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by

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Study Abroad: An Intervention for Athletic Identity Foreclosure

in Black Student-Athletes

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Report

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Study Abroad: An Intervention for Athletic Identity Foreclosure in Black Student-Athletes

by

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Researchers interested in the plight of the Black student-athletes have consistently identified the need for individuals to develop other salient aspects of their identities (Brewer et al, 1993; Harrison et al, 2011; Bimper and Harrison, 2011), however, there have been few feasible solutions such as the one this paper is offering. This paper explores the specific manner in which the 1. Identity of "athlete" forecloses on Black student-athletes multidimensional identities and 2. Proposes study abroad as a potential intervention. Studying abroad has been widely regarded as a positive experience in the multi-faceted identity development of students, and is currently a service severely under-utilized by student-athletes, specifically Black males. 3. This research proposes that studying abroad could have a liberating effect on student-athletes who have spent a majority of their time, and energy on sports. Furthermore, recent research on studying abroad has identified benefits such as a boost in GPA, graduation rates, career maturity, and self-efficacy, all of which are negatives associated with athletic identity foreclosure.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to offer a potential intervention to athletic identity foreclosure that occurs in Black student-athletes in revenue-producing sports at Division 1 colleges. Athletic identity foreclosure has been defined as an individual's over-identification with the athletic aspects of their identity to the point where the development of other aspects of their identity is severely hindered because their focus is unanimously and often solely on being an athlete (Brewer et al, 1993; Beamon, 2012). Due to sports being seen as one of the primary modes of upward mobility for African-Americans, the overrepresentation of Black males in basketball and football as well as the unique positioning of Black-student athletes on primarily white institutions (PWI's), Black student-athletes suffer from athletic identity foreclosure at high rates and often times it "may dominate their alternative social and personal identities" (Bimper and Harrison, 2011, p. 278). Many Black student-athletes at PWI's are engulfed (Adler, 1991) into the role of athlete, and struggle developing other aspects of their multidimensional personalities. It has been argued that "the physical and psychological demands of intercollegiate athletics, coupled with the restrictiveness of the athletic system, may isolate athletes from mainstream college activities, restrict their opportunities for exploratory behavior, and promote identity foreclosure" (Murphy et al, 1996, p. 240). While other students have the time and are encouraged to explore other salient aspects of their identity specifically as they pertain to their future careers, student athletes are engulfed and limited in their "athlete" role making it difficult for them to envision a future outside of the realm of athletics. With only 1-2% (NCAA, n.d.) of collegiate student-athletes getting opportunities to play professional sports, individuals' exclusive aspirations to become

professional athletes leads to athletic identity foreclosure and often leaves them underprepared to deal with the realities of life after the world of college.

In their widely regarded work, Adler and Adler (1991) found that many student-athletes, regardless of race, entered college with strong and salient academic identities, however something changed during their college years as their academic identities became less central to their overall identity suggesting that the experience student-athletes are having on campus is leading to their high rates of athletic identity foreclosure. In discussing the exploitation of Black student-athletes on the collegiate level, Sack and Stuarowsky (1998) state, "universities are far more concerned with exploiting the athletic talent of the Black community than with nurturing its academic potential" (104). This statement was made nearly 20 years ago, however, it seems as though athletic identity foreclosure in Black student athletes is just as problematic as ever, if not worse. This issue should not be solely left up to the athletic department, rather university leadership needs to identify opportunities on campus that will intervene in the process of identity foreclosure. A critically important step in developing the student-athlete holistically is providing them with diverse psychosocial experiences, to explore and learn about other aspects of themselves (Henry & Closson, 2012).

Researchers interested in the plight of the Black student-athletes have consistently identified the need for individuals to develop other salient aspects of their identities (Brewer et al, 1993; Harrison et al, 2011; Bimper and Harrison, 2011), however, there have been few feasible solutions such as the one this paper is offering. This paper explores the specific manner in which the 1. Identity of "athlete" forecloses on Black student-athletes multidimensional identities and 2. Proposes study abroad as a potential intervention. Studying

abroad has been widely regarded as a positive experience in the multi-faceted identity development of students, and is currently a service severely under-utilized by student-athletes, specifically Black males. 3. This research proposes that studying abroad could have a liberating effect on student-athletes who have spent a majority of their time, and energy on sports. Furthermore, recent research on studying abroad has identified benefits such as a boost in GPA, graduation rates, career maturity, and self-efficacy, all of which are negatives associated with athletic identity foreclosure. What better way to push someone to explore their multi-faceted identity by putting them in a foreign country where they will be forced to develop other aspects of their identity?

Theoretical Framework: Figured Worlds and Fluid Identities

This paper will refer to identity through a socio-cultural lens, as suggested by Holland et al. in their book, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds (*1998), recognizing that one's perception of themselves constantly mutates (Urrieta, 2007). Identity is in a constant state of fluidity and hybridity (Hall, 1993), always contextually influenced by time, space and positioning. Individuals take part in a variety of different "figured worlds," affording them the opportunity to develop and act on multiple aspects of their identity. Holland et al explain figured worlds as "a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts. And particular outcomes are valued over others" (1998, p.52). Student-athletes on college campuses take part in a figured world that affords them opportunities to develop certain aspects of their identities while also making certain identities unavailable (Nasir, 2011).

Within this figured world there are certain expectations and values that student-athletes must live up to, in order to be recognized. Student-athletes often adopt to the values of the figured world, and come to "understand themselves in relation to these worlds" (Holland et al, 1998, p.54). Many student-athletes, Black one's especially, come to understand their own value and worth through the lens of what is valued within the figured world of college athletics (Harrison et al, 2011), and have a hard time imagining themselves outside of this world. Within the world of college sports student-athletes are often stuck in an athletic bubble that values wins and losses, and too often these student-athletes come to define their own worth through this limited lens. Furthermore, student-athletes spend most of their day occupying spaces with other people who also place a higher value on athletics than most other aspects of their lives (Beamon, 2006).

Many student-athletes are complacent in this process as they fold in line with the norms of the figured world, as certain acts are "reproduced, forming and reforming in the practices of its participants… a figured world is formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it" (Holland et al, 1998, p.53). Most scholarship players spend summers working out rather than obtaining internships or studying abroad. Most scholarship players attend 'voluntary workouts' although they are voluntary, because it is part of the culture of this figured world. In order for the figured world to maintain its rules of governance, participants in the figured worlds must be formed into a collective reality (Holland, 1998). Student-athletes often adapt similar attitudes towards their athletic identities because they are socially isolated, spending most of their time with one another. Most of their day is spent together on activities that reinforce the importance of athletics such as: practice, team

meetings, working out, study hall, and even eating and housing together. Many Black student-athletes get stuck in the expectations of the figured world of college sports and there personal and professional development is limited by the racialized identities that are made available to them within the spaces they occupy (Nasir, 2011).

Identity: A space for navigation

The identity construction of a Black male participating in a revenue sport at a PWI is unique. Identity is always a co-constructed phenomenon (Urrieta, 2007) meaning that it is relational to both who they are as well as who they aren't. In coming to understand who one is, they must also identify who they aren't, by identifying 'the other,' as identity is only attained through difference (Sarup and Brooker, 1996).   Holland et al suggest that "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then they try to act as though they are who they say they are" (1998, pg.3). Through the process of self-making, individuals construct a concept of who they are individually as well as the collectives they are a part of (Urrieta, 2007) and try to act in accordance with how they envision those identities.

