, ethnic minorities accounted for only 21.7% of study abroad participants. Fourteen point seven (14.7%) percent of all of ethnic minorities identified as Black and/or Latinx as well. Additionally, Black and Latinx students are projected to see the highest increases in post-secondary enrollment over the next ten years and earn post-secondary degrees at a slower rate (Hussar & Bailey, 2016; NCES, 2016). Thus, it is imperative to research the relationship between Black and Latinx students and study abroad, since study abroad has shown to increase post-secondary retention and aid in degree completion; otherwise post-

secondary Black and Latinx students will continue to lag in study abroad participation and global competency development.

### **Descriptive Statistics of the Participants**

Students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds were actively recruited to apply for both study abroad programs. The majority of the application pool, therefore, was primarily comprised of students of color. At the time of this study, 190 students had participated in either one or both of the study abroad programs to Beijing and Cape Town. Of the 190 students, I contacted 37 Black and Latinx students that I had built rapport with via the study abroad programs and the Office of Diversity Initiatives. Eighteen students displayed interest in participating in the study through responding to email; 16 students agreed to participate in the study via email, telephone, or in person; and 15 participants consented and submitted all of their materials. Recruitment for the study ended once 15 Black and Latinx students consented to participate in the study.

The demographic composition of my study's participants mirrored that of both the applicant pool and the selected study abroad program participant cohort. I discuss and document the descriptive statistics of age, gender, race/ethnicity, classification, and first-generation college student status below and in table 4.1. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 27 years old. Seven of the participants identified as female and eight of the participants identified as male.

Four of the participants identified as African-American; four of the participants identified as Black; three of the participants identified as Hispanic; three of the participants identified as Latino/a; one participant identified as Mexican. Eight of the participants identified as alumni; five participants identified as seniors, and two of the

participants identified as juniors. Eight of the students participated in the Beijing, China study abroad experience and three of the participants participated in the Cape Town, South Africa experience. Four participants participated in both programs. Eight of the fifteen participants identified as first-generation college students (i.e. students who are the first members of their families to attend college) (Education, 2005). Seven of the participants were from households that generated less than \$50,000 in annual income.

Participants declared and held majors from a variety of SU colleges. In the next section, I provide a brief overview of each participant, the two study abroad programs, and the lead faculty member. Participants' self-selected their racial and gender identities. It is important to note that participants who identified as Black or African-American interchangeably used the terms Black and African-American. The participants that identified as Hispanic or Mexican sometimes used the terms Mexican, Hispanic, and Latino/a to described themselves. However, Gabriela did not identify as Mexican American, Hispanic, or Latino/a. She is a native of Mexico and identifies as Mexican. Furthermore, the participants who identified as female also used the term woman and female to describe themselves. The participants who identified as male used the term man to describe themselves.



**Table 4.1: Summary of Participant Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Summary of Participant Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>
4 African American	1 20
4 Black	4 21
3 Hispanic	2 22
3 Latinx	5 23
1 Mexican	2 24
	1 27
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Household Income</b>
8 Alumni	7 < \$50000
5 Senior	8 > \$50000
2 Junior	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Study Abroad Experience</b>
7 Female	8 Beijing, China
8 Male	3 Cape Town, South Africa
	4 Both Destinations
<b>Area of Study</b>	<b>First-Generation Status</b>
4 Business	8 Yes FG
5 Communication	7 No FG
1 Education	
3 Liberal Arts	
1 Natural Sciences	
1 Social Work	

## **Participant and Program Profiles**

In this section, I provide an overview of each participant's major, family dynamics, college involvement history, and travel history prior to studying abroad.

Pseudonyms were used to protect participant confidentiality.

**Anthony Banks.** Anthony was from Houston, Texas and a graduate of Southwest University. Anthony majored in Government and minored in African and African Diaspora Studies. He identified as an African-American male, was one of five children, and a first-generation college student. As an undergraduate student, Anthony was heavily involved in various college student organizations and was also in a fraternity. Anthony studied abroad in both Beijing and Cape Town. Prior to studying abroad, Anthony's travel experience consisted of visits to various places around the United States. At the time of the study, Anthony was attending law school.

**Aaron Becker.** Aaron was from Dallas, Texas and was a graduate of Southwest University. Aaron majored in applied learning and development with a concentration in youth and community studies. He identified as an African American male, was an only child, and identified as a first-generation college student. As an undergraduate, Aaron was involved in residence life, various student organizations, and joined a fraternity. Before Aaron studied abroad in Beijing the furthest he had traveled was to Arkansas. The first time he flew on a plane was as a senior in high school. At the time of the study, Aaron was employed in sales.

**Bella Cooke.** Bella identified as a Black female and was from a small town in Texas. She majored in nutritional science and graduated from Southwest University. As an undergraduate, Bella was involved with various student organizations and mentored

incoming first-year students. Bella's travel history consisted of visits to Washington, D.C. and surrounding states when she was in middle school. Bella traveled to Beijing, China for her study abroad experience. At the time of the study, she was working in the nutrition field.

**Bria Dawson.** Bria was from Houston, Texas and identified as a Black female; she had two sisters and a brother. Bria identified as a first-generation college student, who at the time of this study was a senior, majoring in communication studies. As an undergraduate, Bria was involved with admissions, various student organizations, and held various internships. Bria studied abroad in Beijing, China. Prior to this, she had only traveled domestically once with her family when she was in elementary school.

**Brody Day.** Brody identified as a Black male from north Texas and was the youngest of three children. Brody majored in Business Management and was heavily involved with various on-campus student organizations. Brody had traveled around the United States prior to studying abroad in Beijing, China. He received a master's degree in education, and at the time of the study, worked in higher education. Since studying abroad, Brody visited several additional countries.

**Dexter Gamble.** Dexter identified as an African-American male from Houston, Texas and had two siblings. He majored in management information systems and minored in international business. Dexter was heavily involved in several student organizations as an undergraduate. Before he studied abroad, the furthest he had traveled was to Mississippi as a child. Dexter studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa. He later worked in China and Singapore. At the time of the study, Dexter was working in the corporate world.

**Gabriela Gallo.** Gabriela was born in Mexico and moved to El, Paso Texas at the age of nine and was the youngest of three children. She also referred to herself as Mexican, not Mexican American at times, because of her strong connection to Mexico. Gabriela majored in communication science and disorders, identified as a first-generation college student, and was involved in a few student organizations. Gabriela had travel experience prior to studying abroad. For her fifteenth birthday, she and her mother traveled all over Mexico. At the time of the study, she was pursuing her master's degree in speech pathology. Gabriela studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa.

**Claudia Garrido.** Claudia identified as a Hispanic female from San Antonio, Texas. She had an older brother and a younger sister. Claudia identified as a first-generation college student, who, at the time of the study, was majoring in psychology. Claudia's involvement consisted of participating in two academic communities and was a senior at the time of our interview. Her travel history consisted of domestic trips around the state of Texas and visits to her grandparents who resided in Mexico. Claudia participated in the Beijing, China study abroad experience.

**Stephanie Lester.** Stephanie identified as a Hispanic female from San Antonio, Texas. She was an only child and was raised by her mother and grandmother. At the time of this study, Stephanie identified as a first-generation college student who was in her junior year, majoring in corporate communications and minoring in theater and dance. She was involved in few student organizations. Stephanie studied abroad in Beijing, China. Prior to studying abroad, her travel experience consisted of multiple vacations to Florida.

**Erick Marshall.** Erick grew up in South Texas and identified as Latino with one sibling. He identified as a first-generation college student majoring in communications and graduated in 2015. Erick was also involved in two academic communities as an undergraduate. He studied abroad in Beijing, China. Additionally, Erick studied abroad in Ghana and South Africa. The South Africa study abroad program was not affiliated with the Office of Diversity Initiatives and was not related to this study. At the time of the study, Erick was a doctoral student in California.

**Leo Murphy.** Leo identified as a first-generation Mexican male college student from Dallas, Texas with one brother and one sister. His involvements consisted of participation in two academic communities and a few student organizations. Leo studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa and Beijing, China. Leo studied abroad in South East Asia as well. Leo's first flight traveling out of the country was to South Africa for the study abroad program. At the time of the study, Leo was a senior majoring in sociology and in the process of selecting graduate programs.

**Jake Nicholson.** Jake identified as an African American male from Houston, Texas with one brother and one sister. Prior to traveling abroad, his travel experience consisted of visits to California, Louisiana, and Florida. Jake participated in both study abroad programs. At the time of the study, Jake was a junior, majoring in Business and planned to pursue a career in corporate America.

**Alexandria Pitts** Alexandria grew up in the Rio Grande Valley and identified as a Latina female with an older sister. She was involved in a sorority and an academic community on campus. Alexandria studied abroad in Cape Town. Prior to traveling

abroad, Alexandria had visited Florida and Mexico. At the time of the study, Alexandria was a senior, double majoring in social work and Mexican American Studies.

**Naomi Singleton.** Naomi identified as a Black female from Dallas, Texas. Naomi double majored in business management and African diaspora studies and was also a first-generation college student. She was involved in multiple extracurricular activities in both the Black community and larger campus community. Prior to traveling abroad to China, Naomi's travel history consisted of trips to Oklahoma, Florida, and various places in Texas. Naomi studied abroad in Beijing and Cape Town. At the time of the study, she worked in corporate America.

**Josh Tucker.** Josh identified as a Hispanic male from San Antonio, Texas with four younger siblings. Josh majored in public relations and was a senior at the time of this study. He also identified as a first-generation college student and was minimally involved in extra-curricular activities. Josh studied abroad in Beijing. Prior to traveling to China, Josh had traveled via a domestic flight to attend a conference, which was the first time he had been out of the state of Texas.

In the above section, I provided a brief snapshot of the participants' backgrounds. The table below provides a summary of the participants' background. In the next section, I provide an overview of each study abroad program.

**Table 4.2: Summary of Participant Background Information**

Summary of Participant Background Information						
Participant	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Classification	Destination	FG**
Anthony Banks	24	Male	African American	Alumni	Both*	No
Aaron Becker	23	Male	African American	Alumni	Beijing	Yes
Bella Cooke	23	Female	Black	Alumni	Beijing	No
Bria Dawson	23	Female	Black	Senior	Beijing	Yes
Brody Day	27	Male	Black	Alumni	Beijing	No
Dexter Gamble	23	Male	African American	Alumni	Cape Town	No
Gabriela Gallo	22	Female	Latina	Alumni	Cape Town	Yes
Claudia Garrido	22	Female	Hispanic	Senior	Beijing	Yes
Stephanie Lester	21	Female	Hispanic	Junior	Beijing	No
Erick Marshall	23	Male	Latino	Alumni	Beijing	Yes
Leo Murphy	21	Male	Mexican	Senior	Both*	Yes
Jake Nicholson	20	Male	African American	Junior	Both*	No
Alexandria Pitts	21	Female	Latina	Senior	Cape Town	Yes
Naomi Singleton	24	Female	Black	Alumni	Both*	No
Josh Tucker	21	Male	Hispanic	Senior	Beijing	Yes
*Both indicates student participated in both the Beijing, China and Cape Town, South Africa study abroad experiences						
**Yes, indicates the participant identifies as a first-generation college student						

## **Background of the Site**

**Southwest University.** Southwest University (SU) is located in the Southwest region of the United States. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education Foundation (2017), SU is a selective, large, four-year, doctoral granting research-intensive institution. In the Fall of 2015, SU enrolled approximately 40,000 undergraduate students and approximately 11,000 graduate students. The gender breakdown of SU at this time was 51% female and 49% male. The racial/ethnic demographic breakdown of the undergraduate student body was 3.9% African American, 17.2% Asian, 17.2% Hispanic, 0.2% American Indian, 9.7% Foreign, and 45.1% White (Facts and figures, n.d.).

**Office of Diversity Initiatives.** In 2007, the former SU president realigned the universities diversity and community engagement initiatives, forming the Office of Diversity Initiatives (ODI). The Office of Diversity Initiatives worked to help the university meet its mission of service and create pathways for success for underserved students throughout the state of Texas. The ODI included more than fifty units, programs, projects, and initiatives and worked in four strategic areas: campus culture, community engagement, pre-K-16 education pipeline, and research (ODI, 2017).

The Academic Community Center was housed within the Office of Diversity Initiatives. The center employed several staff, faculty, administrators, graduate research assistants, graduate assistants, and undergraduate student staff who supported hundreds of SU students annually, through a variety academic services and support programs. The faculty, along with some of the staff members, served as support staff for both of the study abroad programs. The support staff assisted with the marketing, curriculum



development of the study abroad preparation course, and coordinating logistics for both study abroad programs. The Beijing and Cape Town study abroad programs were the result of a partnership between SU's International Office and the Academic Community Center housed within the Office of Diversity Initiatives. The SU International Office has been widely recognized for their commitment to increasing the amount of first-generation college students, as well as increasing the number of students of color that participate in study abroad each year ([SU International Office](#), n.d.).

**Beijing, China.** Students participated in a summer four-week, faculty-led study abroad program in Beijing, China. The students took a course that examined how the histories of China and the United State affected current social issues in each country. The course also required students to conduct research on social enterprises of their choice, developing an understanding of how those enterprises impacted their surrounding societies. The students volunteered and tutored local migrant elementary school students in English, climbed the Great Wall, as well as participated in class excursions that explored historical sites throughout Beijing. All students had free time to interact with locals (residents of Beijing, other students, etc.), as well as sightsee and explore various parts of Beijing. In addition to the faculty and lead TA, the program had between 8 to 12 additional support staff members. The majority of students who participated in the program were of color.

**Cape Town, South Africa.** Students participated in a summer four-week, faculty-led study abroad program in Cape Town, South Africa. The course students enrolled in examined and compared and contrasted South Africa's history of racial segregation to that of the United States. The students also consulted, tutored, or volunteered with one of

several host local business or government organizations in the area (i.e., hospitals, day cares, schools, small businesses, etc.). Activities involved the students visiting historical sites, such as the Cape of Good Hope and Robben Island. All students had free time to interact with locals (residents of Cape Town, other students, etc.), as well as sightsee and explore various parts of Cape Town. In addition to the faculty and lead TA, the program had between 8 to 12 additional support staff members. The majority of students who participated in the program were of color.