This understanding of identity suggest that while some aspects of a person's multidimensional identity are more robust than others, an individual is always in a process of becoming, and not bound to any specific identity. For Black student-athletes, their athletic identity is often a very salient aspect of their identity (Bimper and Harrison, 2011; Harrison et al, 2011) for numerous reasons, including personal self-efficacy, high levels of visibility and hegemonic racialized storylines (Nasir, 2014) which erroneously suggest Black athletic superiority and intellectual inferiority (Harrison et al., 2004). Many Black athletes have articulated that being an athlete is simply one aspect of who they are (Beamon, 2012), yet they

are situated into the athlete box as if it encapsulates the entirety of their self-hood. In his article addressing the identity production of 'Chican@'activist teachers, Urrieta states, "people produce identities through participation in cultural activities that allow them to engage conceptual and procedural identity production" (2007, pg.121). In order for an individual to take on the identity of 'student-athlete' they would have to go through a mental and literal self-making process of identity production as both an athlete as well as a student. However, the majority of a student-athletes time is spent on 'cultural activities' that reinforce the importance of the athletic identity while dismissing the importance of an academic identity, suggesting college campuses area a place that promote the development of their athletic identity over all else (Beamon, 2012). It is challenging for revenue producing student athletes to develop relationships with people outside of athletics due to academic clustering, eating and housing together, mandatory hours at an academic study center used exclusively by athletes, and time spent in practice, meetings, and weightlifting. When one's Black racial identity and the racial storylines that come along with being Black in the context of education and sports are taken into account, many Black student-athletes are socially isolated on campus, effectively living in an athletic bubble (Beamon, 2011) that supports the development of their athletic goals but not their academic aspirations (Bimper, 2014). While Black student-athletes have multi-dimensional and fluid identities, college campuses provide an environment that offers limited opportunities for Black student-athletes to engage with aspects of their identity unrelated to athletics. In order to better understand how an individual's Black racial and athletic identity interact together, this piece will ground itself in a socio-cultural literature review of Black identity.

Literature Review: Black Identity

Black identity can't be understood without looking at the social and cultural context of the current times or the history from which it has emerged. Blackness, in this country has historically been associated as a problem (DuBois, 1903), the inferior 'other,' to the superior classification of whiteness (Fanon, 1952). This historical underpinning of Blackness led Dr. William Cross to theorize that African-Americans must go through a process of Nigrescence to develop a positive and healthy racial identity (Cross, 1971). He posits that due to this country's founding in ideals of white racial superiority, African-Americans first come to understand their racial identity through the hegemonic White lens, and must go through stages of development that eventually take them from identifying as a Negro to a more desirable stage of identifying as Black. Much of the literature on Black racial identity comes from the field of Psychology and uses an Ericksonian perspective on identity, often premised on stages of development (Cross et al., 1991). While this paper does not focus on Nigrescense, the conversion from a Negro to a Black identity, it provides a framework for us to understand how Blacks might develop a positive Black racial identity through participation in sport which speaks to the strong prevalence of Basketball and Football to Black American culture. Cross's work is seminal, influential and foundational to most contemporary work regarding Black racial identity.

Cross's theory influenced Seller's theory and his development of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) which "provides a framework for understanding both the significance of race in the self-concepts of African Americans and the qualitative meanings they attribute to being members of that racial category" (Sellers et al, 1998; pg. 19). The MMRI was

focused on answering two questions in relation to an individual, how important is race in the individual's conception of self? And what does it mean to be a member of this racial group? In their article, *Meet me at the Crossroads*, Bimper and Harrison (2011) use the MMRI to look at the intersection of racial and athletic identity in Black student-athletes.

Bimper and Harrison suggest, that many times for Black student-athletes, "sports is more than merely a game to play' rather it is a mean of defining self" (2011, pg. 275). Due to both the perceived and structural limitations of making it to college and "out of the hood," many Black kids, at a young age become convinced that sport is the most viable means of making it out (Hodge et al., 2008). Bimper and Harrison argue that often times the strength of one's athletic identity grows in congruence with their racial identity, meaning that to some, being Black means being an athlete. Bimper and Harrison use the MMRI to measure Black identity because it is focused on how one understands their racial identity at a specific period of time. The MMRI understands racial identity as one of numerous hierarchically ordered identities that impact how an individual defines themselves (Sellers et al., 1998). They suggest that the athlete role of African-American student-athletes identity "may dominate their alternative social and personal identities" (Bimper & Harrison, 2012, pg.278), especially on college campuses.

As a Psychologist, Seller's assumes that the dimensions of one's identity can be measured and compartmentalized, whereas socio-cultural theorist like Hall and Fanon see identity as fluid, recognizing that individuals occupy different figured worlds where are positioned differently due to issues of power and context. Within the figured world of college campuses, there are cultural norms, expectations and ideas that offer particular kinds of

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participation and identities to Black student-athletes, while limiting others (Nasir, 2011). Black

student-athletes are often positioned as powerless in the classroom yet powerful and god-like

in the athletic domain, which further pushes athletic identity foreclosure upon them. Black

student-athletes over-identification with the role of 'athlete' is directly linked to issues of

historical and concurrent racial oppression. These students have come to associate blackness

with being an athlete, and must remove themselves from the athletic bubble on these

campuses to better understand themselves and the heterogeneity of blackness (Hall, 1996).

Black student-athletes must be provided with spaces and opportunities to develop other

aspects of their identities to avoid athletic identity foreclosure (Harrison et al., 2011). An

opportunity like studying abroad could help bring consciousness around the hybridity of

blackness internationally (Hall, 1996) to these student athletes who would then be able to

redefine their blackness and break away from hegemonic ideologies which position Blacks as

athletes and entertainers and little else.

The fact that Blacks currently reign supreme numerically in both professional basketball

and football is not due to genetics, but rather representative of issues surrounding power,

oppression and identity in the US context. Blacks have been positioned as less than in most

areas outside of sports, where Blacks are often positioned as greater than within sports. As

Bimper and Harrison (2011) explain, understanding the context of race relations and historical

racial oppression, gives us a unique lens to better understand why athletics is closely associated

with one's racial identity for Black athletes. Based on the fact that Whites reigned supreme and

have historically and currently been dominant in society, they developed a superiority complex

while Blacks simultaneously developed an inferiority complex (Fanon, 1952). However, the

realm of sports provides Blacks an opportunity to show not only their equality but their superiority, so in trying to understand the importance of sport in Black culture, it is important that we understand the larger issues of power that contextualize sport, race and society (Edwards, 2000).

For Fanon and philosopher Stuart Hall, in order to better understand Black identity, it is imperative to analyze both Blacks and Whites as their identities are reliant upon one another, and developed in relation to one another. Fanon (1952) argues that you can't have a superior race without an inferior one nor an inferior race without a superior one. As previously articulated, sports, namely Football and Basketball, has provided a space, or figured world, where the power dynamic has been switched and Blacks are seen as superior and whites as inferior. One could assume that Fanon would not be surprised with the high rates of athletic identity foreclosure in Black student-athletes because sport has provided a world in which Black people can develop a psychologically healthy racial identity (Cross, 1971). In most aspects of society, Blacks are positioned as inferior, so it is not hard to understand why some Black people would over-identify with the role of athlete, as it is likely the one identity that has been positioned as superior in reference to 'the other,' Whiteness.