**Lead Faculty Member.** Dr. Stokes served as the leader of both study abroad programs. He was a full professor in the humanities as well as a senior administrator. Dr. Stokes was key to encouraging many of the students to apply to study abroad. Additionally, he was viewed as a central source of support by several participants and was referenced throughout this chapter. Dr. Stokes was essential to the implementation and recruitment of both the Beijing and Cape Town study abroad programs.

In this section, I included descriptive statistics regarding the study participants. In the next section, I provide an overview of the coding procedure, a synthesis of the findings for each of the research questions, and the emergent themes.

## **Themes and Subthemes Based on Coding Procedure**

In this section, I review the procedure for coding and present the findings related to each of the research questions.

### **Synopsis of Verbatim and Focused Coding Procedure**

Interviews were conducted with 15 participants and the audio recordings were transcribed by a third-party transcription service. The interview transcripts were then uploaded into ATLAS.ti. The transcripts were read and re-read to determine the emergent themes through verbatim coding and focused coding. ATLAS.ti was also used to create codes based on the theoretical framework of transformative learning.

### **Synopsis of Conceptual Framework Coding Procedure**

The conceptual framework of transformative learning was used to analyze and interpret the interview data. Through the data analysis process, I developed themes and subthemes regarding the experiences of Black and Latinx study abroad participants. I coded data by identifying key moments that signaled changes in the participants' frames of references. I present the fifteen subthemes using participants' direct quotations. These themes reflect changes or evolution of the participants' behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs as they relate to the participants' self-concept, social relationships, and career aspirations. The subthemes also reflect the participants' attitudes towards the overall design of the program. Table 4.3 presents an overview of the research questions, major themes, and associated coding subthemes.

**Table 4.3 Findings related to the Research Questions for the study**

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**Research Question 1: How do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive their study abroad experience to have benefited their lives?**

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Theme 1 – Individual Awareness

Subtheme#1 – Awakening of American identity (13/15)

Subtheme#2 - Ethnic identity empowerment (14/15)

Subtheme#3 - Self-assurance (15/15)

Theme 2 – My Friends, Family, and Community

Subtheme#1 - Family change of perspective (10/15)

Subtheme#2 - Social responsibility (14/15)

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**Research Question #2: How do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive their study abroad experience to have shaped their career trajectories?**

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Theme 3 – Career Development

Subtheme#1 - Career clarification (12/15)

Subtheme#2 - Career interview and application navigation (13/15)

Subtheme#3 - Making connections (14/15)

Subtheme#4 - Transferable skills (14/15)

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**Research Question #3: What study abroad program characteristics (recruitment, destination, staff, curriculum, service, etc.) do Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive to have enriched their study abroad experience?**

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Theme 4 – Who You Study Abroad with Matters

Subtheme#1 - Comfortability (12/15)

Subtheme#2 - Intragroup diversity (10/15)

Theme 5 – Program Design

Subtheme#1 - Faculty/staff support (15/15)

Subtheme#2 - Study abroad preparation (12/15)

Subtheme#3 - Destination matters (12/15)

Subtheme#4 - Experiential learning (13/15)

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**Ratios refer to the number of participants that experienced the phenomenon out of the fifteen total participants.**

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## **Data Analysis for Research Question 1**

Research question #1 explored how Black and Latinx participants perceived their study abroad experiences to have benefited them personally and socially. The personal component of research question 1 refers to key events, social interactions, and moments of reflection that impacted the participants in a personal way. The social component refers to how participants' friends and family perceived them post-study abroad, the impact of the study abroad experience on participants' relationships with others, as well as how the participants viewed their personal responsibility to society after studying abroad. Two overarching themes emerged under research question 1: (1) individual awareness and (2) my friends, family, and community. The themes and subthemes are discussed below.

### **Theme 1 - Individual Awareness**

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was individual awareness. I define individual awareness as the ways in which participants make meaning of their identities and self-perceptions. The following subthemes emerged from the larger theme of individual awareness: (1) Awakening of American identity, (2) Ethnic identity empowerment, and (3) self-assurance.

**Subtheme 1 – Awakening of American identity.** Awakening of American identity was the first subtheme to emerge under individual awareness. In the context of this study, Awakening of American identity refers to participants' realizations that they were not solely people of color but specifically in a foreign context, were also Americans. Prior to traveling abroad, many participants discussed how they *only* viewed themselves as a Black person or Latinx person, but never a Black American or Latinx American. In

total, 13 out of 15 participants became aware of, or developed an American identity as a result of studying abroad. Participants discussed several examples of interactions and reflective moments in which they became aware of their American identity. For example, Brody Day, a Black male alumnus who studied abroad in Beijing, China, remarked how his living quarters challenged him to become aware of his American identity:

Being with the students, you're in close quarters with people that you maybe wouldn't have spent a lot of time with. You sit together in silence or eat. You have awkward conversations. You try new things. When you're forced to do this in a setting where it's people that you don't necessarily have a choice to be without, it pushes you out of your comfort zone. It makes you more tolerable. It makes you reflect a little bit more on your areas of improvement.

Brody illustrates how getting out of his comfort zone by interacting with different students, challenged him to reflect on his perception of self to identify areas of improvement. As a result, Brody reflected on how others perceived him, which led to a different self-understanding:

Being around the students was the first time I developed a sense of American identity. The W.E.B DuBois theory of double consciousness of Blacks having to see life through the lens of both a Black African and as an American are two different experiences that mend into one. In my entire life, I'd always seen myself as Black. I hadn't really thought too much about my American identity.

W.E.B Du Bois' theory of double consciousness is a concept that was introduced in 1903. The theory of double consciousness states that since Black people have lived in a society that has historically repressed and devalued them, it has become difficult for Black people to reconcile their identities as Black and American. Furthermore, double consciousness theory challenges Black people to understand their identities from their perspectives and from that of others, specifically White people (Du Bois & Edward,

2008). When Brody was asked to expand on double consciousness theory, he went on to say:

I noticed when we'd be out and people would see us, they would first and foremost see us Black, Latino, White students as being American. I saw that we all had common interests and common threads that bound us together. A lot of times we as minorities look at what makes us different from other Americans, most specifically White people, but this was really the first time I started to see what is common within Americans regardless of race. I still have my Black identity, but my American identity was first formed on this trip.

Brody's sense of American identity resulted from comparing and contrasting his study abroad experience to his experiences in the United States. For example, he described how living in a new environment pushed him out of his comfort zone and challenged him to self-reflect. Brody acknowledged how many of the local foreigners viewed him and his classmates as Americans despite their racial and ethnic differences. He also mentioned how he shared many commonalities with his classmates, which linked them as Americans:

There was a sense of privilege in us having the ability to explore different aspects of Chinese life that the average Chinese person, or somebody from another country, might have not been afforded. I saw that we were a little bit more well off financially. I saw that we had privileges in regards to communication, social media, open source internet, and Google. Things other countries aren't afforded.

Brody developed awareness of his American identity by identifying and reflecting upon his privileges as an American.

Participants also discussed becoming aware of their American identity through social interactions. Stephanie Lester, a Hispanic female who studied abroad in Beijing, shared her experience at one of China's largest markets. People from various parts of the world, with various ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds frequent the market and haggle over the prices of various goods. In addition, the sales people speak multiple

languages and carry multiple types of currency (i.e. USD, Euro, Yuan, etc.). Stephanie noted that the sales people recognized her American accent, assumed she was wealthy, and encouraged her to spend money:

Being an American is a privilege in a lot of ways. A lot of people think of America as this super power country, which we are in a lot of ways, even though we have a lot of things to work out. It's still seen as such a huge thing, and I didn't realize the extent of what people thought about Americans until now. They know us as consumers. They know as us rich consumers who just want to buy, buy, buy, buy, buy.

Stephanie realized how foreigners labeled and perceive Americans. When asked how the perceptions made her feel, she said:

It's true. I realized like wow, I feed into that a lot too. I really do. That was something hard that I had to realize too. I never saw myself as a shopper, I'm not a shopper at all, or not when it comes to designer purses and things like that, but in a broader scope, perpetuating these corporate businesses that make America go around.

The experience at the market challenged Stephanie to reflect on her identity as an American, changing her point of view of Americans. More specifically, Stephanie began to understand how some foreigners associate consumerism with American nationalism. As result, this experience forced her to reflect on her role in perpetuating America's consumption-driven reputation. Overall, Stephanie's visit to the market initiated a perspective transformation pushing her to become aware of her American identity.

Participants also developed a sense of American identity through comparing and contrasting their treatment abroad versus their treatment in the United States. Dexter Gamble, an African American alumni male, who studied abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, remarked:

My favorite experience from going abroad was the one time went to a braai [barbeque]. We went to a braai and I got immersed in the culture immediately.



We're out here, they're treating us like family. They're cooking for us. They're out there dancing. It was really good to just be immersed in that, but I think the bigger picture that I got from that was, one, it's crazy how much people idolize Americans.

As Dexter noted, a braai is similar to an American cookout or barbeque. Through this experience, he became aware of how youth in South Africa perceive Americans. Dexter said:

That was the first time that I ever really just felt American in Cape Town because you had these kids coming up to us. We tell them like, "Hey, this is how much our plane ticket was. They're processing that and they're thinking that's so much money, they're just thinking, wow, this is crazy. Then they're thinking we're like movie stars and all that just because we're from America.

Dexter described how many of the foreign locals associated money and finances with Americans. Similar to Stephanie's experience, Dexter was confronted with foreigners' images of affluent Americans. As a result, Dexter became more aware of his American identity.

Bella Cooke, a Black female alumnus, who studied abroad in Beijing, China, developed a sense of her American identity through her interactions with migrant children and in observing many homeless people in route to the school where all study abroad participants volunteered on a weekly basis. The study abroad participants were bused to the school once per week and often observed and took note of the levels of poverty they witnessed. When asked about the migrant school, Bella remarked the following:

It was amazing, the ride there made it so amazing because I saw poverty on a level I have never seen before. I've seen homelessness, I've seen people sleeping in tents on the side of the highway. I don't know how to say this without sounding judgmental about the homelessness in America, there are homeless shelters in America, there are options for homeless people in my opinion. In China, there is not. Knowing this made me feel, as they say "proud to be an American" and

privileged to live in the country we live in. America has many flaws, but you still are very privileged because there are innate benefits to being an American.

Bella compared her new perceptions of poverty in China to her perceptions of poverty in the United States. Bella realized that America was indeed a nation of relative privilege, despite many of the tensions surrounding race relations. As result of this understanding, she developed a stronger connection to her American identity. In sum, 13 out of the fifteen participant responses were consistent with Brody, Stephanie, Dexter, and Bella's comments.

**Subtheme 2 - Ethnic identity empowerment.** The second subtheme that emerged under theme #1 was ethnic identity empowerment. Ethnic identity empowerment refers to participants' development of a strong connection to their ethnic background. Participants indicated that social interactions with peers and foreign locals, as well as class discussions, encouraged many of them to reflect on their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Fourteen of the fifteen participants either embraced their ethnic background, began to question how they were perceived in society, or identified opportunities to explore their ethnic identity as a result of their study abroad experience. For example, the course offered through the Cape Town study abroad program explored the history of race relations in South Africa. These discussions prompted the Black students to compare the experiences of Black people in the United States to the experiences of Black people in Cape Town. As a result, many of the Latinx students observed how the Black students discussed and shared aspects of their experiences as Black people in the United States. Furthermore, whether the shared experience was positive or negative, the Black students would always discuss their ethnic identity with

pride. The Latinx students' hearing the Black students discuss their ethnic identity challenged many of the Latinx students to think about how they self-identify.

For instance, Leo, a Mexican male senior who studied abroad in Cape Town and Beijing stated, "Cape Town [was] where I started questioning as to why don't I say, 'I'm Mexican' like how Black folks say 'I'm Black.'" In this quotation, Leo referred to how the Black students would acknowledge with pride their racial identity as Black people. When Leo was asked to clarify why questioning his identity was important and why he was hesitant to identify as Mexican, he stated:

Growing up, my mom and dad didn't put me in Latin culture. We were very disconnected with Mexican culture as far as the music, the dances, and stuff like that. I never felt Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican. Those were just words people told me I was. Being on that trip helped me re-evaluate that. I always knew I wanted to learn my history and gain a sense of pride. The pride wouldn't come until I got to Singapore where I was like no, I am Mexican. That trip did a lot of things for me personally.

Leo noted how people always labeled him as Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican, yet he never felt connected to those labels. Hearing how the Black students referenced their identity challenged Leo to question how he ethnically identified. In Singapore, many of the students Leo associated with viewed him as wealthy and White, due to his fair complexion. After several interactions, Leo grew frustrated and began to refer to himself as only Mexican:

I didn't finally say I was Mexican until I got to Singapore. I was in Singapore, but we went to Bangkok. The lady in Bangkok asked me if I was American. Everyone just assumed I was white at the time. I just got tired of it. I'm like no, I'm not, I'm Mexican. That was when I started saying to people I'm Mexican and actually taking pride in it.

Leo's social interactions that revealed foreigners' assumptions challenged and encouraged Leo to self-identify as a Mexican.

Alexandria Pitts, a senior female Latina, who studied abroad in Cape Town, had a similar experience and felt empowered to seek out opportunities to learn more about her ethnic background. Alexandria remarked about her experiences and observations of the Black students in the study abroad program:

All the black people in that class would always be like, "I'm going back to my home country." Or like, "I'm going back to where my roots are from." I'm like, "This isn't my roots. This is not where my culture is." "So where do I go?" I guess it was a lot of self-identity. I needed to figure out who I was, and I feel like living in The Valley I learned that I was Mexican but I was never proud of it. After that I started being like, "We came from somewhere I was like, where is all this history? I was like, "Why is it not in textbooks?" That's when I came across one of my Mexican American studies classes and ever since then it's been my major.

Alexandria observed how many of the Black students, when in the United States, would express their desire to visit Africa. This experience challenged Alexandria to reflect, desire, and question her own ancestral roots. She also noted how she sought out history about her ethnic heritage through Mexican American courses and as a result, she added Mexican American studies as a second major to learn more about her identity.