Literature Review: Athletic Identity

Athletics are the one venue where Black men are celebrated and worshipped, as my mentor Dr. Moore would say, "Where else can you find thousands of White people screaming and cheering on a Black man" (L. Moore, personal communication, January 8, 2015). Thus it is no surprise that Black student athletes develop strong athletic identities. Athletic identity has been defined as the degree to which an individual identifies and associates with the role or

identity of 'athlete' in their overall self-conception (Brewer et al, 1993). Self-concept is multidimensional, meaning it is made up of many identities and these identities have different values in different figured worlds, which impact an individual's judgment of their personal worth and competence (Brewer et al, 1993). In highly valued domains or figured worlds, incompetence can negatively affect ones self-esteem while incompetence in a low-valued domain will likely have little impact on an individual's self-esteem. Individuals with a strong athletic identity would thus place a high priority on competence within athletics, and if they were competent they will likely have strong self-esteem, based out of their athletic identity because athletics is very important to them. However, if a student is not producing in the classroom but they are producing on the field, they will likely still have strong self-esteem because they are placing more value on athletics then academics (Brewer et al., 1993). Thus it is important for researchers to understand how one's athletic identity impacts other aspects of an individual's identity.

Brewer and colleagues suggest that there are both positive and negative aspects of a strong athletic identity, and that identity can impact other facets of ones' identity. Individuals with a strong athletic identity tend to put more focus on exercise and healthy habits, goal-setting, and teamwork, while also using that identity to build relationships and community (Brewer et al, 1993; Harrison and Bimper, 2011). While there are many benefits, they are also some potential pitfalls like difficulty moving away from a career in athletics, delayed critical consciousness, lower graduation rates, career immaturity, and athletic identity foreclosure (Beamon, 2012). Brewer suggests that individuals with a strong athletic identity are at risk of identity foreclosure becaue there laser-like tunnel vision and focus on athletics can impair them

from noticing other opportunities outside the realm of sports. Brewer et al., state, "Strong, exclusive athletic identity leaves an athlete vulnerable to emotional difficulties upon termination of his or her sport career" (1993, p. 241). While in college, it's important for student athletes to identify alternative areas to develop aspects of their identities so when their careers to come to an end, as all sports careers do, they will be able to effectively transition out of the athlete role.

In order to quantify Black males over-identification with sport and understand the athletic identity phenomenon, it is important to measure their athletic identity. Since the development of the AIMS in 1993 (Brewer et al, 1993), it has been the most commonly used measure of athletic identity. The AIMS can be used to better understand the associations between the salience of one's athletic identity and issues they may face as they come to an end of their athletic careers. Specifically, the AIMS can be used to identify individuals who are at high risk of emotional disturbance when their athletic career comes to an end and try to find alternative ways for them to develop other aspects of their identity. After continued research, the AIMS was edited from a 10-item questionnaire to a 7-item multidimensional model (Brewer and Cornelius, 2001). The AIMS is similar but different from the Self-Role Scale in that is focuses in on the strength and exclusivity of identification with the athlete role. The AIMS has proven to be a reliable psycho-social measurement tool in relation to athletic identity, and research consistently shows that Black students have inflated athletic identities making them more susceptible to athletic identity foreclosure (Bimper, 2014; Bimper and Harrison, 2011).

Athletic identity is multidimensional and is often looked at through two lenses (Nasco and Webb, 2006) both the public/social identity as well as the personal identity. This public

identity refers to "the extent to which the individual is known and recognized by others as an athlete" (Stephan and Brewer, 2007, pg. 68). Depending on the sport one plays, the popularity of their sport both locally and nationally, as well as the competitiveness of their team, certain athletes are very visible and often recognized through their role as athlete. This is especially true for Black student-athletes who participate in revenue earning sports such as football and basketball at Primarily White Institutions (PWI's) where there is a limited number of Black males on campus. The second part, the individual identity refers how much one relies on their athletic identity as part of their private self-concept. As previously suggested, for Black student-athletes, the line separating the private and social self-concept is often blurred (Bimper and Harrison, 2011).

Athletic Identity Foreclosure: A socialization Process

The limited opportunities for identity development personally and socially amongst Black student athletes on college campuses leads to high levels of athletic identity foreclosure. Identity foreclosure occurs when one starts to become defined though a specific identity role (Marcia, 1966). Identity foreclosure has been historically defined as an individual's commitment to one aspect of their identity before thoroughly exploring other aspects of their identity (Beamon, 2012; Danish et al., 1993; Marcia, 1966). Identity foreclosure is especially prevalent when that individual is widely recognized by others on the basis of that identity. Foreclosure is a process that happens in and through a variety of different interactions an individual has and typically "occurs when one has not been exposed to a broad range of alternatives," (Beamon, 2012, pg. 196) that expose individuals to other aspects of their identities. Athletic identity foreclosure refers to the process in which athletes come to define themselves through this

identity without sufficient consideration of alternative identities. Individuals develop athletic

identities at a young age (Bimper & Harrison, 2012) through their participation in sport and

foreclosure is a process that occurs over time through consistent messaging both internally and

externally that encourages continued involvement and focus on this specific aspect of their

identity (Marcia, 1966). Identity foreclosure is especially prevalent among Black student-

athletes due to how they are often positioned into that identity by other socializing agents such

as, their families, friends, peers, coaches, teachers, and the media (Beamon, 2012).

Strong athletic identities are not something that individuals develop in isolation but

rather it is a socially driven process. Holland and colleagues suggest that individuals begin to

perform the identity that is expected of them in the figured world, "These understandings-

these identities- are unstable, especially as people are first inducted to a figured world, and

they continue to undergo heuristic development in concert with people's acclimation to new

spheres of activity" (Holland et al, 1998, p. 65). Stephan and Brewer (2007) examined the

specific influences that contribute to the construction and maintenance of a strong athletic

identity in elite athletes at the Olympic level. Supporting previous research (Brewer et al, 1993;

Harrison, 2006) Stephan and Brewer (2007) found that aspects of one's identity are socially

reinforced by those whom they spend the most time with. Student- athletes spend most of

their time with other student-athletes, coaches and others connected to the athletic

department making it challenging to develop alternative aspects of their identities. Spending

time in different social situations would challenge student-athletes to develop other aspects of

their identities because they would be forced to connect with students who weren't athletes.

The socializing aspect of being an athlete is specifically important due to the high visibility of these students. For example, A CEO of a huge company will likely be socialized to enact the identity of "CEO" while at work and in other spaces where they are recognized and identified as a CEO. However, when that CEO is at a coffee shop, the grocery store or the movie theatre, they are not forced to enact the identity of CEO because others do not recognize them as such. However, the high-visibility and celebrity like status of many student-athletes does not afford them the luxury of choosing how they want to identify in public. They are identified, labeled and viewed through the label of athlete forcing them to wear that identity in spaces where others, like the CEO, can go unnoticed. Student- athletes do not have the choice to turn off their identity as athletes because in most of the spaces they occupy (athletic facilities, dormitory, campus streets, class, library, grocery store, etc.) they are reminded that they are different, they are unique, they are special, they are athletes. Furthermore, the social structure of student-athletes lives encourages them to spend a large amount of their time with other student-athletes (Brewer et al, 1993; Beamon, 2010). Many of these student-athletes have study hall together, the same classes, and similarly blocked schedules which further contributes to their social isolation on campus as well as their limited opportunities to exercise other aspects of their identities. With the added time demands of playing college sports, athletic identity foreclosure of student-athletes is a socializing process just as much as it is a self-deterministic process.