While Alexandria and Leo's study abroad experiences empowered them to learn more about their ethnic identity, Gabriela Gallo, a Latinx alumnus who studied abroad in Cape Town, felt her ethnic identity was reaffirmed. When asked if her study abroad experience influenced her ethnic identity, she stated:

It reinforced it to the max. Sometimes I was worried that I was too Americanized, or sometimes when I would forget words in Spanish. Like talking to my mom I'd be like, "Oh my God. I'm losing my roots!" But then I went to Cape Town and I was comfortable with the way people lived there. The way that I thought about life was Mexican. You know, like, "It's okay for us not to have a heater. It's normal to take public transportation and be crowded with a bunch of people, and then women selling their fruit in the street, it's normal. A lot of people do this even though we don't do this in America. People do this. Just the way that I thought about situations and the way that I thought about things, it was entirely Mexican and my Mexican upbringing. That helped me realize, you might be

forgetting Spanish a little bit from time to time, but you still think and act like a Mexican. So, going that far helped me reinforce my identity as a Mexican.

Before Gabriela had traveled abroad, she was concerned she was losing her identity as a Mexican, but once she arrived in Cape Town, she felt more comfortable. Gabriela was able to compare and contrast her experiences in Cape Town to her experiences growing up Mexico. By comparing these experiences, she identified behaviors that resembled her upbringing in Mexico, which affirmed her ethnic identity.

Like the Latinx students, the ethnic identities of the Black students were also affirmed. Many of the Black students who studied abroad in China indicated how Chinese locals would request pictures with the students, touch their hair without permission, and admire their skin complexion. For some of the Black students, the attention was overwhelming; other participants embraced the attention and viewed the attention from the Chinese locals as a compliment. For example, Naomi Singleton, a Black female alumnus who studied abroad in China and South Africa, embraced the attention and remarked the following:

That was probably the first time ever in my life that all these people were admiring my blackness. In the US, you got black skin, and it's a lot of stereotypes and negative things that go along with that. In China, they loved us! They embraced us so much and wanted to learn so much about us. I was just fascinated by their fascination. It was something I had never experienced.

Naomi embraced the attention she received because it stood in sharp contrast to the negative stereotypes and stigmas that influenced how she experienced Blackness in the United States. She welcomed the attention she received as interest that was genuine and complementary.

Bria Dawson, a Black female senior who studied abroad in Beijing, China, discussed several instances where Chinese locals requested pictures and touched her hair as well. Bria stated that her self-esteem was boosted as a result of this experience. When asked why she felt study abroad boosted her morale she said the following:

It's just because of race relations in the US, and classism and racism and all the other isms that constantly plague the areas that we've grown up in. You don't see other races portraying us in a negative way or making us feel bad, so to be halfway across the world, and have another race putting you on a pedestal, was definitely a morale boost.

After comparing and contrasting the treatment of Blacks in China to their treatment in the United States, Bria met what she interpreted as positive attention, enthusiastically.

Like Bria, Aaron Becker, a Black male alumnus who studied abroad in Beijing, China, had a similar experience and described his interaction with a Chinese local:

One lady cried when she saw us because we got black skin. She's never seen a black person. I was like it was pretty amazing. Being a black man in China, you don't think about it. Ain't nobody judging you because you're a black man. Ain't nobody scared of you because you're a black man. You're just a black man.

Aaron revealed his awe after viewing a Chinese person react emotionally to his Blackness. In our interview, Aaron further mentioned how the woman's tears were of admiration, and that she had requested a picture. Aaron, like his fellow study abroad participants, was pleasantly shocked by the locals' attention – attention that only sharpened the contrast between his experience as a Black man in the U.S. and his experience abroad. Aaron shared that many people in the U.S. possessed misconceptions and fears about Black Americans. However, when Aaron was abroad, he never felt discriminated against. As a result, he was empowered by the woman's reaction; he took it as a sign that he could be less cautious and not worry about judgement from others.

The accounts of Aaron, Bria, Gabriela, Leo, Alexandria, and Naomi all demonstrate how the participants felt empowered to embrace their Black identity. All of the participants illustrated how they each became aware of and felt proud of their ethnic identity, or sought to learn more about their racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is important to note that the Latinx students experienced ethnic identity empowerment by reflecting on their differences or becoming curious of their ethnic identity through interacting with other students. This was in contrast to the Black students, who embraced their identity by comparing and contrasting their treatment from foreign locals to their treatment in the United States. Furthermore, the older Black students perceived the attention they received from local foreigners as sometimes racist, since people were curiously drawn to their differences, whereas younger Black students viewed the attention as positive. I would posit that differences in perception could be attributed to the older student's levels of maturity and exposure to life experiences that were rooted in racism. As a result, the older students are more able to identify instances of racism.

**Subtheme 3 - Self-assurance.** The third subtheme that emerged under theme #1 was self-assurance, or self-confidence. Every participant identified study abroad as an experience that bolstered and reaffirmed his or her self-assurance. Further, many of the participants indicated that after studying abroad, they felt more confident in their ability to make decisions, navigate predominantly White environments, and engage in new experiences. For example, Claudia Garrido, a Hispanic female junior who studied abroad in Beijing, felt empowered to try new opportunities. During her interview, she stated:

While in China, I was like "Oh my goodness. I'm able to do this. What more am I able to do?" I think the experience pushed me and motivated me to take advantage of the opportunities that are being presented towards me...I had just finished my

Sophomore year, when I studied abroad. In the Fall, I was going to be a Junior. I was like I only have two more years here. What am I doing with my life? It was at that moment back, I was like "every opportunity presented towards me, I was like I've got to do this." I think it really motivated me to reach for things that before I wouldn't have.

Claudia's increased confidence inspired her to identify and commit to new opportunities offered at SU.

Leo also described the affect study abroad had on his confidence level. At the time of the study, Leo was in the process of selecting graduate programs. During a site visit, Leo attended and participated in a graduate level course. When asked how study abroad influenced the way he interacted with people, Leo mentioned the course and remarked:

I feel like I actually had something to contribute. I had these experiences to talk about, and relate it to the course material. Stuff like that, I would not have felt comfortable two, three years ago, doing that. I would have been like, "This is their space. Their learning. I'm just here on a visit. I'm just going to keep my mouth shut, and just listen." Not anymore. If I'm here, I'm going to say something if I feel like I should.

The study abroad experience caused Leo to be more assertive and self-possessed. Leo went on to say:

Coming to a space like SU, I would be nervous. This is his space or her space. However, now I feel I can joke around with whoever I'm interviewing with, or whoever I have to shake hands with. I can be myself.

Leo attributed much of this increased confidence to the way in which he looked up to fellow students in the program, as he further elaborated:

There was a freshman on trip. She could do what the sophomores and the juniors and the seniors could do, which was go back and forth with a tenured professor, ask Dr. Stokes questions. I remember thinking to myself I can't do that. I remember one time Dr. Stokes asked me, "You good? You haven't said anything." I said, "Yeah, I'm just tired." Really it was more so I felt I had nothing to



contribute to the class. That was a challenge in itself. It was insecurities but I knew I wanted to be like them. I wanted to get to they were at mentally.

Leo valued having older students in the program because they served as mentors. Leo strived to emulate his mentors - to be more vocal, opinionated, and confident. As a result of his participation in the study abroad program, his mentors empowered him in a variety of ways, marking a significant change to when he began the program when he even questioned his ability to participate.

Students also mentioned being more vocal in discussions and interactions with people as a result of going abroad. Jake Nicholson, an African American junior who studied abroad in both Beijing and Cape Town remarked:

Helping the guy develop a financial plan and having him listen to me, even though he was like twice as old as I was, helped me gain a sense of confidence in what I do, when I lead my organizations, or whenever I have a group project or something, I have more strength and more confidence behind my voice and my opinion.

Jake attributed his sense of pride and confidence to the people in South Africa valuing his experience and intellect, regardless of his age. Furthermore, the confidence Jake developed abroad transferred to many of his obligations back home. Similar to Jake, several participants shared experiences demonstrating increased self-assurance. The second theme to emerge was my friends, family, and community. This theme is discussed below.

## **Theme 2 – My Friends, Family, and Community**

All the participants indicated that their study abroad experience positively affected their families and friends, as well as challenged them to think about how they could help other people in their community. Under theme #2, two subthemes emerged: (1) family change of perspective and (2) social responsibility.

**Subtheme 1 – Family change of perspective.** Family change of perspective was the first subtheme that emerged under theme #2. Family change of perspective refers to how participants perceived their family members to have changed as a result of study abroad. Ten out of fifteen participants indicated their family members were more comfortable with them relocating to different areas of the United States and pursuing international job opportunities. Ten out of the fifteen participants also described how they encouraged their family members to study abroad as well. Bella remarked:

I am my mom's only child. It is easy for her to want to keep me close and make sure I'm always okay. But now when we go an extended period of time without talking to each other, she's not thinking the worst when I don't answer or call her back the next day. Like if I go to sleep early and she calls me at 9:00 and I don't answer and I don't call her back until 9:00 the next night, she's not freaking out. The same thing happened in China because time zones were completely opposite and we didn't always get to talk to each other.

At the time of the Beijing, China study abroad experience, Bella's mother was unable to frequently communicate with her daughter due to the differing time zones in China and the United States. As a result, Bella and her mother communicated less with one another than usual. This separation challenged Bella's mother to grow comfortable when communicating less with Bella.

Dexter had a similar experience. He described how his family did not accept his decision to study abroad until the day they said goodbye at the airport. Dexter reflected on that moment:

My dad took me to the airport and said, "Hey, be safe over there. I'm just now accepting this." It really took me telling my mom bye, telling my brothers bye and my dad taking me to the airport, for them to really just accept like, dang, dude's about to go to Africa. That was just an interesting time. Now they're just like, "Oh, you're about to go here? All right, cool."

Since studying abroad, Dexter's family has grown more comfortable with him traveling internationally. Dexter's family is extremely proud and now boasts about his adventures.

When asked for clarity, Dexter stated:

My dad likes to brag now. He'll meet up with a homie, and be like, "Man, my son been in 11 countries now, man. He ain't stopping. He ain't stopping at all." I think my dad's super happy. He's just like, "You're doing it." My mom, she's pretty happy. She's like, "That's pretty cool how you go all these places and see all these things at such a young age."

Dexter's experiences demonstrate how his family was initially hesitant to let him study abroad, but then changed and began to encourage his travels.

Erick Marshall, a Latinx alumnus who studied abroad in Beijing, China, described his study abroad experience as a "catalyst for change" for both himself and his family.

When asked to expand on his thoughts, he stated:

It was freaky because leading up to it she definitely had apprehension. Coming back, my mother was extremely happy. She bragged to her friends that I was in China and lived there. This experience released a lot of reins she had on me that in a way controlled this freedom I wanted was let go. I have the power to make my own decisions, and my mom understands that and she supports it. She does offer advice here and there, but she has let go of a lot of the reins and I feel more independent. Because of that, I feel she's extremely proud

Erick felt more confident about pursuing opportunities in various parts of the country and more confident in his ability to make decisions, in large part, because he perceived that

his mother trusted his judgement. It seems that this newfound trust resulted from his mother realizing that Erick was mature and independent since he had successfully traveled abroad and returned home on his own.

Participants also indicated that since they studied abroad, their families grew increasingly open to them pursuing careers in different states and countries. For example, Naomi remarked:

I think my parents have become more open. Our background is we're very careful. We're very stagnant. After I studied abroad twice I let them know I wasn't going to stay in Texas after I graduated. They were just like, "Okay. We'll see," but I didn't even apply to any job that would allow me to be in Texas. They don't like the fact that I'm in Connecticut in the cold, but they definitely just supported my decision of venturing out. My little sister has grown too, she is going to get a passport to go to Jamaica in the summer.

Naomi described her family as stagnant and wary of change, but after two study abroad program experiences, her family grew more comfortable with Naomi venturing outside of Texas. I posit that this increased comfort level is due to Naomi sharing her study abroad experiences with her family, thus allowing her family to relate to her global experiences and feel confident in her decisions. The subtheme of family change of perspective illustrated how parents required less attention, contact, and communication once their children returned home and felt confident in their children's decisions. The participants also indicated their parents were more open to their children traveling elsewhere again or relocating after college completion.

**Subtheme 2 – Social responsibility.** Social responsibility was the second subtheme that emerged. Social responsibility refers to participants' desires to become more informed on social issues, share their experiences with their community, and take advantage of new opportunities as a result of their study abroad experience. Fourteen out

of fifteen participants felt it was their social responsibility to encourage their friends and family to study abroad. Erick shared:

These 30 days allowed me to grow, take risks, think creatively, and be open minded, more than I had been within the two years at SU. It was through this reflective state that I noticed this experience transformed me and it is important to me, and now I need to help other people find and make their own experience.

Erick attributed much of the growth he experienced to his study abroad program. He also reflected on his commitment to helping others:

It is my responsibility, to share things that have helped me grow. Every summer since that study abroad program, I've gone back to my high school and have created panels with seniors and juniors, who are thinking about college. I'm not talking about why it's important to go to college. I'm talking about what college is about, and study abroad is something I talk about for 20 minutes.

Erick described how he grew from his study abroad experience and further expressed his desire to share his experiences with others, since he felt his study abroad experience has had a greater impact on him than his overall college experience. For this reason, he began to visit his high school alma mater to discuss and share his study abroad experience, encouraging other others to travel internationally, reflecting his responsibility to his community.

Jake also expressed a desire to give back to Black students in the SU community:

When I was first in China, after reflecting, my value was in gaining first-hand experience and keeping it to myself. But going to South Africa, I was able to get a sense of value in helping other people become successful. Now, I find myself coming back to SU, preaching the values of study abroad to incoming freshmen.

Through reflection, Jake developed a sense of what was important to him. Jake felt that he experienced enormous growth as a result of the study abroad experience. When Jake studied abroad in China, he prioritized gaining experiences that helped him develop

personally. However, after he studied abroad in Cape Town and completed internships that prioritized helping others, he realized service and giving were most important to him.

Participants also indicated that it was important to facilitate presentations on campus to Black and Latinx students. When asked why, many of the participants indicated they wanted their audience to relate to them and view study abroad as a reality. For example, Bella mentioned how she had spoken and volunteered for one of SU's welcome back events. The event allowed Black sophomores, juniors, and seniors to present and share their experiences as a Black student at SU. Bella remarked:

I did a presentation with three other students that went on the program. Basically, this presentation showed them study abroad is possible. You may be Black. You may come from a small town. You may not have that much money in your bank account, and that's fine. You can still study abroad. This is what it may look like for you, because this is what it looked like for us.

Bella highlighted the importance of the audience's ability to relate to the participants who studied abroad. Dexter shared a similar sentiment:

I think the importance of coming back and not really just keeping your knowledge to yourself is huge. I'm on panels now, just talking about my Study Abroad experience. If there's a panel available, I will volunteer time. I'll take out the time of day to really talk about my experience. I think people are more likely to do it when somebody who's relatable can come to them and say, "Yo, hey, I was you, man. Didn't think there was money out there. Didn't really think I would like it, but I've done it and I've traveled to over 10 countries now." It's been crazy seeing results because even my other mentee just came back from studying abroad in South Africa because I influenced him to study abroad.

Dexter had traveled to ten countries and was fully aware of how study abroad had benefited him. As a result, he committed himself to volunteering his time to help other students study abroad.

Participants also indicated they felt a need to bring awareness to social issues as a result of their study abroad experience. For example, Claudia remarked:

After coming back and being more observant, knowing that we have issues everywhere, knowing that I can actually do something about it, really makes a difference. Now, I'm doing this trip, over Spring Break, that is meant to make social issues aware to people and spread the message of equality, and learn more about social issues, I'm able to teach somebody, and they're able to teach others, and actually do something about it. I feel like my experience made me realize that I need to take action.

Claudia felt compelled to take action after traveling abroad. As a result, she committed to a spring break trip emphasizing social awareness.

Like Claudia, Stephanie felt it was her responsibility to give a voice to those people from marginalized or oppressed communities. Stephanie remarked:

I feel so passionately about these things and what I saw, and what I'm seeing in the U.S., someone needs to be a voice, someone needs to bring it up. If it's not me, then who?

Stephanie referred to the poverty she witnessed while volunteering at the migrant school as well as the poor living conditions the migrant students faced. Thus, she developed a passion for bringing awareness to social justice issues in the United States.

The subtheme of social responsibility illustrated how participants felt more compelled to give back to both their campus and hometown communities through campus presentations, panel discussions, and mentoring incoming students. The social responsibility subtheme also reflected the participants' commitment to bringing awareness to social justice issues. Two themes emerged as answers to research question #1: individual awareness and my friends, family, and community. Further, each theme had sub-themes. For the individual awareness theme, the subthemes that emerged were Awakening of American identity, ethnic identity empowerment, and self-assurance. For my friends, family, and community theme, family change of perspective and social

responsibility were the subthemes that emerged. In the next section, I will present the emergent themes and subthemes for research question #2.

### **Data Analysis for Research Question 2**

The second research question explored how Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceive their study abroad experience to have shaped their academic and career trajectories. The first theme that emerged from data analysis was career development. I define career development as the development of a person's work identity. An individual's work identity is composed of obtained career opportunities, career planning, work relationships, and skillsets. The following subthemes emerged from the larger theme of career development: career clarification, career interview and applications navigation, making connections, and transferable skills they obtained as a result of their study abroad experience.

#### **Theme 3 – Career Development**

**Subtheme 1 - Career clarification.** The first subtheme that emerged under career development was career clarification. Twelve out of fifteen participants indicated their study abroad experience aided in narrowing their career interest and clarifying their future goals. Findings also indicated that participants felt empowered to pursue their passion or seek out additional international opportunities. Gabriela remarked, "It gave me hope that I can pursue what I want to do in terms of service to community, that I can serve others, and use a lot of the ideas that we learned about in regard to entrepreneurship." Prior to studying abroad, Gabriela was uncertain of her career path and was always hesitant to return home to El Paso, as she believed there would be limited career opportunities. When asked why she was no longer hesitant, Gabriela spoke more



about entrepreneurship stating, “I can take some of what I've learned back home, and drive my career.” In Cape Town, the participants were exposed to several entrepreneurial professionals who started their business through discovering a societal need and creating a service to address that need. Gabriela had never considered staying in El Paso and providing a service centered around speech pathology. However, now that she had this experience, she was open to the idea of creating a project to serve her community as opposed to moving to a large city.

Similar to Gabriela, Stephanie, was also empowered and shaped by her internship experience abroad. When asked how study abroad has influenced her career path, she stated:

Yeah, being there in China, working with the migrant school in particular, really made me realize how much I do love kids, and even though I love kids, I don't particularly like working with them one-on-one, or with them as a group. Education reform has become so much more important to me, just here in the U.S. and in my neighborhood, and I want to be able to fix that and have a really positive impact on these kids' lives, even if I'm not there in the classroom with them.

Stephanie discovered that her genuine interest was in education reform:

It was in China where I realized I want to do education reform. I want to be able to make education fun and informative. And that's not really something I would be able to do as a teacher. I would have to do something higher up, which is why I would really want to get into something like public policy and education reform.

Stephanie compared the experiences of the migrant children in China to the experiences of students in the U.S., and this comparison cemented her commitment to help children through public policy. The subtheme of career clarification highlighted how participants used their study abroad experience to narrow, clarify, or affirm their career pursuits.

**Subtheme 2 – Career interview and application navigation.** Thirteen out of fifteen participants indicated having used their study abroad experience to distinguish themselves from other applicants in job interviews and applications for graduate school, scholarships, and awards. The experiences of job interviews and applications for graduate school, scholarships, and awards were coded together since participants were either entering or already admitted to graduate school, or participants were entering the workforce, or already employed. For example, Erick mentioned how his study abroad experience allowed him to distinguish himself from his peers and secure a National Science Fellowship:

These experiences have really helped me stand out from the crowd. This year, I was awarded the National Science foundation's research fellowship as a PhD student. I'm the first person in my department, in my college's history, to ever get the award. To have a first-generation Latino male get this fellowship, I think it's a frikkin' big deal. I printed out the feedback and it said: "Erick is an outlier of his peers, his experience abroad has definitely influenced the way he thinks about the world." I wrote my story in my essay, and my story is: I have lived abroad, and being abroad has changed the way I see things.

Erick demonstrated the unique nature and value of studying abroad as well as how the study abroad experience could be used to leverage academic and professional opportunities.

Participants also used their study abroad experience to overcome barriers to career opportunity and advancement, such as grade point average requirements. Dexter discussed why he felt his experiences were so intriguing to recruiters and potential employers:

The interesting piece is the experiences can get you past barriers as far as GPA cutoffs. Because even for me, the GPA cutoff is like a 3.3. I graduated with like a 2.6. I made it all the way to the director. Nobody else asked me about my GPA because I was able to talk about my experiences and why my GPA wasn't

correlated to my ability to work. That ended up propelling me into a job where I'm doing the same thing as people who hold a master's degree.

Many students graduate college with less than a 3.0 grade point average. As a result, these students are eliminated from some potential job and internship opportunities.

Dexter demonstrated the value of his study abroad experience. Dexter graduated college with less than a 3.3 grade point average. However, discussing his study abroad experiences elevated Dexter from interviewee to employee. When asked how the director inquired about his grade point average, he responded:

The interview was just starting, and then we had small talk and he was like, "I noticed your GPA is this. I'm sure you know our cutoff is blah blah blah. Why is it this?" I talked about, how that's not reflective of me simply because of my experience in China, Singapore, and South Africa, and this is how I can apply it to this position." He was like, "Oh. Okay."

The director was more concerned with Dexter's ability to excel in the position, as opposed to his grade point average. If Dexter had followed protocol, he would have been eliminated from the applicant pool. Dexter indicated that fourteen of the twenty interviewers asked him about his study abroad experience.

Other participants also described how their interviews for employment and/or internship opportunities were dominated by conversations centered around their study abroad experience. Jake said, "I think for all my interviews, we talked about studying abroad for at least a third of the time. There's been a couple where over half the interview was spent on my experience abroad in general." Naomi had similar experiences:

Every single time. To this day, I've never been to a job interview that hasn't asked me about my study-abroad experience and then spent a substantial amount of time on that topic. That's why I feel like study abroad definitely changed the playing field, because I feel like I stand out when compared to my peers.

Jake and Naomi exemplified how employers positively view international experiences, since much of the job interview time was spent inquiring about what the participants learned abroad. Jake and Naomi were both asked to tally the number of interviews in which study abroad was discussed. Jake indicated that four out of the twelve interviews he received inquired about his study abroad experience. Naomi indicated that all of the twenty interviews she received inquired about her study abroad experience. The subtheme of career interview and application navigation demonstrated how participants used their study abroad experience to secure job interviews and fellowship funding. The subthemes further illustrate how participants leveraged their study abroad experience to navigate grade point average barriers.

**Subtheme 3 - Making connections.** Making connections was the third subtheme that emerged under the career development theme. Making connections refers to how fourteen of the participants used their study abroad experience in a professional or academic environment. Participants indicated they used their study abroad experience to form relationships in the workplace or in their academic setting. Aaron shared his experience:

It was definitely a conversation piece. I work in sales now, and the people love to hear cool things, so to say I've actually been to Beijing is a cool thing. Especially when it's an experience they never would have thought of. That's one good thing I was able to do with the experience.

Aaron revealed how he used his study abroad experience in his position of employment specifically by using his experiences to build rapport with clients.

Bria also used her study abroad experiences to connect with others:

It starts conversations and it makes me relate to people a lot more. A lot of people have visited China for work, which is like, "Oh, I was only there for four days but

I did this, this, and this. What'd you get to do while you were there for that entire time?" They actually want to know more about me. We probably wouldn't have had a conversation if I didn't mention that I went to China. I think it definitely helps keep conversations alive.

Naomi shared similar experiences about how study abroad helped her within the work force:

I'm the only black person in my department, of course the only black woman, so to be able to be like, "Y 'all not the only ones that can go abroad," is great! I can have a conversation too. I don't have to feel left out. I probably would have felt lame if I couldn't speak about that. Especially since I am the only black person in my department and everyone has traveled outside of the country.

Naomi revealed how she would have felt insecure if she did not have her study abroad experience to connect with others. Naomi mentioned how stereotypes encouraged her to use her study abroad experience to demonstrate her openness to new cultures, show her competence, and bring attention to her qualifications. As a result, Naomi felt more confident interacting and building connections with her peers.

Participants also indicated their employers became more accommodating and flexible when they learned participants studied abroad. Alexandria shared her experience:

Yeah. I got my internship before I went abroad but I had to tell my internships supervisor I couldn't start until I got back. When I told her, she was like, "Oh my gosh. Where are, you going?" Instantly she wanted to get to know me. I was like, "Dang. Okay." It's good.

Alexandria noted how she was hesitant to inform her internship supervisor of her plans to study abroad. However, once she did, her supervisor was open to changing Alexandria's start date, which affirmed Alexandria's decision to go abroad.

Participants used their study abroad experience to connect with students in their academic classrooms as well. Anthony Banks, an African American male alumnus who studied abroad in both Beijing and Cape Town shared:

It helps me in law school. People group up with people they feel are similar to them and then those people turn into friends. When you go to a school environment, you have multiple social groups. With me having this experience I feel like I'm able to adapt to any environment, I can go to any group. That is something I utilize very frequently here at the law school.

Anthony discussed how he had to learn to communicate with foreigners regardless of their background, and in doing so, he improved his overall ability to communicate and build relationships with everyone. This is important because several participants questioned their presence in certain environments due to fear of being perceived as incompetent. However, since they studied abroad, they worried less about others' perceptions and felt more confident building connections. Participants, Gabriela and Leo, echoed similar sentiments. The making connections subtheme demonstrated how participants used their study abroad experience to build relationships with peers, classmates, and colleagues.

**Subtheme 4 - Transferable skills.** Transferable skills refer to abilities that are relevant and helpful across different areas of an individual's life (socially, professionally, and academically) (Sgobi & Suleman, 2015). Participants identified a variety of transferable skills they gained through their participation in study abroad programs. Fourteen participants indicated they were more adaptable, developed the ability to understand many perspectives, and strengthened their communication skills. Participants indicated that interactions with their peers, locals of the host country, and attendance at local events aided with their development of transferable skills. For example, Anthony shared:

Going abroad has really helped become more adaptable. It doesn't matter where you come from, how much money you had or didn't have, who you think should be president. None of that matters to me. I can go into whatever group there is and

adapt to their environment. I want to say that was something that I had, but being on this trip, I grew those skills.

When Anthony was asked why he felt he developed this skill, he stated,

Having to interact with locals in these different countries, especially in China where y 'all don't speak the same language, you got to find a way to communicate, I definitely think I subconsciously picked up on how to be friendlier, more open with people and just interact with others in a positive and productive way.

Anthony highlighted two skills he developed as a result of his placement in a new environment, and consequently he was forced to communicate and adapt. Brody also spoke about how adaptability related to various aspects of his life:

From an education standpoint, it makes me a lot more adaptable to different personalities. If I'm having some type of conflict with somebody, I'm more open and patient in understanding if what I might be doing may be bothering them, or it might be just their value system, because everybody comes from a different value system.

Brody exemplified how he became more cognizant of where students were in their development. His study abroad experiences also equipped him to apply the concept of adaptability to personal and professional experiences. Claudia also mentioned how her volunteer experience at the migrant school challenged her to adapt:

Obviously, we had a teacher who was able to communicate with us and the students. When he wasn't teaching, it was just us SU students teaching the students. We had to rely on each other and our resources. If we had to draw, we had to draw. I used the dictionary a lot when I was with them. If they had questions, I tried to answer as best as I could I put myself in their position.

Due to the language barrier in China and time constraints of the school, Claudia had to identify efficient ways to assist the students when the instructor was unavailable. As a result, she downloaded a Mandarin dictionary to support the migrant students,

demonstrating her ability to adapt by being resourceful. Claudia went on to further state what she learned:

I've learned when a situation arises and you don't know how to react to, you've got to roll with it. Like "Okay, this happened, but I'll get past it." There If I had challenges I would just find ways to move past it. I feel like I've grown a lot. The trip really pushed me, pushed my limits, and made me get out of my comfort zone.

Claudia realized her ability to adapt by going with the flow or quickly developing a solution.

Participants also discussed the ability and importance of understanding multiple perspectives. Bella shared why understanding multiple perspectives was important to her:

I got to appreciate someone else's culture without bias, without prejudice, because that made me realize that this world is made up of all types of people but in many ways, we're the same. You can easily go to college and be surrounded by the same type of people or the same experiences that you had in high school. I was guilty of that. I chose to surround myself around black people in high school. I chose to surround myself with black people in college. This made me realize that life is so much bigger than my experiences.

Bella noted that prior to studying abroad, her world centered around her individual experiences. For example, she would only associate with people who shared her common interests. However, after studying abroad, she realized the world was composed of several perspectives, which shaped her worldview. Similarly, Brody had a comparable thought and spoke to the importance of understanding multiple perspectives:

From an artistic standpoint, it's made me more open to taking in different influences. If I'm working on a hip-hop project, instead of me solely using other hip-hop as my influence, I'm open to listening to rock, electric, Latino, European, and traditional African music.