Most student-athletes have other unique aspects of their identity, however, they are less likely to develop them because they are not recognized and valued. In her research on athletic identity foreclosure in Black student-athletes, Beamon's findings revealed that many of

these student-athletes have other talents and hobbies, such as art and music, but that they are

not as important in their self-definition. This speaks to the way in which our social identity

informs our self-identity, and the importance of inhabiting spaces and having experiences that

encourages student-athletes to expand their self-definition. For example, if a student-athlete

was being recognized and affirmed for the art work they created on display in the student-

union, the way they are for their athletic prowess, the role of artist/designer/creator would

likely make up a considerable part of their self-definition, because they would see their art

work as important.

Athletic Identity Foreclosure and Graduation Rates

While the overall number of Black-student athletes who earn their college degree has

been steadily increasing over the years, Black student-athletes in revenue-producing sports

(Men's football and Men's basketball) continue to suffer from low graduation rates. While Black

student-athletes graduate at higher numbers than Black non-student athletes across Division 1

institutions, this is not true for the major 6 conferences in college sports. Students at these

institutions are more likely to suffer from athletic identity foreclosure and Black student

athletes at these institutions don't graduate at higher rates than their Black counterparts who

don't play sports. Harper and colleagues did a comprehensive report on the graduation rates of

76 institutions of the major 6 conferences and found that,

"The Association (NCAA) has a television commercial in which it claims that Black male student-athletes at Division I institutions graduate at rates higher than do Black men in the general student body. This is true across the entire division, but not for the six conferences whose member institutions routinely win football and basketball championships, play in multimillion-dollar bowl games and the annual basketball championship tournament, and produce the largest share of Heisman trophy winners. Across these 76 colleges and universities, Black male student-athletes graduate at 5.3 percentage points lower than their same-race male peers who are not on intercollegiate sports teams. That an average of 49.8% of Black

male student-athletes on these campuses do not graduate within six years is a major loss" (Harper et al, 2013, p. 7)

Black student-athletes who compete at the best and most competitive programs across the country, also have the lowest graduation rates. These student athletes are more likely to have professional aspirations to play sport and suffer from athletic identity foreclosure at higher rates than those from less competitive institutions.

Isiah Thomas, former professional basketball player and Dr. Nasir at the University of California, arguably the best public institution in the country looked at the graduation numbers of Black student-athletes at their institution and found even more appalling numbers. Thomas and Nasir report, "Right here at our very own university, the University of California, Berkeley, the graduation rate for Black male basketball players in 2013 was only 33 percent. What this means is that many Black male basketball players are leaving college without the degree or requisite skills to embark upon a professional career" (Los Angeles Sentinel, May 30, 2014). The prevalence of athletic identity foreclosure is preventing them from getting the most out of their collegiate experience including their degrees. Targeted interventions need to support Black student-athletes and the development of other aspects of their identity so they will have higher graduation rates and better professional opportunities once their athletic careers are over.

Sport-career Retirement and Career Readiness

Athletic retirement can be especially difficult for individuals with strong athletic identities especially if that individual does not have other complimentary aspects of their identity that will help them transition out of sport. Some of the challenges have been noted as psychological and emotional difficulties, decreases in self-confidence, and substance abuse upon sport retirement (Beamon, 2012). Due to a high salience of the athletic role in individual's

lives, "the loss of the athlete role upon retirement affects not only one's athletic identity, but one's overall sense of self" (Lally, 2007, p. 85). Lally did a qualitative research study including three interviews with 4 athletes, one prior to sport retirement, one a month after and then the last a year after retirement, to better understand the process of sport-career retirement. Participants were recruited from a Canadian university "which is comparable to Division II sports in the U.S." (2007; p.88), which suggest that these athletes would have less professional aspirations than a division 1 player in a revenue earning sport in the U.S. All participants admitted to committing physically and psychologically to athletic goals, which often came at the expense of attractive opportunities to develop other aspects of their academic and social selves. Specifically, a few mentioned the inability to study abroad or gain valuable internship experience while in college. Student-athletes are not receiving the complete college experience, thus their identity development is limited due to their limited opportunities of personal exploration.

The sooner student-athletes recognize and value other aspects of their identity, the lower the chances they will suffer from athletic identity foreclosure and the likelier they are to transition out of sports with a healthy conception of self (Harrison et al, 2011). The most compelling results of Lally's (2007) research was that the athletes who consciously decided to decrease the centrality of the athlete role of their identity pre-retirement by exploring other aspects of their identities, transitioned a lot smoother into their future careers and had less trouble adjusting to their re-structured identities. The participant who did not choose to relinquish aspects of his athletic identity prior to retirement faced challenges upon actual retirement, he stated, "I would say identity crisis is an understatement. Basically everything in

my life changed, everything I identified with was gone. I had to move on. It was an extremely difficult thing" (2007, pg. 95). Lally concluded by suggesting, "athletes who initiate this redefinition of self-prior to leaving the athlete role may be better equipped to cope with its loss than those who maintain a strong commitment to the athlete role until retirement or even afterwards" (2007, pg. 98). It is important to give student-athletes opportunities that will allow them to develop other aspects of their identity to help them transition out of the world of college sports.

Student-athletes who suffer from athletic identity foreclosure are typically not career ready upon graduation. Typically they have not sufficiently explored professional opportunities as well as aspects of their identity that would help them establish a career outside of sports. Murphy et al (1996) looked at 124 student- athletes, both men and women from 1 NCAA Division 1 university across numerous sports including varsity and non-varsity as well as revenue and non-revenue earning sports. Their research intended to measure identity foreclosure, athletic identity, and career maturity in these student athletes. The research found that high levels of identity foreclosure were closely associated with low levels of career maturity. Identifying strongly and exclusively with the athlete role limits an individual's exploration of career opportunities and possibilities outside of the realm of sports. Furthermore, varsity students were noted to have higher levels of athletic identity than non-varsity students. With the added gender identity, Murphy et al found that "male varsity student-athletes in revenue-producing sports may be at particular risk for restricted career development" (1996, p.244). The risk for delayed career development in Black student-athletes is even higher because they are socialized into the athlete identity at higher levels than their

white counterparts at younger ages (Beamon, 2006.) Many have thought they were going to 'go pro' since they were young, and others have encouraged and supported this unrealistic goal.

This trend is especially problematic for Black males because not only do they believe they can make it, this is likely the one platform where society encourages and tells them they can make it. Singer (2011) argues that Black student-athletes often reproduce their social status when they have professional aspirations because they often miss out on other opportunities to develop professionally due to their focus on sport. These student-athletes have worked very hard to get to where they are today making it even harder to get them to think about alternative option for their futures. Challenging student-athletes to think about alternative career options outside of sport can be difficult because they have invested so much to get where they currently are. Thus, individuals with foreclosed identities are less likely to engage with people and activities that challenge their ideological commitment to a professional career as an athlete. Engaging in career planning can be seen as a sign that they are giving up on their dream of becoming a professional athlete and many individuals with strong foreclosed identities want to hold onto that dream as long as possible (Murphy et al., 1996). Murphy found that directly challenging students with foreclosed identities to think about alternative careers will not be as effective as helping them to think about their future careers post sport retirement. This approach still will help the individual plan for the future however, it will not directly challenge their identity as an athlete making them more responsive and open to the conversation. This is especially important for practitioners as they work with these individuals in developing the strength of alternative identities that could hopefully lead to higher career readiness and maturity. Opportunities and spaces, or figured worlds, need to be made available

to student-athletes to develop other aspects of their identities that work in congruence with their athletic identity.