Brody illustrated how he was more open to various perspectives when working with music, adopting an increasingly global perspective.



Communication was also a reoccurring theme in terms of transferable skills.

Bria shared how her communication skills evolved:

I ask way more questions than my peers and not questions just to ask questions for the heck of asking questions, but I think you can't just take yes for yes. When I was in China I asked a whole lot of questions even though it was like pulling teeth to understand what was going on. I got comfortable asking a lot more questions. because I don't want to have the question again.

Bria was typically hesitant to ask questions, but while abroad, she had to ask questions to fully grasp what was taking place. This experience forced her to improve her communication skills.

Stephanie also strengthened her communication skills. She indicated that she learned the importance of non-verbal cues since she was challenged to navigate a language barrier:

I remember being in China and during my walks in the morning to get breakfast. I'd just smile at people walking by, and they'd smile back. I didn't know the language. So just smiling, being able to nod your head yes, when you're trying to communicate with people, when trying to order, and when showing gratitude towards them was the best way to communicate. Being able to give them a genuine smile and thank them for the service goes a long way.

In China, people who tip for services are considered rude. However, Stephanie felt bad and realized she could show appreciation through non-verbal cues (i.e. handshakes, eye contact, head nods, etc.). Stephanie adapted to her new environment by respecting cultural norms and identifying alternative methods to communicate, indicating the expansion of her communicative skill range. Prior to her study abroad experience, her understanding of non-verbal cues was limited. In sum, the transferable skills subtheme illustrates how participants increased their abilities to become more adaptable, more

understanding of diverse perspectives, and more effective communicators as a result of their study abroad experience.

Answers to research question #2 emerged under the career development theme. The career development theme was comprised of four subthemes: career clarification, navigating job interviews and application, making connections, and transferable skills. In the next section, I will present the emergent themes and subthemes for research question #3.

### **Data Analysis for Research Question 3**

The third research question of the study investigated study abroad program characteristics (recruitment, destination, staff, curriculum, service, etc.) that Black and Latinx alumni and undergraduate students perceived to have enriched their study abroad experience. Answers to this question emerged under two themes: who you study abroad with matters and program design.

The theme of who you study abroad with matters was the fourth theme to emerge. Participants attributed much of their experience to the group of students with whom they learned and traveled abroad. In addition, participants indicated they learned about race relations from their peers and built lifelong relationships. Under the theme of who you study abroad with matters, the subthemes of comfortability and intragroup diversity emerged.

## **Theme 4 – Who You Study Abroad with Matters**

**Subtheme 1 - Comfortability.** Many of the participants attributed much of the growth they experienced to their peers and classmates. Twelve of the participants mentioned feeling more comfortable abroad since many of the students were of color.

Aaron stated:

My favorite thing about the trip were the people I went with. To a certain extent, there has to be a comfortability about something. The fact that I was going with a lot of black people really made it feel better. My best friend took me to the airport, dropped me off. As soon as I walk in, I see like three other people who are going on the trip. Get past baggage claim, now I'm at the gate. I'm seeing about 10 other ones. From the moment, I got to the airport to the moment we got back, you really weren't alone. You were always with somebody that you had a commonality with.

Aaron had flown domestically once several years ago, however flying internationally was a new and anxiety-provoking experience. However, when he arrived at the airport, many of his concerns were alleviated once he realized his peers—all of whom he knew prior to study abroad—were people of color with limited traveling experience, similar to him.

The commonalities among Aaron and his peers made his travel experience considerably more comfortable. When asked to expand on the importance of students of color traveling abroad with other students of color, Aaron said, “Because, shit, we not comfortable in America. I couldn't imagine going to China by myself, but if I go with people who have similar experiences, then that's a different situation. It's a better situation.” He went on to discuss stereotypes and misconceptions that are often placed on Black males in the United States. Had he experienced the same type of treatment in China he would not have known how to cope, so it was important for him to travel abroad with people who he shared common experiences.

Bria concurred with Aaron. When asked why she applied to the program, she remarked:

I only went because I knew it would be a diverse group. I would have never considered studying abroad, because the stigma is its only going to be rich white kids going to Europe, and I don't want to hang out with rich white kids. We don't have anything in common. At that point in time, that was my thought process. I'm sure I could learn something, but I like to be around people who I could relate to, and there was, even though we were all minority students, or diverse students made me 100 times more comfortable knowing that the vast majority of students in the group came from similar backgrounds.

Bria's perceptions of study abroad reinforced the assumption that only white people with money studied abroad. However, after becoming aware of the participants' similar racial backgrounds, Bria's fears and concerns were lessened.

Bria and Aaron immediately noticed the diversity of their classmates, whereas others did not think about the diversity of the group until they returned to the United States. For example, Claudia remarked:

There was a lot of diversity, and my roommate actually made notice of it, when I came back, I had made these great connections with the students who went along with me, my roommate actually got to see who I made friends with, and how great of a bond we had. She went abroad on a predominantly white study abroad program, she was the minority among them. She made mention that, when she came back, she didn't have those great bonds or connections that I had with people I studied abroad with, and that she wished that could have happened for her. Having heard her experience, made me really realize, that the trip was actually really diverse. There were more minorities than anything else, so we were the majority among each other. And the fact that a lot of us hadn't studied abroad before, made it a really great experience.

Many of Claudia's connections were based on her and her classmates' shared identities as people of color. After Claudia compared her study abroad experience to her roommates' study abroad experience, Claudia began to understand how the diversity of her classmates allowed her to have a positive study abroad experience.

Participants also indicated increased confidence as a result of going abroad with students with similar backgrounds. Erick shared the following:

I didn't know everyone quite well. Cliques started to form but it was that time when I thought to myself, "These people are in the same boat as me we're all in this together so let's just try to make the best out of it" so when I got our group together, that's when we started exploring and really started trying to learn a little bit about the culture and hang out around the city a little bit more.

Once Erick realized his co-participants had similar experiences, his fears were eased, and he was able to connect with them. When asked how important diversity was to his experience, he went on to say:

It was important. People always ask me what's the best thing about studying abroad. I can't really give an answer to that, but what I can speak to is studying abroad when your 18 or 19, it can be scary but when you have a group of people who are exploring it with you and you feel connected to, it becomes less of a worry.

Like the other participants, Erick demonstrated how he felt more confident in a larger group to whom he could relate. Erick also revealed how study abroad can be scary for someone who is young, which further illuminates the importance of comfortability. Several participants discussed how they experienced being stereotyped and judged by their classmates on their predominantly white campus in the United States. However, when participants were abroad, they did not have to deal with stereotypes and misconceptions from classmates since they felt united as people of color. This unity allowed the participants to feel comfortable and embrace all the resources and opportunities available through the study abroad program. It is important to note that despite the students' relief at the perceived lack of prejudice and the "positive" reactions the Black and Latinx students received from foreign locals, I believe their treatment was still rooted in racism. Moreover, the junior and senior Black students did not perceive the

attention they received from locals as racist or prejudice. They assumed the foreign locals who touched their hair and requested pictures were just curious, since they had never seen a Black person. The Black alumni students also viewed the foreign locals who touched their hair and requested pictures as racist, but still better than their treatment in the United States. None of the Latinx students felt they were discriminated against or stereotyped, despite constantly being labeled as white.

The next section discussed the subtheme of intragroup diversity.

**Subtheme 2 – Intragroup diversity.** The significance of diversity has been noted in several court cases, the most recent and well-known case is that of Abigail Fisher, a white student who filed a lawsuit against the University of Texas at Austin (UT) after being denied admission. Fisher claimed that minority students with less impressive credentials had been admitted instead of her, since UT allows for the consideration of race in its admission policy. The supreme court affirmed that educational benefits of diversity remain a compelling interest under federal law, as diversity promotes the destruction of stereotypes, cross-racial understanding, and offers a robust exchange of ideas (Haslerig, Bernhard, Panter, Daye, & Allen, 2013) .

These educational benefits of diversity were evident throughout this study. Thus, intragroup diversity was the eleventh subtheme to emerge under the who you study abroad with matters theme. For the purpose of this study, intragroup diversity refers to the differences that exist both within and between minority groups. Ten of the participants discussed feeling comfortable abroad as a result of the student diversity; participants also indicated they learned from each other. More specifically, Latinx

participants became informed of issues that affect the Black community and vice versa.

Dexter discussed the importance of intragroup diversity:

It was really interesting to see how we had white people, how we had Hispanic, how we had Asian, of course Black people in South Africa where it's mainly White, Black and colored. Seeing how people who may be privileged back in America, view South Africa and how their understanding impacts them was hugely important to really just get a perspective into how they think, so you take that back and just say, "All right, I understand your perspective. Let's have a conversation about this if you disagree.

Dexter reflected how participants learned to have differences in opinion through discussion about their views and beliefs. Furthermore, Dexter went on to discuss changes he noticed in classmates when they returned to the United States as a result of the intragroup diversity:

I do think the students who may not have particularly mingled a lot with people who are from different backgrounds, some of the white students, when they came back it seemed like they had a completely different perspective. It was cool to see one of the girls actually work for Peace Corps. Some of the people are really huge on wanting to hang out with a more of a diverse crowd now.

Dexter's thoughts illustrate how not only Black and Latinx students benefited from study abroad, but how white students had a different perspective as a result of studying abroad as well. Dexter's thoughts also indicate how when the participants returned to the United States, many of them were open to diversifying their social groups. Claudia described how the diversity of the students changed her perspective:

I think before, I saw everybody who wasn't white as a minority, so I figured we were all going through the same thing, but then coming back from China, and viewing everybody's opinions, and how they felt about issues, made me see that, we are all minorities, but we're all going through different things, and these issues are more important than other issues.

Claudia's thoughts illustrate how study abroad challenged her to grow. Her perspective also challenged her to see differences within marginalized groups. This is important since

many ethnic groups have preconceived notions about each other, but through interactions, the participants were able to develop a better understanding of each other's experiences as minorities. Like Claudia, Leo, also attributed much of his development to the intragroup diversity he was exposed to in Cape Town:

I don't think I would've questioned my identity if everyone else was just Latino. The diversity provided new perspectives. I don't think the experience would be the same had it been a predominantly white trip like in most programs.

The intragroup diversity within the group aided Leo with the development of his ethnic identity. Similar to Leo, Erick stated:

This study abroad experience taught me how to interact with people who were so different than me. I was put in an unknown space with people who were like me, but people who were different than me, and this experience helped me realize how to listen to others and listen to their stories and how to draw commonalities and engage with people. I feel like I'm more open-minded, I feel like I understand where people are coming.

In sum, the majority of participants indicated that student diversity played a large role in their study abroad experience. Students further indicated that without that diversity, many of them might not have learned about intragroup diversity, been challenged to take advantage of new opportunities, or had the interactions that allowed them to question their identities. In the next section, I discuss the program design theme.

### **Theme 5 – Program Design**

The fifth theme that emerged was program design. Program design refers to elements that students perceived to have influenced their decision to apply to study abroad. Many of the participants indicated their decision to apply to study abroad was influenced by faculty/staff support, host destination, the experiential learning opportunities that would be offered abroad, and the study abroad preparation pre-



departure information they received. Under the fifth theme of program design, four subthemes emerged: faculty/staff support, study abroad preparation, destination, and experiential learning. In this section, I discuss each subtheme.

**Subtheme 1 – Faculty/staff support.** Fifteen participants indicated they applied to study abroad due to the interactions and conversation they had with the academic support center faculty and staff. Participants further indicated they would have never thought about applying had the lead faculty not encouraged them to apply. In addition, the participants indicated that faculty/staff supported them emotionally, academically, and professionally, before, during, and after they had studied abroad.

*The beginning.* Participants indicated they had several personal relationships with faculty and staff who asked and encouraged them to submit their applications several times. They also mentioned how faculty and staff advocated on their behalf. Naomi, for example, summarized the lead faculty member, Dr. Stokes' efforts in recruiting students:

Dr. Stokes was grass-rooting this trip, following us, pestering us like, "I know you're thinking about it but have you really thought about it?" He didn't let up at all, and I appreciate his efforts because had he let up I probably would've forgot about it and wouldn't have considered it any more.

Naomi's experience echoes many of the participants' experiences with Dr. Stokes and his support in encouraging them to apply to study abroad. Aaron, a Black male alumnus who studied abroad in Beijing stated:

In passing, I saw Dr. Stokes, he was like, "You ready for this Beijing trip?" I was like, "Aw man, I didn't get accepted." He was like, "What? Okay." He just said okay, and then two days later I got an acceptance letter. I'm like oh okay, I'm pretty sure I didn't get accepted. I never told anybody why I was on the trip, but I'm like I'm pretty sure I'm not supposed to be here.

Aaron noted how Dr. Stokes advocated for students like him to study abroad. The fact that the student was first rejected and then later accepted affirmed why faculty/staff support was a reoccurring subtheme. Aaron also went on to say,

I never had a negative feeling in Beijing, even when they told you, you can't drink the water you brush your teeth with. Never a bad feeling because at the end of the day, it was all a new feeling. These were things that I was humble enough to realize that I never would've saw if I hadn't been sold a dream by Dr. Stokes.

Aaron explained how appreciative he was of Dr. Stokes for his ongoing encouragement to travel abroad. Several other students spoke to the influence Dr. Stokes had on them.

For example, Anthony stated:

I was not going to study abroad at first, if you can believe that. I ended up running into Dr. Stokes and he asked me specifically to study abroad. Me and him had grew a relationship. I had his class, and I went to him during office hours, and I was talking to him. I guess he took a liking to me, and he was like, "Hey, man. I want you to come participate in this study-abroad experience It was because of him that I made the decision to look into it.

Like Aaron, Anthony attributed his study abroad experience to Dr. Stokes. Furthermore, he illustrates how Dr. Stokes used his social capital to encourage students to study abroad. Bria shares the pivotal role Dr. Stokes had on her experience:

I knew that it was going to be a very popular program, I knew a lot of people were interested in it. I started the application and stopped when it came to a professional or a professor's reference because I didn't talk to any of my professor's freshman or sophomore year. One day after class, Dr. Stokes came up to me. I didn't even know he knew who I was, but he came up and was like, "Why don't you finish your application?" I was just like, "I don't know any professors who will write me a reference." He was just like, "I'm a professor." It seemed like he really cared about the program. I think that's what actually got me to fill out my application.

If Dr. Stokes had not been genuinely concerned for students, Bria would not have applied. Dr. Stokes' key involvement with the recruitment process illustrates how

students can feel discouraged to study abroad if they encounter barriers with faculty and staff support.

Leo discussed the influence Dr. Stokes had on his decision to apply to study abroad. The academic support center engages in annual recruitment trips to various high schools throughout the state of Texas. Leo met Dr. Stokes on a recruitment trip, and due to Dr. Stokes' charisma, he felt compelled to enroll in two of Dr. Stokes' courses. Leo remarked:

I kept talking to him about study abroad. I wanted to be part of his program and to be mentored by him. I believed in what he said, when he said this would be a transformative experience and it would help me down the line. I bought into his vision. I applied, because of him.

Leo demonstrated how he viewed Dr. Stokes and how he bought into his vision. He also mentioned he nearly decided to withdraw from the study abroad program due to family financial obligations. When Leo was asked why he changed his mind and decided to go abroad, he said:

I was in his second office, but I was with my mentor because my mentor used Dr. Stokes office to hold office hours. Dr. Stokes just happened to come by randomly. He didn't know we were there. He asked, "Are you still not going?" I said no. He gave me a talk. I told him my summer plans. He said anyone can do that. That's not unique. That's not beneficial to your growth. He said, "You'll get more out of this program than if you just go home and do community college." That's the message he still preaches today. I remember feeling really bad about myself. I remember going to my dorm and opening my laptop and paying that \$500 and I knew I was going to go from then.

Dr. Stokes believed in the value of study abroad and was adamant about encouraging students to see that value as well. His clear influence through the power of relationship building with students highlights how many students of color may not choose to study abroad if they are not encouraged to do so and if the value of the experience is not clear.

Participants also discussed how other staff members supported and encouraged them to study abroad as well. Alexandria mentioned:

My grandma passed away in October. I wasn't going to submit the study abroad application because she died the week before the November 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. When that happened, I ran into my advisor downstairs and she had just saw me and asked, "Are you okay?" I wasn't crying or anything but I had this really sad face. She was like, "You still have to do it. Just think about all the exciting things that you can do." After that I was like I have to do it." You all weren't telling me, "Suck it up." It was more of like, "It's okay to be sad right now, but look at everything else that can happen for you in the foreseeable future." I felt like y'all were depending on me to keep pushing and to keep doing more.

Staff were supportive while being sensitive to the loss of the student's family member.

The staff further encouraged the student to see she was capable of moving forward, while acknowledging and grieving the loss of her grandma. As result, Alexandria submitted her application. Several participants, such as Gabriela, Dexter, and Josh shared experiences of how support staff assisted them and encouraged them to apply to study abroad.

*Support while abroad.* Participants also indicated the support staff were patient and encouraged the students to venture out and explore, as well as supported the students through the class. For example, Dexter remarked:

I think the staff helped us a lot with everything. It was really cool just to relate to the TA's [teacher's assistant]. I think being able to relate gives you the ability to let the TA's know what's going on, but at the same time have that mutual respect like, "Hey, you know, we cool but I'm still the TA I'm going to grade this work."

The TA's established boundaries that allowed the participants to feel safe discussing sensitive personal issues. Stephanie recalled:

There was people watching over me at all times, which comforted my mom. Also, even though we went off and we did our own thing too, we knew you TA's were watching out for us.

The large number of staff allowed her to venture out while reassuring Stephanie that the TA/s were available as a resource; the large number of staff had the added benefit of parents feeling more comfortable about their child traveling around the world.

Erick also discussed how the staff supported him and aided with his adjustment to China. He indicated that upon his arrival in Beijing. He along with another student, located a taxi to travel to their place of residence. The cab driver attempted to take advantage of the language barrier by overcharging Erick and the other student for a cab ride to their residence. When Erick arrived, the cab driver attempted to charge them twice the amount. However, a staff member advocated on their behalf and cleared up the misunderstanding. Erick discussed that experience:

Jessica and I ended up going to the hotel. The cab driver called the staff member, she comes out and he starts saying in mandarin that we owe him double the amount of money. The staff member begins arguing with him and she's like, "He said that you agreed to pay it and also you put the luggage on his back seat which is against the law." I said, "How am I going to agree to something if I don't even know the language?" It was a crazy argument, but she negotiated the price down.

Erick's story demonstrated how the staff member advocated on his behalf. Erick's example also illustrates how some students who have never traveled further than their home state may experience culture shock.

*After.* Participants also discussed how they continued to find support in the relationships they developed with the faculty and staff abroad after they returned to the United States. For example, Stephanie considered transferring to a college in her hometown to be closer to home for financial reasons:

The relationships that I made there were so incredible, so impactful. Dr. Stokes and Dr. Salinas had faith in me, and wanted to bring me back to UT. That was so powerful. They were willing to offer me a job and help me find scholarships.

That put a lot of value in myself. I didn't really have before. I did not have any self-value. And after that, I was like, "Wow. I'm worth it."

Stephanie demonstrated how the relationships built abroad transferred back to the United States. The faculty demonstrated their desire to help Stephanie by identifying funding and helping her to stay enrolled at SU. In addition to the quality relationships she maintained, Stephanie's self-perception had also improved. Prior to study abroad, Stephanie did not understand her value, but the investment from the faculty challenged Stephanie to understand her worth, as well as understand why the faculty were so invested in her academic success.

Participants such as Leo and Alexandria also discussed how staff continued to support them with graduate school applications, job applications, and mentorship well after the study abroad experience. This subtheme illustrates how participants benefited from the support of the faculty and staff from the start of their study abroad program to the end and after.

**Subtheme 2 - Study abroad preparation.** Study abroad preparation refers to the one credit hour course participants were required to enroll in to study abroad in either Beijing, China or Cape Town, South Africa. However, both courses were tailored to their specific host country. The class discussed passport, flight, and housing logistics. Participants also were familiarized with cultural norms, basic language phrases, and an overview of the country's history. The subtheme also refers to study abroad funding and participants' ability to address family concerns. Twelve participants indicated having benefited from the course and support from the staff in preparing to study abroad. Brody said:

The class prepared us for basic survival skills with some of the language tutoring. I think that also alleviated some of the anxiety. It made us more familiar with the area, sites, and prepared us in regards to knowing what we were going to be doing at the migrant School. The class allowed for me to place myself there.

Brody demonstrated how the course alleviated his anxiety about going overseas and provided him enough basic knowledge to navigate China. Like Brody, Stephanie remarked, “We learned about that beforehand, so we were kind of mentally prepared for it. We knew we had to be cautious of what we were doing and the signs that we were giving off.” Stephanie relayed how the class prepared her by providing knowledge of cultural norms and highlighting potential dangers in studying abroad. Dexter talked about the course as well:

I still have that book that Dr. Stokes had us read about Nelson Mandela's life. A lot of the things that we read in the book, made more sense once we got there. I think that was definitely a good transition into at least learning a little bit about South African history, especially with apartheid, and Robben Island. Luckily, we also had a staffer, who had been to South Africa. He provided a lot of his perspective, which actually served as a great foundation for information and resources to check out.

Dexter demonstrated how the course aided him in his transition to South Africa, since they read books and sought out information that highlighted South Africa. The lead faculty member was intentional in selecting staff members as indicated in the previous section. One staff member had been selected for his prior knowledge and experience traveling to South Africa. For this reason, when they were abroad, staff and students heavily relied on the staff member's experience in navigating Cape Town. Similar to Dexter's experience, Leo, when asked about the course remarked:

The TAs gave us a calendar and on each day, we were going to do something or what was recommended. From that, I was like okay, everything is taken care of. I thought that was helpful. I got to meet some of my classmates. I think having the

class helped because they explained what we were going to do. It just helped build the excitement for me because it was my first time traveling.

Leo described how faculty provided details and documents to help the participants transition to their study abroad host country. He also noted how participants had the opportunity to connect with peers. This was important since many of the students, indicated that their study abroad experience was their first time flying out of the country. Thus, the class served as a space for students to ask questions and staff to disseminate logistical information.

**Reduction in family anxiety.** The course also had a trickle-down effect as several participants discussed how both their individual and family member concerns were addressed through the course. Furthermore, participants also mentioned they forwarded on any information they received in the course to their family. The parents of the participants also felt reassured by the number of support staff who would be available to support students in the host country. For example, Aaron discussed his mother's anxiety:

Her anxiousness really died down when I showed her my plane ticket and itinerary. I also told her that everything's organized, which put her mind at ease.

Aaron described how parent anxiety was reduced as the participants gathered information and shared that information with family members. The class played a pivotal role in aiding the students in organizing logistics. Additionally, Dr. Stokes shared his personal cell phone number with participants, and encouraged the participants' parents to call him with questions or concerns. Bria discussed how the course and Dr. Stokes alleviated many of her concerns:



The weekly class we took definitely helped relieve some of my concerns because I knew a lot of the names of the people who were going to China. We did a lot of group exercises, we talked about a lot, we addressed all of our concerns. I had concerns, but I also knew that I'd be able to figure it out because I typically can figure it out. My family had all these questions all the time and the fact that Dr. Stokes announced almost every day in class like, "If your parents are confused or your parents are concerned about what's going on, I will write them a note. Give me their number. I'll talk to them. You don't have to talk to them, I can talk to them." Every time I'd go home and my mom or my grandma would ask a question and I'd be like, "Look, I don't know the answer to that, but do you want to talk to Dr. Stokes? He said he would call you and he'd explain everything to you." Then they'd simmer down. I think that really eased a lot of their concerns, as well.

The course allowed Bria to build relationships and connect with her classmates, which alleviated some stress. Dr. Stokes' efforts to speak to parents eased her parents' concerns. Many of the participants described how their parents were concerned for their safety and felt more comfortable communicating with an older adult. Dr. Stokes identified as a Black male as well, thus he could also relate to many of the parents, as he understood the issues that affect college students of color.

**Funding the study abroad experience.** Surprisingly, participants did not list finances as a huge concern or deterrent to studying abroad. Literature indicates that participants of color are deterred to study abroad by the costs (Chieffo, 2000; Cloughly, 1999). When participants were asked how they funded their study abroad experience, answers ranged from scholarships, plate sales, donations from loved ones, side jobs, and funds from parents. Furthermore, participant attitudes toward study abroad reflected a persevering mentality. They recognized the value of a study abroad experience, and were determined not to let money be a barrier. For example, when Aaron was asked how he funded his study abroad experience, he responded:

I figured it out. When you talk about hustling, that was a semester for hustling. All my bills were paid, I bought my ticket with my refund, and then that was it.

Refund gone. Now it's like everything else you just got to get out there and find it. I worked all through college. I was probably working on campus before China.

Bella indicated the following when asked if she would change anything about her experience:

Honestly, I had to come up with money aside from the Coca-Cola scholarships, I did have to fund the trip on my own. I would have liked to go for free. But we tend to not be invested in things we haven't invested in. Paying for it made it more of like a "You better go, and you better appreciate the hell out of this because you spent all this money on this." If it was free, I don't know.

Thus, Bella appreciated her experience more because she invested in the experience and had to secure funds. Had Bella received full funding to study abroad, her experience might have been different.

Bria also reflected a similar attitude in regard to having to secure funds to study abroad. Bria stated:

I think that I wasn't going to be able to put my best foot forward if I had to do scholarship essays. Knowing that you can also take out loans for this definitely eased my mind. I knew that I preferred the money to be free money or scholarship money or something along those lines, I knew the benefit of what I'd learn or just the experience itself definitely outweighed whatever I'd have to pay back in the future.

Bria viewed the trip as an investment, therefore she chose to take out loans instead of identifying free money.

Unlike participants' Aaron, Bella, and Bria, other participants either settled on loans, worked, or just figured it out. Dexter used a different approach and described his efforts in identifying funds for Cape Town:

I went to the very first info session and networked with the people who were over it. I ended up getting into the program and then also ended up getting a \$4,500 scholarship. I never worked for something that hard in a while, so when I reflect back on it I actually took the time out to do all of this stuff just to kind of get to

that end goal, which I ended up getting. Looking back that propelled me to where I am now.

Dexter realized he wanted to travel abroad and did not let any barriers deter him from participating.

Naomi, like Dexter, also committed much effort towards funding her study abroad experience:

I was working three jobs. Time management was key and I didn't sleep I also started a Go Fund Me page and my mom and my dad share my page to their friends and colleagues to see if I could raise money that way. That was really helpful. I raised six hundred bucks for it, which I used for my deposit.

Naomi worked three jobs as well as learned to put her pride aside and ask for help. As a result, she was able to raise six hundred dollars. When asked how this made her feel, she went on to say:

I was really embarrassed to do the Go Fund Me page at first. I guess you can call it a pride thing. I never really had to ask for anything outside of my family. But if you really want this, you're going to have to ask for help. That was definitely a learning experience for me and I did grow up. Because I did have to put my pride aside.

Naomi's attitude changed as she became more open to receiving help.

Participants also discussed creative methods their parents and friends used to help secure funds to study abroad. Josh described how his family and community assisted him:

They helped set up a plate sale for me so I could get money to go. They were my biggest supporters in all of that. A plate sale, is when you have a barbecue. We'll barbeque a bunch of meat, chicken, and stuff, cook some beans and rice. Then we'll put it in a styrofoam container and sell them for five, six bucks a piece. People in our neighborhood don't generally go to college or have any kind of experiences like this, so they started spreading the word that I was going to China and all of a sudden everybody showed up and wanted just to hear why, and see how they could help.

Like several other participants, Josh showed how he and his family were creative in raising funds to study abroad.

The findings in this subtheme are significant, as much of the literature indicates students of color do not study abroad as result of family concerns and finances. However, many of those concerns were reduced when there was open communication between, parents, students, staff, and faculty.

**Subtheme 3 – Destination matters.** The subtheme of destination matters refers to the importance of the host country. Twelve participants indicated the locations, Beijing and Cape Town, influenced their decision to study abroad.

Erick remarked the following when asked why he selected China:

I wanted to go somewhere where the culture was different, the food was different, and I would be put in circumstances and situations that made me uncomfortable. I realized after my first year at SU what made me uncomfortable helped me grow and helped me become more open minded, helped me take more risks personally professionally. China was both a personal and professional move at the same time.

Erick described his thought process in selecting China. He selected the Beijing program since the language barrier would expose him to difficult situations and China's economic growth provided him an opportunity to grow professionally.