When students are put in positions to make tough decisions, they learn more about themselves and what they want and don't want, which is an important element of becoming career-ready. Locus of control refers the extent to which individuals perceive a sense of control and decision-making power in their own lives (Brown et al., 2000). Brown and colleauges found that the greater amount of time participating in sport, the lower the self-efficacy for career decision-making tasks. With research showing that college students with an internal locus of control have a higher sense of career maturity, Brown (2000) set out to measure student-athletes self-efficacy in relation to career-making decisions. This finding suggest that athletic departments and coaches need to be more explicit in helping student-athletes identify transferable skills between their participation in sport and their future career trajectory. Consistent with most other research on athletic identity and career readiness (Murphy et al., 1996) these findings speak to the importance of student-athletes occupying spaces and having experiences where they are able to explore other aspects of their identity and how those interests might relate to future career opportunities. Furthermore, athletes have very structured lives in regards to taking specific class, having class at specific times, suggested majors, mandatory study hall, specific practice time, 'voluntary' summer workouts, game and travel time, etc, which speaks to their lower levels of internal locus of control. Having more decision making power in their own lives, their majors, their summer plans, and choosing to take advantage of other opportunities on a college campus would lead to these students having

elevated levels of internal locus of control and would suggest higher levels of career-readiness

and maturity.

Athletic Identity Foreclosure in Black Student-Athletes

Sport retirement and career readiness issues as a result of identity foreclosure impact all

athletes but minority males in both football and basketball are affected the highest rates of

identity foreclosure (Harrison et al, 2011). What are the experiences that these student-

athletes *are and are not* having that contribute to this phenomenon is the question Beamon

attempted to answer in her research on athletic identity foreclosure in Black male student-

athletes. She conducted ethnographic interviews with 20 Black men who formerly played D1

football or basketball. While other studies showed that athletic identity foreclosure did indeed

occur among student-athletes, her qualitative approach allows for individuals to describe in-

depth, the process and nuances of athletic identity foreclosure, as they experienced it. In their

process of reflection they articulated how "being big and Black" or a "little black boy" (Beamon,

2012; pg. 205) spoke to the racialized context in which they developed and were socialized into

an athletic identity. Identity foreclosure is not a process that happens in isolation, but the

behavior must be reinforced by other socializing agents (Beamon, 2012). With the perceived

and as well as real structural challenges that limit the societal advancement of Black men,

sports is misdiagnosed as the primary and often times sole opportunity of upward mobility.

Familial and community influences

Black families and communities also fall victim to the aforementioned myth, as they

have seen and heard about the rags to riches stories of Black men making it big in professional

sports. Beamon's research looking at the impact of socializing agents on former Black student-

athletes suggests that the African-American family and community at large is a strong socializing factor. She found that many of the respondents were heavily influenced by an athletic role model in their family or in their community. One respondent noted how athletic scholarships were an easy and efficient way to college for Black males:

> "it was just always understood that we were gonna play sports…. It wasn't that they pushed us, it's that it was what we did… We definitely knew we had to go to college and sports was the easiest way for us. We knew that we had to have the degree and sports was the obvious way for us to do that." (Beamon, 2010, 288)

Her findings suggested that as youth, these Black men were not forced into sports, yet they did overwhelmingly feel "their parental support for athletic achievement outweighed the support they received for academic achievement (Beamon, 2010, p. 289). One respondent reflected on the specific type of parental support he received in relation to his athletic identity:

> "I mean he… was at every game so ya know he'd tell me what I did wrong and what I need to improve… but he was actually the "dad slash coach"… you know how people are living out their dreams through their kids and I pretty much felt that he was more or less trying to do that." (Beamon, 2010, 288).

Edwards (2000) suggest that preeminence of sport within African-American families and culture is having adverse effects than originally intended and is actually impeding the social and cognitive development of African-Americans youth, particularly males.

When one thinks about the forces that limit the possibilities of Black men (prison industrial complex, athletic industrial complex, segregation, income inequity, ghettoization, policing, etc.) it is not surprising that one's racial and athletic identity seemed to develop congruently at a young age. At least 25% percent of the respondents mentioned that athletic success was the most important role for "little black boys," as one responded quoted (Beamon, 2012, pg. 203). Another participant noted the fact that they were 'big and Black' created an

expectation that they not only played sport, but that they played a specific sport and excelled at it. When young people are rewarded and recognized for certain aspects of their identities, they develop those aspects to continuously reap the rewards of acknowledgment. In her interviews of 20 former Black student athletes, she found that 15 of the 20 respondents felt that athletics made up 60% of how they define themselves as a person, their self-identity (Beamon, 2012). One of the respondents stated, "When I got to junior high school... I could see that there was those people and there was us (athletes)." When pressed to explain who those people were, the respondent responded "smart people and white people." This finding suggest that developing an identity as an athlete was positioned as the anti-thesis for developing a smart or academic identity. Furthermore, by identifying the other as both "smart and white" one could come to see "black and athletic" as the complete opposite, which would likely push them to disengage with academics while over indulging in athletics. This is not to suggest that one then identifies as a dumb black athlete, but we can infer that association with the athlete role for this individual, also meant identifying with what they were not, white, which was associated with intelligence. The powerful and stereotypical coupling of black and athletic compared to white and intelligent has detrimental effects on the Black student-athlete, and provides an atmosphere where athletic identity foreclosure is anticipated and normalized.

College Experience

The racialized narrative (Nasir, 2011) that positions Black student athletes as solely athletes is magnified at the collegiate level. Experiences on campus facilitate the process of role engulfment and athletic identity foreclosure, illuminating the need for Black student-athletes to find opportunities to develop alternative salient aspects of their identity. Far too often, Black

student-athletes find themselves in situations on campus where they are limited by others conceptions of who they are and who they aren't. Participants in Beamon's study talked about the narrow scope of the conversations they had with other students on campus, as one respondent stated, "they wanna come up to you and talk to you about sports cuz they feel that's the only way they know you... or that's the only way they can communicate with you" (Beamon, 2012, p.202). The aforementioned quote reminded me of my experience as a Black student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and how even at 5'7 and 165 pounds I was consistently asked about my involvement on the football team. Similarly, most people engaged in conversation with me around hip-hop, sports, and Los Angeles gang culture. The limited nature of my conversations led me to believe that in their eyes, I am little more than a stereotypical Black kid from Los Angeles. Socially, it was hard to perform other aspects of my identity because I did not have the space to do so, similar to the ways in which student-athletes are unable to perform other aspects of their identities socially, because they often can't remove themselves from the athlete label placed on their foreheads.

In addition to having stronger athletic identities and being more visibly recognized as an athlete than their White counterparts, Black student-athletes have significantly higher and often unrealistic aspirations to play on the professional level (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997, Lapchick, 1996). Beamon (2012) in her mixed- methods research found that 70% of the Black male student-athletes strongly agree that they expect to have a career in professional sports compared to 31% of White student-athletes. Furthermore, she found that 40% of Blacks believe that professional athletics is the best route to economic success for Black men, with 27% of Whites agreeing to the same statement. The most interesting and telling aspect of her research

was that the higher the classification (years in school) of the respondents, both black and white, the higher belief that sport is the best avenue to success for a Black male. Does this mean that the figured world of college is socializing athletes both Black and White to believe that sport is the best opportunity for social mobility for Black student-athletes? Are some student-athletes staying in college simply to play ball? Beamon's work highlights the idea that these student-athletes are not getting the typical college student experience where one is challenged to think about all the things they can be in the world. In fact, Black student athletes are getting the opposite experience in college, they are being systematically pushed into one career direction that unfortunately is very unlikely to pan out: professional sports.