Claudia also provided similar reasoning for selecting Beijing as her study abroad destination. Claudia stated:

I probably could've been better off in Italy than in China. At the same time, I know they reiterated this a lot. Why would you want to go to Europe when you can go to some place that a lot of people don't go to? I was like "That is a really good point." I can go to Italy when I'm rich and famous. This is China. Who knows when I can go or when I'm going to go back? This is the opportunity I need.

Claudia desired a unique experience, and since Europe was a popular tourist destination, she felt she would have more opportunities to travel to Europe versus China in the future, which solidified her decision to study in Beijing.

Josh said he chose China for the “shock value” to inspire his family:

I wanted to do something that I knew would throw them off. I have three younger brothers and a younger half-sister. I'm also the oldest of all of my grandmother's grandchildren. Up until me nobody had gone to college in my entire blood line. I thought well I've already set the standard here why stop now? I wanted to show everybody that stuff like this is possible. That's why I wanted to pick something that could throw them off because they probably would have never expected anything like that was possible for me for any of us.

Josh was thinking of the future of his siblings and his family. As a result, he chose the Beijing program as it would demonstrate to his family that any goal or objective is possible. He wanted to lead by example by inspiring his family to follow his example.

Participants also considered how interactions with people from various backgrounds could prepare them for future opportunities. Alexandria, for example, aspired to be a social worker. She wanted to gain experience interacting with people from different backgrounds, so she applied to the South Africa program. When asked about why she chose South Africa, Alexandria stated:

I feel like I have nothing to relate to people who are in Africa. I never grew up thinking that. I always thought of it as like it's just so foreign to me, what am I going to be doing in Africa? That's why it never occurred to me, but then at that point I was trying to figure out different people and how their background shaped themselves. I was just like, "You have to put yourself in an uncomfortable situation to figure out if this is what you want to do." If you want to help people in life you need to learn how to speak to different people with different backgrounds.

The subtheme of destination matters illustrates how participants considered the destination when applying to study abroad and how participants processed and evaluated how the destination would challenge them to grow personally and professionally.

**Subtheme 4 – Experiential Learning.** The experiential learning subtheme refers to how participants described aspects of their internship and volunteer experiences to have influenced their understanding of social issues, themselves, and their future aspirations. Thirteen participants described how the interactions with specific people and/or tasks allowed them to grow personally and professionally. For example, Aaron volunteered at the migrant school and described what he learned from some of the children:

I noticed it with the kids. Boys hung out with boys. Girls hung out with girls. there was next to no interaction between the two groups. It wasn't forced on them. It was just culturally how they fell. Dudes are kind of touchy feely, too. They like to hug and that kind of shit, which is fine. We have a little hyper masculinity in America. I get that. But they did that a lot. I wrote it off because they're kids. But then we went to the club. I was like, damn. The grown men do the same thing. They hugged just as much as the fifth graders at the migrant school did. Culturally, it's kind of weird but it made me appreciate that friendship.

Aaron grew to understand friendship through watching the children interact. His frame of reference shifted as a result of comparing the interactions of men and women in China to those in the United States. Aaron was asked to describe why the interactions between men and women resonated with him:

As a Black man, we fight like hell to prevent emotional growth. The shit sucks. Just being out there, the rules and the laws to your manhood, it doesn't matter. You can take it too serious and let it hold you down for umpteen years or you can actually just chill and begin to grow, begin to think differently with the way you see other men, with the way you see friendships, for the way you love, the way you learn new things. It's not intangible, but it's definitely a good thing that I took from the trip.

Through observing children, Aaron questioned the idea of Black male masculinity and concluded that socially constructed rules that dictate how a Black man should act did not

apply in China. Aaron was the only participant to express this point of view; however, the concept of Black masculinity deserves further examination in future studies.

Bella described her experience volunteering at the migrant school:

That experience was awesome, because we went in there thinking we were going to teach the children English, we were going to teach them all about America. They knew English, we didn't have to teach them a thing. They knew way more English than we knew Mandarin, it was almost embarrassing. I thought we were teaching them more than we actually were. Instead, they were teaching me about their culture.

Bella assumed the migrant students would need a great deal of tutoring. However, once she realized the migrant students knew more than she thought, her assumption changed. As a result, Bella recognized and began to learn from the migrant school students, which led to her having a positive experience at the school.

Participants also described how these experiences helped them recognize institutional systematic inadequacies. Bria shared her thoughts:

I wasn't convinced anyone had a worse education system than the things that are being taught in America, but once I was working at the migrant school I realized there's so many things to consider when evaluating education. That's one of the things I think about now, just because I ultimately want to run and operate my own charter school. I also realized that what we have going on in the US, although it's not great, is a whole hell of a lot better than some of the things that they were facing in China.

Bria described how comparing the condition of the China's educational system to that of the United States influenced her perspective on education and educational disparities, thus contributing a great deal of knowledge to her career aspirations.

Jake discussed how his internship experience contributed to his personal and professional growth as well:

I think what I got the most out of study abroad was my internship program. I worked in one of the townships with a tour company. Basically, I helped him

reorganize his operations. He was very disorganized. He was overpaying his staff and had negative profit margins, so being able to help teach him business strategies, such as an income statement or how to basically save your money was actually fulfilling because he didn't know how to save. It was cool to be able to teach him that and see how much I actually learned from my colleagues was pretty cool.

Jake demonstrated how he was able to implement and apply business principles to organizations, highlighting how his study abroad experience shaped him professionally.

In the previous section, I presented the findings related to each research question. In the next section, I provide an overall summary of the chapter.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

Overall, this study provided insight into the study abroad experiences of fifteen Black and Latinx students who participated in a short-term study abroad program. The study's findings were presented via five large themes: (1) individual awareness, (2) my friends, family, and community, (3) career development, (4) who you study abroad with matters, (5) program design. Fifteen subthemes emerged from the larger themes: (1) Awakening of American identity, (2) ethnic identity empowerment, (3) self-assurance, (4) family change of perspective, (5) social responsibility, (6) career clarification, (7) career interviews and application navigation, (8) making connections, (9) transferable skills, (10) comfortability, (11) intragroup diversity, (12) faculty/staff support, (13) study abroad preparation, (14) destination matters, and (15) experiential learning.

In chapter five, I present results related to the research questions, a summary of the overall study, conclusions drawn from the research findings, a discussion of the research findings, recommendations, and future research.



## **Chapter Five – Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

Despite efforts to increase study abroad participation, study abroad programs still remain disproportionality white (NCES, 2016). Scholars have further agreed that there is much to discover about the relationship of study abroad and students of color. Thus, it was important to examine the study abroad experiences of Black and Latinx students. In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the research study by directly connecting the themes back to my conceptual framework and to the extant literature. I conclude with recommendations for practice, areas for future research and my conclusion.

### **Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework**

After completing this study and determining the findings, I revisited the transformative learning framework to determine if it explained the findings of the study. To review, transformative learning refers to learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). An individual can experience a transformation in learning experience through one of four ways: (1) by elaborating existing meanings schemes, (2) learning new meaning schemes, (3) transforming meaning schemes, and (4) transforming perspectives. A transformative learning experience is activated by a perspective transformation or a disorienting dilemma. In the case of this research study, the study abroad experience represented the catalyst that activated the disorientating dilemma, which resulted in the participants transforming their frames of reference. In the following section, I outline how the various subthemes illustrated each of these transformations.

### **Elaborating existing meaning schemes**

The subthemes of family change of perspective and faculty/staff support were the result of participants' abilities to elaborate on their current frames of reference, essentially changing their point of view. In regard to family growth, many of the participants discussed how they were apprehensive to apply or inform their parents of their decisions to study abroad due to fear of no family support. However, once participants returned to the United States, their families viewed them as more mature and better trusted their children's judgement. As a result, participants' parents were more receptive to their children traveling and relocating out of state, illustrating the change in the parents' point of view. All of the participants were encouraged to apply or committed to study abroad as a result of faculty and staff following up with students about their study abroad application and explaining the benefits of study abroad. Once participants understood how a study abroad program could benefit them professionally, their points of view changed and they applied to the program.

### **Learning new meaning schemes**

The subtheme of comfortability can be attributed to the second process of learning, learning new meaning schemes, which states that an individual seeks out evidence to support their own initial bias on their point of view. Several participants described how they experienced new opportunities and connected with their classmates as a result of their similar backgrounds. The fact that the participants shared many similarities and felt more comfortable illustrates their appreciation for being around people who share a similar point of view. The subtheme of intragroup diversity can also be attributed to the participants' ability develop new points of view. This subtheme

illustrates how intragroup diversity allowed the participants to develop new points of view through understanding the experience of other students that did not share the same background.

### **Transforming meaning schemes**

The following subthemes - awakening of American identity, ethnic identity empowerment, self-assurance, and social responsibility - can be attributed to the third way individuals learn, which is the process of transforming meaning schemes, or changing one's previously held view points.

For example, the participants were all aware of their American identity and ethnic identity; however, in conversations with foreigners, they would only identify or mention their ethnic identity versus their national identity. However, after immersing themselves in foreign culture, the participants were challenged to confront their American identities, as many foreigners viewed them as American first. The participants were also empowered to learn more of or embrace their ethnic identity based on interactions with their peers, class discussions, and immersing themselves into the foreign culture. Participants became more confident in their personal decisions due to taking advantage of new opportunities. Lastly, participants developed a strong desire to help others and encourage others to study abroad.

These four findings illustrate how the participants' previously held viewpoints were transformed as a result of their study abroad experience. For example, interactions with foreigners and classmates challenged the participants to construct new meaning schemes associated with their American identity, ethnic identity, individual confidence, and social responsibility. As a result, participants viewed themselves differently.

## **Transforming Perspectives**

The subthemes of career clarification, career interview and application navigation, making connections, and transferable skills relate to the fourth way in which individuals learn. The fourth process of transforming meaning structures is the process of transforming habits of the mind. The participants indicated how they used their study abroad experience to navigate the work force, stand out among other applicants, and build rapport with fellow coworkers. Many of them also indicated that barriers such as grade point average challenged them to rethink how they navigated such barriers. As a result of understanding the value of their study abroad experience, the participants used their study abroad experience to leverage professional opportunities, illustrating how participants changed and developed new habits of the mind to navigate barriers or to distinguish themselves.

## **Findings Related to The Literature**

Several findings related to this study were confirmed by extant literature. Studies (Anderson, 2005; Black & Duhon, 2006; Gmelch, 1997; Gonyea, 2008) indicate students who study abroad have significantly higher levels of tolerance, self-confidence, sense of independence, and openness upon returning. Many of the Black and Latinx students within this study experienced several of these outcomes. For example, participants discussed their resulting strong commitment to and desire to give back to their communities.

Study abroad research also shows that students of color who participate in study abroad programs may re-conceptualize their national and racial identities (Jackson, 2006;

Lu et al 2015). This finding was echoed in the current study. Several participants highlighted the interactions with foreign locals that challenged them to reevaluate how they ethnically and nationally identified. Research further emphasizes that many students of color participate in study abroad as a result of interactions with faculty and their peers (Holmes, 2008; Lu et al 2015).

Scholars have also explored the relationship between study abroad and career development. Carlson, Burn, Useem, and Yachimowicz (1990) found that study abroad programs empowered students to consider overseas employment. In addition, Hadis (2005) found that study abroad experiences influenced participants' short-term and long-term career goals. Both of these conclusions were consistent with the findings in the study.

### **Contributions to the Literature**

This study contributed new knowledge to the extant literature on study abroad through five themes: family change of perspective, the value of study abroad, career interview and application navigation, cohort participant selection, and staff selection. In the following section, I discuss each of these contributions.

#### **Family Change of Perspective**

The results from this study indicated that participants' family members were affected by the participants' study abroad experiences. Several participants indicated that their parents and family members had several concerns in regard to safety, funding, and communication. As a result, parents of participants were reluctant to let them travel abroad. However, after participants traveled abroad and returned, the parents of participants were more open to their child taking advantage of new opportunities. I

suggest that this occurred as a result of the parents growing comfortable with their children's independence attributable, in part, to having to adjust to limited communication with their child while abroad. The parents adapted to having less communication with their children than they were previously accustomed to; in this way, the concern for their children lessened, allowing the parent(s) to release some parental control and allowing students to take advantage of new opportunities.

### **The Value of Study Abroad**

Despite study abroad literature showing that many students of color often choose not to study abroad due to finances, the findings from this study indicate that participants did not view funding as a concern when they applied to study abroad. Many of them went on to further state that they understood the value of the study abroad experience and were determined to figure out a way to identify and receive funding. This leads me to believe that students of color are equipped to find resources to study abroad. However, participants may not immediately understand the value of study abroad. Many of the participants interviewed were first-generation and indicated how their priority was to graduate and secure a job. It was only when faculty and staff took time to explain how their study abroad experience could contribute to their ability in securing job prospects that participants became more receptive to study abroad opportunities. Thus, this subtheme illustrates that participants do not immediately understand the value of a study abroad experience.

## **Career Interview Application Navigation**

Participants indicated that in the majority of their job interviews post-study abroad, the interviewer spent the majority of time asking about their study abroad experiences. In addition, participants also indicated that their study abroad experience helped them to navigate barriers such as low GPAs. I suggest this was a reoccurring subtheme for three reasons. First, people attempt to identify commonalities to create small talk and build rapport. The interviewer could have used this strategy to connect with the participants. Second, the interviewer could have been trying to glean information about transferable skills gained through international travel. Third, participants used discussions of study abroad to highlight their strengths. I also believe this occurred because study abroad can be used to build rapport and many people can relate to travel.

## **Cohort Participant Selection**

All of the participants mentioned that the other students with whom they studied abroad became their longtime friends. The participants further discussed how their classmates challenged them to grow in regard to social awareness issues, supported them through new opportunities, and felt more confident in a foreign context since the participants shared similar background characteristics.

## **Staff Selection**

Many of the participants described how staff members supported them emotionally, academically, and professionally while abroad. Furthermore, participants also stressed how the faculty and staff support helped alleviate family fears and concerns, challenged them to venture out and explore their study abroad host cities, as well as provided mentorship to the participants when they returned to the United States. The staff

were involved in the selection process from the moment the application became available to study abroad to when participants returned to the United States.

### **Significance**

The findings for this study enhanced the current literature by supporting previous findings, introducing program characteristics that may influence a student's decision to study abroad, highlighting the importance of intragroup diversity, and illustrating how Black and Latinx participants leverage their study abroad experiences for professional and academic opportunities. The research study also identified how families are affected by study abroad experience, as well as highlighted program characteristics participants found to have inspired and contributed to their overall study abroad experience. The study also enhanced literature by focusing on the experiences of Black and Latinx students and providing recommendations that support Black and Latinx study abroad recruitment. In the next section, I discuss the recommendations for practice generated by this research.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

As this study demonstrated, it is possible for institutions to recruit students from diverse backgrounds. Because the scope of this study focused on Black and Latinx students, the recommendations for practice will center on how to increase Black and Latinx student participation in study abroad programs. After careful analysis and review of the interviews of the fifteen participants in the study and reviewing study abroad literature, I present the following recommendations for practice:

1. The themes and subthemes illustrated within this study indicate that students' decisions to study abroad were largely due to positive relationships they had with



the faculty and staff. This seems to suggest that participants were more likely to invest in opportunities when individuals they held in high regard believed in the said opportunity and believed in them as students. For this reason, study abroad office staff should collaborate with professionals on campus who have rapport with students of color. Ideally, partnerships should reflect a community based approach to supporting students in study abroad. For example, a potential partnership could include staff from a study abroad program, individuals from an advocacy office who have strong rapport with students of color, and the counseling center. The purpose of the partnerships could be to coach a potential Black or Latinx on how to inform their parents of their study abroad endeavors.

2. Study abroad marketing materials should also reference career outcomes. Students of color need to understand how employers value and perceive study abroad. Many campus professionals assume finances deter students of color from participating in study abroad. However, findings from this study illustrate that Black and Latinx students will invest in study abroad programs when the value of the experience is clear. Once participants understood the value of a study abroad program, they were adamant about securing funding because the study abroad experience could benefit them academically and professionally.
3. Study abroad programs should recruit and support Black and Latinx students from the moment they are accepted into the program until they return to the United States and after. Findings illustrate that participants felt encouraged to apply and travel abroad since Dr. Stokes regularly followed up with students about their application, deposit, parent concerns, and their overall decision to study abroad.

4. Study abroad programs should offer an optional pre-departure orientation via in person or streaming service to connect parents with faculty and staff. Many of the participants mentioned their parents could not understand or relate to international travel. Thus, an opportunity for parents to interact with faculty and staff may alleviate parental concerns. This opportunity could also allow parents to become more informed about study abroad.
5. Study abroad programs should market to the parents of potential participants. The materials should further illustrate how study abroad opportunities contribute to a student's long-term career trajectory. The advertisements should reflect material that is easily understood by multiple audiences (parents, faculty, staff, students, etc.) and be available in English and Spanish.
6. Study abroad offices should offer career development workshops and mixers highlighting how former participants have leveraged their study abroad experiences personally, professionally, and academically. Participants should be of diverse ethnic backgrounds, ages, careers, and work experience.

### **Future Research**

This qualitative study enhances the body of literature regarding the experiences of Black and Latinx students in study abroad. Further explorations of these populations are needed to continue to understand their experiences in study abroad. I offer the following recommendations for further research on this topic:

1. The participants in this study were, at most, three years removed from their undergraduate experience and four years removed from their study abroad experience. Future studies should examine Black and Latinx students several

- years removed from college to assess how their study abroad experiences continue to affect them personally and professionally.
2. Family change of perspective emerged as a subtheme for this study. Future studies should explore how parents and family members are affected by their students' study abroad experiences. Future studies should examine if family members continued to grow from the study abroad experiences as the participants did, or if family members' growth was a one-time phenomenon.
  3. Studies that examine the relationship between Black male masculinity, emotionality, and study abroad experiences should be conducted. Participants described instances of strangers showing them affection throughout the study abroad experience which, in turn, made them more comfortable in expressing their own emotions. Some participants relayed that Black males struggle to show emotion because doing so is sometimes viewed as a sign of weakness.
  4. Future studies should examine the relationship between philanthropy and Black and Latinx study abroad participants. Study abroad programs are expensive, thus identifying strategies that empower people to give back could to study abroad could be beneficial.
  5. Overall, additional studies should be conducted to reflect the experience of Black and Latinx students in study abroad. Qualitative studies are essential in capturing the nuances of such experiences; however, quantitative studies are also needed, as there is still much to discover about study abroad.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the study abroad experiences of Black and Latinx students. More specifically, the study explored how participants perceived themselves to have benefited personally, social, and professionally, from their study abroad experiences. The findings suggest that participants developed a better understanding of themselves and leveraged their study abroad experiences professionally and academically. The study also demonstrated that participants' family members were affected by their child's study abroad experience. Participants indicated their parents were more comfortable allowing them to pursue international experiences and/or relocating to a different state. In addition, findings also demonstrated that program design greatly influenced the participants' overall study abroad experience. Participants stressed that faculty, staff, and co-participants in the study abroad program facilitated their ability to feel comfortable in a foreign setting and challenged them to take advantage of new opportunities.

In addition to the study's findings, I uncovered several factors that were key to empowering Black and Latinx students to study abroad. First, the partnership between SU's International Office and the Academic Community Center housed within the Office of Diversity Initiatives would not have been possible without SU's president's commitment to diversity. The creation of the Office of Diversity Initiatives also illustrates how SU showed their commitment to diversity through resources and senior level political support. Without resources and political clout from senior leadership, the study abroad programs would not have been implemented.

Second, relationships were essential to recruiting Black and Latinx students. The faculty and staff referred to throughout this study continued to be invested in the students

from the moment the study abroad program application opened through the completion of this research study. This is significant as it speaks to the importance of warm demanders. The term “warm demanders” was created to identify teachers who were successful with students of color while creating a structured and disciplined classroom (Ware, 2006). In essence, warm demanders are disciplinarians, caregivers, and are culturally sensitive (Ware, 2006). Dr. Stokes was the epitome of a warm demander as he constantly challenged students to see his vision and invest in study abroad by being direct and stern with students. Warm demanders are essential to empowering Black and Latinx students to study abroad.

Third, articulating the value of study abroad is key to encouraging Black and Latinx students to study abroad. All of the participants were initially skeptical about applying to a study abroad program. However, after conversations with warm demanders who articulated the personal and professional benefits of study abroad, the Black and Latinx students applied with no reservations. Even in my own undergraduate experience, I chose not study abroad because I did not understand how the experience could benefit me. The value of international education did not become clear until I became a doctoral student and Dr. Stokes encouraged me to research this phenomenon in hope of identifying strategies to empower underrepresented students to study abroad.

As a result, I have shared my international experiences with students, friends, and family to encourage and influencing them to travel. For example, as I was conducting data analysis for this study, I received a call from my sister informing me she had applied for her passport. My sister further stated that she was encouraged to apply because of the way my brother and I talked about our international travel experiences. In that moment, I

immediately realized that value of study abroad had become clear to her because she trusted mine and our brother's view on study abroad, which is consistent with this study's findings.

Lastly, it is imperative to note that the study abroad programs offered at SU would not have been possible without the University's commitment to diversity and the allocation of resources to study abroad programs. Furthermore, the study abroad programs would not have been possible without Dr. Stokes, as his social capital and ability to connect with students drove recruitment.

## **Appendix A: Email to Recruit Student Participants**

Dear (Student's Name),

I hope you are doing well. My name is Dal Dean, and I am a graduate research assistant at Southwest University. I am currently working on a research project examining the experiences of current and alumni students who have studied abroad here at the university.

Deciding to participate in this study is completely voluntary, and you may elect to discontinue your involvement at any time without any negative consequences.

In order to participate in my study, you must answer “yes” to the following questions:

- (1) identify as Black or Latinx
- (2) have graduated from college, or be 18 – 22 and currently enrolled, and
- (3) have participated in a maymester or short-term study abroad trip sponsored by Southwest University where you were out of the USA for a minimum of 4 to 6 weeks.

If you agree to participate in my study, follow the link where you will be asked to complete a 15 -minute survey. Please let me know if you have any questions. I am available via email at xxxxx@austin.utexas.edu, or by phone, xxx.xxx.xxxx. Thank you for your cooperation.

Best,

Dallawrence Dean  
Graduate Research Assistant  
Southwest Academic Community Center  
Southwest University

## Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. List the country your study abroad experience was based out of: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What additional countries did you visit during your study abroad experience?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How long was the program?
  - ☐ 1-2 weeks
  - ☐ 2-4 weeks
  - ☐ 5-6 weeks
  - ☐ 7-8 weeks
  - ☐ 9-12 weeks
  - ☐ 14-16 weeks
  - ☐ 17-20 weeks
  - ☐ 21- 24 weeks
  - ☐ 25-36 weeks
  - ☐ 37+ weeks

**Try to answer each of the following statements as mostly TRUE or mostly FALSE.  
Circle the answer that best represents your present opinion.**

4. After I studied abroad:

I was more open to exploring different career options	T	F
It was easier to identify my strengths and weaknesses	T	F
5. I believe my study abroad experience

Made me more appealing to employers	T	F
Helped me clarify my career goals	T	F
6. I gained the following skills through study abroad (fill in the blank)
7. The benefits of study abroad are (fill in the blank and list all that apply)
8. My study abroad experience contributed to my career trajectory?

	T	F
--	---	---
9. My study abroad experience gave me skills that help me perform my job?

	T	F
--	---	---
10. I still reflect on

The skills I gained when I studied abroad	T	F
---	---	---



- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| On how my study abroad experience shaped the way<br>I see the world | T | F |
|---|---|---|
11. I have applied the skills gained through study abroad:
- |                         |   |   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| To my personal life     | T | F |
| To my professional life | T | F |
12. List all the occupations you are considering right now \_\_\_\_\_?
13. In thinking about your present job or in planning for an occupation or career:
- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 14. I need reassurance that I have made the right choice of occupation.    | T | F |
| 15. I am concerned that my present interests may change over the years.    | T | F |
| 16. I am uncertain about the occupations I could perform well.             | T | F |
| 17. I don't know what my major strengths and weaknesses are.               | T | F |
| 18. The jobs I can do may not pay enough to live the kind of life I want.  | T | F |
| 19. If I had to make an occupational choice right now, I'm afraid I would  |   |   |
| 20. make a bad choice.   | T | F |
| 21. I need to find out what kind of career I should follow.                | T | F |
| 22. Making up my mind about a career has been a long and difficult problem |   |   |
| for me.  | T | F |
| 23. I am confused about the whole problem of deciding on a career.         | T | F |
| 24. I am not sure that my present occupation or job is right for me.       | T | F |
| 25. I don't know enough about what workers do in various occupations.      | T | F |
| 26. No single occupation appeals strongly to me.                           | T | F |
| 27. I am uncertain about which occupation I would enjoy.                   | T | F |
| 28. I would like to increase the number of occupations I could consider.   | T | F |
| 29. My estimates of my abilities and talents vary a lot from year to year. | T | F |
| 30. I am not sure of myself in many areas of life.                         | T | F |
| 31. I have known what occupation I want to follow for less than one year.  | T | F |
| 32. I can't understand how people can be so set on what they want to do.   | T | F |

33. How much education do you expect to get during your lifetime?
- ☐ Less than a bachelor's degree
  - ☐ Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
  - ☐ Master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.B.A., M.F.A., etc.)
  - ☐ Law degree (J.D.)
  - ☐ Doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D. M.D., D.O., etc.)
34. Gender:
- ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female
  - ☐ Transgender
35. Grade Point Average:
- ☐ 4.00-3.50
  - ☐ 3.49-3.00
  - ☐ 2.99-2.50
  - ☐ 2.49-2.00
  - ☐ Under 2.00
36. Major: \_\_\_\_\_
37. Indicate your anticipated graduation date if applicable: \_\_\_\_\_
38. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
39. Select your ethnic background from One or More of the ethnic backgrounds from the following groups:
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
  - ☐ Asian
  - ☐ Black or African-American
  - ☐ Hispanic/Latino
  - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - ☐ White
  - ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
40. What is the highest degree obtained by your father/guardian?
- ☐ Less than High School
  - ☐ High School Degree
  - ☐ Some college, no degree
  - ☐ College degree
  - ☐ Graduate or professional degree
41. What is the highest degree obtained by your mother/guardian?
- ☐ Less than High School
  - ☐ High School Degree
  - ☐ Some college, no degree

- ☐ College degree
- ☐ Graduate or professional degree

42. What is your annual family income (approximately)?

- ☐ Below \$20,000
- ☐ \$20,000-\$30,000
- ☐ \$30,001-\$50,000
- ☐ \$50,001-\$70,000
- ☐ \$70,001-\$90,000
- ☐ \$90,001-\$110,000
- ☐ \$110,001-\$130,000
- ☐ \$130,001-\$150,000
- ☐ more than \$150,000

## **Appendix C: List of Sample Interview Questions for Participants**

### **Interview One – Student Participants**

1. Where are you from? Major? Siblings? First-generation?
2. Are you involved on campus?
3. Tell me about your previous travel experience?
4. Why did you decide to submit your application to study abroad?
5. Did you have any concerns?
6. How did you fund your study abroad program?
7. Did your friends have any concerns?
8. Did your family have any concerns?
9. How did you prepare for your study abroad program?
10. What were some challenges that you faced?
11. Tell me the student's that were in your cohort abroad?
  - a. Was it diverse?
  - b. Did the diversity effect your experience?
12. What was it like being a Black/Latinx abroad?
13. Tell me about your internship and volunteer experience abroad?
14. Do you think the experience have been better?
  - a. How? Why?
15. Do you have any regrets?

### **Interview Two – Student Participants**

1. Was this experience transformational?
  - a. How? Why?
2. How did leverage you study abroad experience after you returned to the United States, if applicable?
3. Has this experience influenced your career path?
  - a. Future aspirations?
  - b. How?
4. How do you talk about this experience in applications and job interviews?
5. Have you developed any transferable skills?
  - a. When did it hit you that those were a result of your study abroad experience?
6. Has this experience changed the way you interact with others?
7. Did your family see you differently after returned to the United States?
8. How did this experience help you in current role \_\_\_\_\_ (law school, etc.)?
  - a. Have your values changed or been affected?
  - b. For better or for worse?

9. Has this experience affected or influenced your biases? Or stereotypes?
10. Did this experience inform your perspective on the world?
11. Do you think you had a good experience?
  - a. How? Why?
12. Is there anything you wished I would've asked you pertaining to how this experience has changed you?
13. Do you have any regrets?

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## **Vita**

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