Lacking critical consciousness

Beamon's work clearly implicates the college campuses as a site that strengthens the grip that athletic identity foreclosure can have on Black students as, "the college experience does not diminish this expectation, but reinforces it" (Beamon, 2002, 187). This finding challenges early research conducted on athletic identity by Brewer and colleagues which found that the higher the classification of the athlete the weaker the connection with a strong athletic identity, they suggested, "as college students mature and become exposed to a variety of activities and influences, their exclusive identification with the athlete role decreases" (1993, p.250). Brewer's sentiment makes sense, however, it seems that in today's high-profile world of sports where coaches are making over 5 million dollars a year, Black student-athletes are not being exposed to a variety of activities and influences, but are instead spending the majority of their time focused on sport. The discrepancies in the research could simply be the differences in the participants interviewed and researched but alternatively, it might suggest that something

is happening within the college experience that is limiting what Black student-athletes see as possible for themselves. Beamon (2012) asserts,

> *This indicates that the longer the student-athlete is on campus, whether Black or White, the more reinforced is this belief that professional sports is the best route for African-American men to choose if they are to be successful economically. This creates an environment for a Black football player in which most of his peers believe that professional sports are the best route toward economic success for him, and this belief grows stronger the longer the player is on campus. This creates an environment in which the belief that football is the only chance to be successful is reinforced and accepted (190).*

While these findings are saddening, they are not surprising, in 1933, Dr. Carter G Woodson wrote a book entitled, "The Miseducation of the Negro" where he explained how the education system does more to discourage the Black mind and dissuade who they really are, then develop their mind for the benefit of the White community. He asserted that the more schooling one has, the more prevalent this problem is. For African-American male in college to believe that the best avenue for their success is through athletics speaks directly to an issue Dr. Woodson articulated over 80 years ago, how the White educational system plays tricks on the Black mind. These men are stuck in a bubble where they are unable see the world outside of sport, limiting their levels of consciousness, and pushing them to strive for something that does not serve them, their families or their communities in the long run. It is necessary to remove them from this bubble as to where they can better understand themselves in relation to their community and the world and how they could serve their community. Freire (1971) states that "one of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings consciousness" (p.51).   Student-athletes need opportunities to develop a critical consciousness that will enable them to take better advantage of their collegiate experience.

Intervention: Study Abroad

The problems associated with role engulfment and athletic identity foreclosure specifically for Black men is well documented, however there is a lack of viable solutions and interventions documented in the research. Often referred to as a life-changing experience, studying abroad in college has become one of the biggest movements in higher education over the last 20 years (Bhandari, 2009). I have a personal connection to this topic as I studied abroad three times while in college (Quebec, Canada; London, Great Britain; Cape Town, South Africa) and each had a profound experience on my identity and shaped my professional trajectory. To this point, I have traveled to 30 countries, lived in 5 and spent over 3 years of my adult life abroad. I found the experience very liberating as a Black man because for the first time, I was able to define my blackness not in relation to the dominant white society, but in relation to another culture, another country, and another way of seeing the world. I learned a lot about myself and it challenged my conceptions of what it meant to be Black. Furthermore, I saw other forms of oppression in the world, which allowed me to better come to terms with the racism I faced in my own country, as well as the privileges in which I held and had come to take for granted. In the end, traveling inspired me to want to give back to my community and push individuals to see the possibilities they harbor within themselves. Studying abroad helped me get out of my bubble and opened me to a world of options, and I propose that this experience for Black student-athletes will be even more profound because of how socialized they are into their identity bubble. Studying abroad is powerful for any student, but especially powerful for individuals who have been racially oppressed and forced to define themselves in and through a white lens (Morgan et al., 2002).

Participation in study abroad has been suggested by many collegiate institutions, associations, foundations and governmental agencies as a means to develop the personal and professional knowledge needed to compete in today's globalized job market (IES Abroad, 2009; Obst, Bhandari & Witherell, 2007, Harder et al, 2015). In recent years, it has even been suggested that those who lack global skills would be, in fact, at a disadvantage (Harder et al, 2015). Studying abroad has created an appeal for colleges and universities as well as students leading to a rapid increase of students studying abroad over the past 20 years (Bhandari, 2009). While studying abroad has increased a great deal among general college students, most student athletes in Division 1 revenue-producing sports don't get the opportunity to study abroad.

Studying Abroad: A New Figured World

Studying abroad is unique because it provides a new figured world that allows for many aspects of an individual's identity to be developed. Holland's (1998) theory of figured worlds suggest that in a figured, individuals communicate from different places or social realities based on the power dynamics at play. For student-athletes, in the figured world of college, they occupy a space that limits the development of other aspects of their identity because everyone is so focused on them being an athlete. Holland further argues that interpersonal communication is always mediated by the cultural systems and social locations of those communicating, which would provide Black student athletes new spaces and opportunities to develop aspects of their identity.

It's important to identity figured worlds that allow for equitable relationships, removing individuals from hegemonic power dynamics. For students of color, studying abroad provides a space to seek out equitable relationships where they are no longer seen as 'the other' in

relation to White American society. Students of color from America get to step outside of the white lens (Du Bois, 1903) giving them new freedoms to develop aspects of their identity that were previously prohibited.

Studying abroad allows students to see themselves as independent and free from the constraints of U.S. societal norms. Wick conducted qualitative research on identity formation and development of students of color studying abroad and found "time abroad is a Third Space that allows for profound changes because of the possibility for reinvention and the necessity of taking on new responsibilities" (Wick, 2011, 160). Black student-athletes would no longer be constrained by their athletic time commitments but would rather dedicate that same time to learning about a new country and themselves in the process. Fanon (1952) and Hall (1993) both suggest that through recognizing and appreciating difference we come to understand the true and heterogeneous nature of what it means to be Black. Meeting Black people from other countries and understanding Blackness through the lens of another country broadens one's definition of race and racial categorizations. This repositioning of oneself in the global world expands ones identity and pushes back on hegemonic ideologies trying to limit the multidimensionality of Black student-athlete's identities. Consistent in the literature about student-athletes and athletic identity foreclosure is the need for student athletes to find spaces that encourage the development of other aspects of their identities (Beamon, 2012; Bimper and Harrison, 2011). Time abroad is especially important for student-athletes because it will provide them a space where they are no longer different because they are a Black student-athlete, they are different or 'othered' because they are American. Instead of being the "Big

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and Black" (Beamon, 2012) student-athlete on a PWI campus this Black student-athlete

becomes an individual, from a country, America.

Studying abroad and Identity Negotiation

The opportunity to be in a new space and interact with new people would provide a

figured world with new relations of power and opportunities for Black student-athletes to

author their own identities. Due to the new and often times drastically different environments

students find themselves in, identity appears to be highly malleable while studying abroad

(Young, 2009; Day-Vines, et al, 1998; Angulo, 2008). The emergent nature of this field, racial

identity formation in study abroad, resulted in limited amounts of research, however, findings

suggest that study abroad presents powerful opportunities for positive identity negotiation and

racial identity formation. The process of identity negotiation appears to be especially powerful

in the case of students of color as they re-examine their national, ethnic and racial

identification. Jackson (2006) found that the questioning of these identities for students of

color led to a renewed self-awareness while adding to their social and cultural capital.

Studying abroad moves students out of their comfort zone and puts them into an

unfamiliar space, where they have no choice but to adapt. Black student-athletes would have to

confront what they have come to value and normalize in their lives in America. Wick's (2011)

study on the experiences of students of color abroad elicited this response, "Just getting out of

your comfort zone, getting out of that circle of friends and family, you're in a place you don't

know anyone, you just have to change. You have to reach out to people." This testimonial is

reveals how engaging in a new figured world of studying abroad pushes students out of their

comfort zone leading to the forging of new relationships. This could be especially impactful for

student-athletes because, unlike most college students, they are provided a built-in social-network, their teammates, as soon as they get to campus. An experience like studying abroad where one has to actively engage a new social network, could be especially powerful for student-athletes who might not have had such experiences thus far.

Students of color are abroad are pushed to be reflective in challenging ways of their racial identity as well as their national American. Study abroad students come to recognize the global implications of American privilege that they all experience, despite their racial or ethnic background (Wick, 2011). As noted in the literature on Black student-athletes, many reported that they were expected to not only play basketball but play well due to their Blackness suggesting that what citizenship for Black men in America, is to perform athletically at a high level (Beamon, 2010). Studying abroad gives students the opportunity to challenge hegemonic ideologies, Wick (2011) noted that studying abroad "allowed participants to leverage and build capital, negotiate their intersecting identities, and develop agency that guided them in their future" (p. 166). Students were able to learn and form new aspects of themselves when put into a space where they were pushed to negotiate their intersecting identities. Furthermore, they realized that their identities changed as the context of their situation changed. This experience could be especially beneficial for Black student-athletes as they would be pushed to think about their identity when they were no longer able to play the role of athlete.

Studying abroad and Critical consciousness

Benefits of studying abroad are innumerable. Study abroad participants are reported to develop a critical lens of their home society by experiencing life in another country. One participant in Wick's study (2011) stated, "When I was hearing of other people's education

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system, it kind of opened my eyes, that yeah we have our downfalls but so does everyone else" (161). The student began to recognize that no system has all the answers. Coming to this same consciousness could push a student athlete to resist athletic identity foreclosure, as "no one system has all the answers" (161). The realization that no one system has all the answers would not directly challenge their strong athletic identities but it would push back against foreclosure upon their athletic identity.

Young (2009) found that studying abroad led to the development of 'global identities' or aspects of global citizenship in participants. Dolby's (2005) construct of global citizenship refers to a heightened awareness of the interconnectedness of people around the world, across national boundaries and further suggests a commitment to a greater understanding amongst all people of the world which is the antithesis of what college athletics and role engulfment creates. Jackson (2006) found that as students returned back to America, an important part of their developing global identity was to give back to their home communities. The negotiation of one's identity abroad seemed to challenge students of color to think about the cultural and social capital that they have always had, but may have never realized (Yosso, 2005).

A global identity could be especially profound for Black student-athletes as it would provide them another lens to be reflective on their identities. Bimper and Harrison (2011) suggest that Black student-athletes often develop their racial and athletic identities congruently, which leads some to believe that being an athlete, is what it means to be Black. No longer would they be confined to view themselves, their identity and the world through an American lens which has a narrow and confining view of what Blacks can be. Instead, they would learn about the heterogeneity and fluidity of Blackness (Hall, 1996). This alternative lens

could provide them an opportunity to challenge hegemonic ideas of what it means to be a Black

male, specifically a Black student-athlete within the American context.

Social Network

The global capital attained from acquiring a global network appears to play a role in

identity negotiation. Another participant in Wick's study (2011) stated,

"When I went to Denmark, I was an introvert. I mean if I wanted to talk to you, I wouldn't have known
how to. So, -and I struggle with that, but being in Denmark really forced me out of that- it forced me to
change. So, I guess the whole radical change of environment really does help" (n.p)

Through his study abroad experience, this student developed an aspect of his identity

that he was previously uncomfortable with and left underdeveloped. Similarly, Black student

athletes have been noted to feel detached from the student body on campus at large (Bimper

and Harrison, 2011). This feeling of alienation leads to less communication and less networks

being built between Black student-athletes and the rest of the campus community. As

evidenced from the testimony above, studying abroad could develop a confidence that will

serve Black student-athletes while they are abroad and in their futures once they return home..

This would led to development of other identities as well as a larger professional network upon

graduation.

Traveling internationally allows students to develop strong bonds with a diverse group

of people from all over the world. This global network could be especially powerful for Black

student-athletes because the relationships built will speak to an alternative identity, their

global identity. Additionally, their strong athletic identity could serve them in developing

alternative identities within this new figured world because it could be used to build

connections with individuals from around the world who are also interested in sport. In the

right context, their athletic identity could actually be used in a beneficial way that fights against athletic identity foreclosure.

Studying abroad and Leadership

Studying abroad would give Black student-athletes an opportunity to be seen as leaders in their community and on campus for reasons outside of their athletic prowess. Black college students are less likely to be informed about studying abroad opportunities, and they are by far the least likely of any demographic group to study abroad while in college (Jackson, 2009). Black student-athletes who study abroad could serve as ambassadors for the Black community in regards to studying abroad and international education. This would provide them with an opportunity to be affirmed in other arenas outside of sport without directly challenging their athletic identity.

Researchers interested in the plight of Black student athletes have bemoaned the importance of Black student-athletes developing alternative salient identities, like academic, to help them fight off athletic identity foreclosure for over 20 years (Brewer et al, 1993; Bimper and Harrison, 2011). In this case, the student-athletes would be able to use their status and visibility to influence other's to study abroad, however, in that process, they will be getting appraised for their global experience and developing global identities. This provides them an opportunity to develop alternative salient identities that coincide with their athletic identity. Studying abroad will help Black student-athletes negotiate different aspects of their multidimensional identity through their interpersonal relationships with people while also serving their academic identities.

Studying abroad and Graduation Rates

Research on studying abroad consistently finds that students who studied abroad have higher graduation rates than students who did not study abroad (Sutton, R. C., & Rubin, D.L., 2010). In conducting research on the fall 2003 cohort of freshman at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Paige and colleagues (2009) found that 64.5% of those who studied abroad graduated by their fourth year compared to 41.0% who did not. Furthermore, the dropout rate of students who study abroad is far lower than those who do not. In the same study, it was found that 33.3% of the 2003 cohort dropped out by the 4th year as compared to only 6.0% who studied abroad. This research suggest that studying abroad has a profound impact on participant's academic identities and trajectories, and the same should be expected of Black student-athletes. While the research above was not broken down by race, the Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative (GLOSSARI) collected data for 10 years starting in 1999, and was able to aggregate their data by race with surprising and encouraging findings suggesting studying abroad as a strong intervention for athletic identity foreclosure.

GLOSSARI collected the study abroad records from the whole University System of Georgia (USG) including 35 institutions, making this project one of the most recognized in the field of study abroad in higher education (Sutton, R. C., & Rubin, D.L., 2010). Consistent with other research on study abroad, they found that less than studying abroad led to higher graduation rates. Specifically, 50% of first-years in the USG graduated within 6 years compared to a 88.7% graduation rate of students who studied abroad at least once during their college careers. In trying to account for selection bias, researchers created a control group of over

17,000 students. Below are the graduation rates for the study abroad students, regular students, and the control group:

SA v. DOM Graduation Rates among eligible students in each population (w/USG baseline)

	4-year grad rates	5-year grad rates	6-year grad rates
Study Abroad Students	49.6% (n=8,109)	82.6% (n=6,572)	88.7% (n=4,890)
Control Group Students	42.1% (n=6,241)	74.7% (n=5,712)	83.4% (n=4,523)
Most recent USG totals 2008	24.0% (n=24,482)	45.2% (n=24,447)	49.3% (n=22,830)

The 4, 5, and 6-year graduation rates are 17.8, 10.6 and 6.4 percent higher than the control group, respectively. Even more interesting is that when other variables were held constant such as SAT score and gender, students of color who studied abroad had a 17.9% higher graduation rate. More specifically, Black students who studied abroad had a 31.2% higher four-year graduation rate. In this study, studying abroad actually proved to close the graduation gap between Blacks and Whites, as both groups who studied abroad graduated in 6-years at rates of 84.4% and 88.6%. Graduation rates among Black students as well as Black student athletes has proven to be a major challenge for educators to tackle over the years, however, few look to study abroad as an intervention in this problem, although research shows that studying abroad can have substantial impacts on Black students graduation rates.

In regards to student GPA's, the average GPA went up from a 3.24 to a 3.30 after completion of studying abroad. Nearly 80% of the participants studied abroad in the summer and over 70% went for less than 2-months ((Sutton, R. C., & Rubin, D.L., 2010) which suggest that even short study abroad trips can have profound impacts on students' academic identities. These short trips are more than accessible for student-athletes, and would likely have a formidable impact.

Career Readiness and Maturity

Studying abroad has proven to have a profound impact on participants specifically in regards to career readiness. One of the major pitfalls of athletic identity foreclosure in student athletes in Black student-athletes is there low levels of career maturity and readiness (Murphy et al, 1996; Beamon, 2010). The Institute for International Education of Students (IES), a national academic consortium with over 155 member colleges released a report identifying the career benefits that studying abroad has on participants and found that 84% of alumni felt that studying abroad helped them build valuable skills for their careers including language proficiency, cultural training, adaptability and communication (Preston, 2012). One participant stated, "An entire range of professional opportunities have opened up to me in recent years, partly due to the skills and internship experiences I gained," adds Joydeep Sengupta (Preston, 2012, n.p.). Participants recall studying abroad as a major influence in both their career direction and career readiness. Studying abroad would not only push back against athletic identity foreclosure, it would actually give them a leg up in their career development and readiness.

Studying abroad is well-respected by employers. In the same report, Preston found that

97% of study abroad participants secured a job within one year of gradation as compared to

49% of the general college graduate population (Preston, 2012). Furthermore, on average the

alumni from IES abroad programs earn on average, in starting salaries, $7,000 more than those

of the general recent college graduate population (Preston, 2012,). Studying abroad not only

impacts the self-efficacy of students in relation to their future careers, it has tangible results in

regards to obtaining a job and earning wages. For those who chose to continue their education,

90% of the participants got into either their 1st or 2nd choice of graduate or professional school

(Preston, 2012). In talking about the benefits of study abroad on the IES Dr. Mary M. Dwyer,

President and CEO of IES Abroad said,

We believe that more and more employers are realizing the extraordinary benefits of study abroad, and are seeking out graduates who have had study abroad experiences. Key jobs skills such as adaptability, global understanding and tolerance, leadership, and independence are directly fostered by learning and living abroad. For parents concerned about the return on their investment, studying abroad offers some very clear benefits for graduates (Preston, 2012, n.p.)

Studying abroad builds students' confidence and communication skills that will ultimately serve

them well in the workplace. They are given an opportunity to further explore themselves and

their passions which will aid them in their future professions.

Implications

While studying abroad for student-athletes has not caught on at most NCAA schools,

there are some institutions that have realized the positive impact that studying abroad can

have on student-athletes. Macalester, a Division III program, sends 60% of their student-

athletes abroad, the same as their general student population (Hiskey, 2011, NCAA.com). Ian

Barker, a coach at Macalester, who uses the opportunity to study abroad as a recruiting tool

firmly believes in the power of studying abroad, he stated, "Our student-athletes come back markedly changed for the experience. They seem more mature and more sensitive to a world beyond their family, friends, and campus" (Hiskey, 2011, n.p) The student-athletes who participated in study abroad were able to use their athletic identity to develop other aspects of their multi-dimensional identity. One student-athlete named Geary stated, "Games are one of the many things that transcend language, so soccer often helped break the ice between my Mongolian host families and me" (Hiskey, 2011, n.p) Studying abroad can serve as an intervention that helps student athletes develop other aspects of their identity without directly challenging their identity as an athlete.

One student-athletes talked about how their experience abroad opened up career opportunities for them upon graduation, she stated, "I fell in love with this small town and the students, and because of these girls and the other brilliant students, I've decided I want to go back to China and teach English"(Hiskey, 2011,n.p). The experiences of these students speak to the need to conduct more research on the potential life-changing effects that study abroad can have on student-athletes at all levels of competition.

Conclusion

This paper proposes study abroad as an intervention to athletic identity foreclosure in Black male student-athletes. This paper started by analyzing the literature pertaining to Black racial identity through a social cultural lens by incorporating social theorist Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall. Then, the paper reviewed the literature on athletic identity and athletic identity foreclosure with a continued understanding of identity as dynamic, fluid and flexible. Next, the paper went through the limited but growing research on study abroad, specifically for students of

color. Ultimately, this piece articulates how studying abroad is an ideal solution that challenges identity foreclosure in Black student-athletes. The many benefits are critical consciousness, an enhanced social network, leadership, improved graduation rates and GPA, career readiness and maturation.

The positive characteristics associated with study abroad directly counter the negative characteristics associated with athletic identity foreclosure such as low-levels of career maturity and readiness, decreased academic identities, social isolation. When analyzed together, the research on athletic identity and study abroad suggest that study abroad could serve as an ideal intervention for student-athletes who suffer from athletic identity foreclosure. In their research on the personal development of students who study abroad, Braskamp and colleagues found that students who study abroad consistently

> Express a greater self-confidence in their ability to meet new situations, communicate with others not like them, and have a lesser need to be continuously supported by others….Education abroad may be an important catalyst for students developing personal attributes, like a sense of self-direction, i.e., helping students make progress in their journey towards self-authorship" (Braskamp et al, 2009, p. 112)

Studying abroad helps individuals learn more about themselves and break away from the chains of societal expectations about who they are and what they should be. As shown earlier in the paper, Black student-athletes suffer from athletic identity foreclosure at higher rates than their white counterparts for numerous reasons, namely that being Black is commonly associated with being an athlete in this country (Harrison et al, 2011; Beamon, 2012). Black student-athletes suffer from lower graduation rates, lower GPA's, lower levels of career maturity, and a tougher transition out of sport than their white peers. Research suggest that practitioners working with Black student-athletes need to find ways to help these students develop other

aspects of their multi-dimensional identities to aid them in resisting athletic identity foreclosure (Bimper and Harrison, 2011). Ironically, the research on studying abroad shows that students who study abroad are challenged to develop new aspects of their multi-dimensional identities, often very quickly due to the demands of being placed in a new space, a new figured world, which might offer these students a different positionality outside of student-athlete. Furthermore, studying abroad has specifically shown to increase graduation rates and GPA's among students as well as broaden their social network and develop skills that make them more career ready. Studying abroad is an ideal intervention not only for Black student-athletes, but all student-athletes who suffer from athletic identity foreclosure. In fact, if student-athletes studied abroad early in their collegiate careers, they would likely avoid experiencing athletic identity foreclosure because they would have been pushed to explore the many dimensions of who they are and who they can become before their identity was foreclosed upon. Studying abroad would provide Black student-athletes a space where they can develop new aspects of their identity while also providing a space to negotiate the salience of both their racial identity and athletic identity in the overall makeup of one's self-concept.

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